

Rachel Berggren  
Sustainability Science  
Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Practicum Synopsis

To fulfill the practicum requirement to obtain an M.S. in Sustainability Science, Rachel Berggren partnered with Auxiliary Enterprises Sustainability Department at UMass Amherst. She was hired as the Food Systems Project Associate by designing and proposing a position within this department. This position focused on developing a coordinated regional food systems capacity building program and shepherding said project from discovery phase through a needs assessment to the project implementation phase. Over the course of 9 months, the FSPA was responsible for guiding and managing the various components of this project including creating administrative project documents, stakeholder mapping, conducting and writing up a literature review, conducting a needs assessment, preparing a needs assessment summary report as well as four audience specific reports, presenting findings to stakeholders, developing stakeholder relationships, co-designing and co-conducting stakeholder meetings, visioning and designing project components, and co-writing a letter of interest and grant application. Although the practicum requires 150 hours of work, the opportunities and skills provided by this position led this student to continuing on in this position through her graduate studies and after graduating from the program.

This regional food systems project, now entitled the Whole Harvest Project, is focused on creating a coordinated, cross sector network to test and implement strategies to strengthen the regional food system. This will be accomplished by working with farmers to bring surplus produce into the market, leveraging the purchasing power and infrastructure of higher education institutions. The goals of this project are to decrease food waste and increase farmer viability through institutional purchasing of surplus produce, increase consumption of local food on campuses, and increase the amount of fresh food distributed to members of the campus community who are food insecure.