Cornell University

Martha E. Pollack
President

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Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
2401 Walnut Street, Suite 102
Philadelphia, PA 19103
2023 Cornell University STARS 2.2 Submission

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to endorse the 2023 AASHE STARS Assessment for Cornell University using the 2.2 reporting platform. Sustainability and climate leadership are signature areas of excellence for our university, and we are proud to have received four consecutive years of the STARS Platinum Rating.

Our students, faculty, and staff continue to advance sustainable operations, curriculum, research, and community partnerships. I am especially proud of the work outlined in our innovation credits, which stand as a testament to our community's dedication in pursuing solutions that scale beyond our campus.

Cornell Botanic Gardens' Native Lawn: The native lawn demonstration project transformed a non-native lawn into a low-maintenance, high-biodiversity native lawn. Goals for the lawn and its care included the ability to withstand moderate trampling, reduced water and energy needs, the elimination of chemicals, and minimal hand weeding. It surpassed these goals, remaining green in drought and emitting zero carbon emissions through once-yearly hand scythe mowing. Insect biodiversity quadrupled compared to traditional lawns, and 85% of the lawn comprised native plants.

Mission Sustainability: All incoming undergraduate students (first-year and new transfer students) now complete a sustainability module entitled "Mission Sustainability." This course includes four parts: a climate and sustainability literacy survey, a 13-minute video about sustainability at Cornell, an exploration of sustainability-related campus resources, and a short reflection essay.

Lake Source Cooling (LSC): The environmentally benign design of LSC cools the Ithaca campus using the renewable chill from the deep, cold waters of nearby Cayuga

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Lake. It saves over 20 million kWh annually compared to previous cooling methods, an 85% reduction in electricity use, and eliminates refrigerants, which are among the most potent greenhouse gases. Cornell has continued to innovate with LSC since its commission in 2000. In 2023, conventional chillers at Cornell's high-energy Wilson Laboratory Synchrotron were replaced by a connection to the return line of LSC which carries water back to the plant after it has cooled the rest of campus. The return water is no longer at a low enough temperature to cool a typical building, but is sufficient to cool the lab. Replacing the failing chillers with this simple but novel solution annually saves over 4 million gallons of water and maximizes the thermal capacity of LSC without requiring any additional flow from the plant.

We value STARS as a reporting mechanism that helps us to engage students, staff, and faculty as we work to enhance the culture of sustainability on campus.

Sincerely,

Martha E. Pollack

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