



August 27, 2021

Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of the President

910 West Franklin Street
Box 842512
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2512

804 828-1200 • Fax: 804 828-7532
TDD: 1-800-828-1120
president@vcu.edu

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System Steering Committee
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
2401 Walnut Street, Suite 102
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Virginia Commonwealth University, it is my pleasure to submit our 2021 Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System Report. This report is an accurate representation of our current sustainability practices, policies, and standards. We are pleased to provide this update on our recent progress and accomplishments.

Virginia Commonwealth University is experiencing an historically important period of growth that will support our educational mission and the development of the Commonwealth for years to come. While enhancing our research, teaching, and learning facilities, expansion of our campus has also increased Virginia Commonwealth University's resource use and environmental footprint, as reflected in this report.

Amid these changes, our sustainability efforts have continued apace. Highlights of our work in the last three years include:

- Development of the Virginia Commonwealth University Free Store, an initiative designed to promote equitable access to household and stationery supplies for students in need, while diverting usable goods from the general waste stream;
- Successful piloting of a food-production program that has allowed students to actively manage an indoor microgreens growing operation and donate produce to the campus food pantry, while earning academic credit;
- Implementation of a community forestry program to enhance Richmond's urban tree canopy that has engaged students, faculty, and staff in experiential learning and service opportunities that meet community needs. With partial funding from the Virginia Department of Forestry, the program has planted 182 trees in two neighborhoods adjacent to the Virginia Commonwealth University campus;

- Formation of a cross-campus working group to eliminate single-use plastic on-campus and minimize other forms of solid waste;
- In 2018, Virginia Commonwealth University invested \$17 million in a multi-building energy performance contract and has achieved emission reductions of over 59,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Virginia Commonwealth University has continued to actively engage volunteers for much of our sustainable campus and community work over this period, creating safe and educational outdoor volunteer opportunities despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, from 2019-21, 290 volunteers served more than 1,900 hours in the Learning Gardens and Community Forestry programs.

Looking to the future, we are currently working to create a comprehensive plan that will influence sustainability practices and policies across disciplines and departments for years to come. We look forward to engaging stakeholders across the university and wider community in addressing the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Rao". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent flourish at the end.

Michael Rao
President
VCU and VCU Health System