



# Cornell University

David J. Skorton  
*President*

March 18, 2015

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education  
Suite 901  
1536 Wynkoop Street  
Denver, CO 80202

Re: STARS submission

To whom it may concern:

I am pleased to endorse the attached sustainability self-assessment by Cornell University and to report our achievement of a STARS gold rating under the new 2.0 version of the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System. This certification symbolizes the efforts of the Cornell community and the progress we have made in advancing sustainability on campus and beyond.

Nearly eight years ago, I signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, pledging that Cornell would develop a plan to achieve climate neutrality, starting on our Ithaca campus, by 2050. The growing urgency of climate action was the subject of study by faculty, students, and staff leaders during the last year. On January 29, 2015, I formally recognized the need to accelerate our efforts by embracing a [new goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2035](#). By intensifying our commitment to carbon neutrality, Cornell has the potential to develop new approaches, applications, and technologies that will be valuable on our own campus and globally.

Cornell continues to be guided by its strategic plan, adopted in 2010, which includes among its objectives effective stewardship of the natural and built environment. Such objectives have now become part of our expectations for every employee of the university through our annual performance management process. Additionally, since last year Cornell has made significant progress in each of our four institutional priority areas: education, research, practice, and engagement.

### *Education*

As the land grant university of New York State, Cornell strengthens the local economy through education and capacity building. Through a partnership with New York State, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College, [Rev Ithaca](#) was founded to provide entrepreneurs a place to grow their businesses. Rev provides access to expert advice from both higher education and the business community and supports acceleration of the business development process.

### *Research*

The [Atkinson Postdoctoral Fellowships in Sustainability](#) address pressing world needs in the six focus areas of the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future: sustainable agriculture and food

systems, energy transitions, one health, sustainable communities, new materials, and computational sustainability. A unique feature of the new program is that the fellows link their research at Cornell, advised by ACSF faculty advisers, with nonacademic partners to advance on-the-ground application of the sustainable solutions they develop. Currently, the external partner organizations include ISO New England, a nonprofit energy transmission company; the World Resources Institute; and the Natural Heritage Institute.

#### *Practice*

In a compelling example of finding the “triple bottom line” of campus operations, the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station worked with HR staff from Organizational Effectiveness to [use the “lean” process improvement approach to save on greenhouse energy](#). Cornell has the largest non-commercial greenhouse operation in New York State. The greenhouse lean team, composed of greenhouse growers, faculty and managers, studied Cornell’s greenhouse system and looked for efficiencies that could reduce costs and help accelerate progress toward carbon neutrality. The changes they identified would save \$160,000–\$212,000 in heating costs and \$40,000–\$70,000 in electricity costs annually, more than \$6.5 million in deferred maintenance costs, and \$120,000 annually in preventive maintenance costs.

#### *Engagement*

Strengthening the food system of New York State is a high priority for Cornell. [The Finger Lakes LandLink](#) is a project of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County and Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming. The purpose of LandLink is to facilitate connections between landowners and land seekers in the Finger Lakes region. The long-term goal of the LandLink project is to establish successful farming enterprises, keep land in farming, and foster the transition of leased farmland to farm ownership. This project builds the support system to create linkages between farmers and landowners, thereby increasing the successful establishment and expansion of farming enterprises while keeping land in active farming contributing to the local economy.

I am proud of the concerted effort that has led Cornell to a gold rating under STARS. Our decision to accelerate our climate neutrality commitment was made possible, in part, by the data we have documented through the STARS process. We are grateful to AASHE for this valuable metric.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Skorton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David J. Skorton