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The Food Systems Program

The Ohio State University at Mansfield founded the Food Systems Program under the Center for Ecology and Justice Studies to address critical social inequities in the present food system including lack of access, lack of affordability, and a food economy that drains low-income communities of capital and contributes to diet-related health issues that impact education and income. The Food Systems program is a multidisciplinary effort to facilitate the use of local, year-round urban sustainable agriculture and diversified rural sustainable agriculture.

The Ohio State University at Mansfield is situated in an urban area at the rural fringe experiencing economic hardships. Richland County suffered a steep economic decline since the decline of heavy manufacturing in the 1970's and 1980's. Resultantly, a disproportionately large percentage of its households earn under \$25,000 per year; in 2015, nearly 30% of Mansfield residents reported an income below the poverty level. The Ohio State University at Mansfield established the Food Systems Program to alleviate poverty by addressing four key sustainability topic areas: economic development, educational achievement, land conservation, and food security. The project aims to bridge the campus to both the surrounding urban and rural areas to increase food security using sustainable agriculture. The project is developing year-round schoolyard gardens at K-12 schools in Richland County. Using a cross-curricular social justice pedagogy, the program is designed to improve educational outcomes and address diet-related health issues. The Food Systems Program integrates student service learning and course curriculum into these community efforts. The Food Systems Program offers a hands-on educational experience to OSU Mansfield students, who are often members of urban households themselves; it trains these students to revitalize their economically depressed communities after graduation using a replicable agriculture model.

The Food Systems Program creates careful, just, and environmentally responsible means to effect a transition from unsustainable to sustainable in our community and region.

Sincerely,

The Ohio State University at Mansfield

Sources for AASHE STARS: <http://www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-Mansfield-Ohio.html>