

MIZZOU

The magazine of
the Mizzou Alumni Association

[Home](#) » [Spring 2009](#) » [Features](#) » The producers

The producers

Students dig into their dream

Back in February, new leaves of lettuce and broccoli already were opening in a greenhouse at MU's Bradford Farm, about six miles east of campus at 4968 Rangeline Road. The tender veggies are part of an experiment that is as much social and educational as it is victual.

Andrew Van Engelenhoven, a junior from Fulton, Mo., is organizing an experiment in community-supported agriculture (CSA) as part of his course work in general agriculture with an emphasis in sustainability. Sustainable agriculture produces food in ways that benefit farmers, consumers and communities while also protecting the environment. Van Engelenhoven and three like-minded students are in on the project using Bradford Farm's greenhouses, fields and equipment. He wants to learn how CSAs work and go on to teach others about them. The lettuce and broccoli — along with several other seasonal vegetables and melons — are destined to feed low-income people in Columbia.

“Community supported agriculture is a subscription service,” Van Engelenhoven says. He is looking to sell 20 to 25 subscriptions, primarily to members of Olivet Christian Church at 1991 S. Olivet



Four agriculture students are starting a community-supported agriculture project. They are, from left, Sally Mayo, Andrew Van Engelenhoven, Whitney Middleton and Abby Berndt.

Road. Subscribers pay in advance for 15 to 20 pounds a week of six to eight varieties of vegetable to be delivered during the May-to-October growing season. The church members plan to distribute the food to residents of central Columbia's First Ward.

This is a twist on traditional production agriculture. In 2004, MU launched what is still the only undergraduate program in sustainable agriculture in the Midwest, says Sandy Rikoon, professor of rural sociology and co-founder of the Sustainable Agriculture Education Association. Although dozens of courses touch on sustainability, agriculture is the first academic unit at MU to put that idea at the core of a program.

Mizzou's program offers courses not only in plant and animal production but also in community food systems. As demand grows, career opportunities will likely expand as well. In addition to farming or ranching sustainably, students could end up working in sales and marketing for supermarket chains such as Whole Foods, analyzing data and policies for government, or working on community development or environmental issues for nongovernmental organizations. Many of the food systems students aspire to jobs in community development, says James Spain, associate professor of animal sciences. "They are the entrepreneurs of today's farming community."

The time is ripe for such programs. For starters, demand exists for local and regional goods. "These include foods that reflect local culture and can become a tool of regional marketing," Rikoon says. Rural communities are increasingly thinking about agriculture in terms of finished foods for sale direct to consumers, rather than just commodity crops. Hunger is another issue; in the U.S. alone, 30 million people don't have enough to eat, Rikoon says. "And internationally, people who work in developing countries often implement sustainable systems in their projects."




Mary Hendrickson, extension associate professor of rural sociology, says the public is recognizing that nutrition has ramifications far beyond individual health. "They're learning that food is not only about what we eat and what it does to our bodies but also about what farming does to the landscape. We need to realize, for instance, that it won't work to turn Missouri into a large field of broccoli."

Mizzou students are seeing firsthand what does work during field trips. Jaunts to a yarn shop, natural-food store and a dairy help students imagine their place in sustainable agriculture, Spain says.

Spain loves watching students' reactions to such experiences. When he sees their eyes light up, he knows he has done his job. "They say, 'Oh, I have never thought about it like that.' And isn't that what we want our students to do — analyze things from different perspectives and decide for themselves the right thing to do?"

Share your comments with Mizzou magazine at Mizzou@missouri.edu.

Note: If published, feedback may be edited for length, style and clarity.

 Follow us on Twitter  Join us on Facebook  Subscribe to our feed

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916
| E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the Mizzou Alumni

Association.

Copyright © 2021 — Curators of the University of Missouri. All rights reserved. DMCA and other copyright information.

An equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013