

**Increasing Community Engagement and Connectivity: The UBC Farm and Wesbrook**

**Place**

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# Increasing Community Engagement and Connectivity: The UBC Farm and Wesbrook Place

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This paper answers the question: what can the UBC Farm do to increase the connections between itself and Wesbrook Place? The paper utilizes demographic information, surveys, and research into what other organizations are currently doing in order to answer this question. As a starting place, this paper recommends that the UBC Farm increase its communication with its surrounding neighbours so that the general public knows about the range of current programming offered by the Farm. Including increasing the quantity and quality of communication with the public, this paper offers the following recommendations to the UBC Farm:

- Communicate effectively with residents and current users, including
  - Connecting with local newsletters and websites
  - Contacting the local businesses of Wesbrook Village
  - Investing in better signage
  - and creating a physical presence in Wesbrook Place through demonstration gardens
- Create community appropriate programming, and
- Invite residents in
  - New Farm Centre: including dedicated community space (ex: playground)
  - Advertising that the Farm is open to the public: seasons and hours of operation

## **PROJECT PURPOSE:**

The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm provides a place for the practice of new ideas to help create sustainable communities and the ecological systems upon which they rely. In order to pursue these goals, the UBC Farm focuses on creating opportunities for academic learning, community engagement, and putting sustainable ideas into practice through the farming of produce for sale.

The main goal of this project is to find ways to increase the connectivity and engagement between the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm and the people of Wesbrook Place to help create a strong community in South Campus. Numerous published studies detail the importance of community gardens in the creation of feelings of social inclusion and of a strong community (Armstrong 2000; Ferris, Norman, & Sempik 2001; Kingsley & Townsend 2006; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner 2007). This study extends these ideas,

assuming the importance of public participation in the creation of a community surrounding the UBC urban farm. The primary question that this project sets out to answer is: how can the UBC Farm augment its current programming to increase the connection between itself and Wesbrook Place?

While the scope of this project is limited, in order to answer this main question, the project must attempt to answer the following questions as a research guide:

- 1) What are the current quantity and quality of the interactions between Wesbrook Place and the UBC Farm?
- 2) Who lives in Wesbrook Place? What is the neighbourhood's demographic make-up? What kinds of programming would be of most interest to Wesbrook?
- 3) How are other urban farming and community garden initiatives currently engaging with their neighbours and how can the UBC Farm adopt and adapt these practices to increase its own connectivity with its neighbours?

There are other important questions we must ask before trying to answer these questions. One we must ask is: what do we consider a community? What kind of community is the UBC Farm seeking to engage with/create? What is the Farm's ultimate goal? The composition of their target audience will ultimately change what kinds of actions they take. Is the Farm trying to create a community of regulars that have dedicated open-programmed spaces where they can come everyday and feel welcome? Are they trying to form a community of visitors who are attracted to the Farm for special events? Or, is the Farm trying to encourage and foster a new community in which people are aware of their role within a local food system, are informed about the ideas of environmental stewardship, and take actions to improve their local food system and environment?

### **UBC FARM HISTORY:**

“Re-discovered” in 1999 as an interactive learning environment to put sustainability and integrated farming theories into practice, the UBC Farm was originally designated as a “Future Housing Reserve” (CFSF, History). Over the years, the UBC Farm has expanded to include three

major areas of focus in its programming, academic, community engagement, and the production of food.

After gaining recognition as an important place for hands-on learning, discussions ensued as to what was envisioned for the land deemed a “Future Housing Reserve”: a newly revived farm or condominiums? Over these years, supporters of the Farm struggled to keep the Farm at its original size and location. In 2008, when serious threats to the Farm were issued, community members, students, different levels of government, and the Friends of the Farm launched a strong campaign to advocate on its behalf. After this group came together, rallying for a permanent farm, the UBC Board of Governors stated that there would be no market housing built on the Farm so long as density goals could be realized elsewhere on campus. In 2011, in amendments to the official Land Use Plan, the UBC Farm was re-zoned as green academic land (CFSF, History), allowing the Farm to remain as the developing of Wesbrook Place occurred around it, right up to its property line. Today, as many of the residents of Wesbrook Place are already settled into their new neighbourhood, the Farm wants to find ways to reach out to these new neighbours to build a strong community in South Campus.

## **METHODS:**

The information presented in this report was primarily obtained through an analysis of local demographic studies and my own survey. I chose to look at demographic information in addition to performing my own survey because each community is situated in a specific geography and time, contains a distinct population, and develops uniquely. For this reason it is important to get to know the people with whom you are working and trying to engage. In looking at the literature, factors like language and cultural exchange (Baker 2004, Wakefield et al 2007), large groups of people of the same origin (Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny 2004), and income (Wakefield et al 2007) all greatly affect the reasons why communities come together and how they interact.

In order to best decide what actions to take to improve community engagement in South Campus, one must first study the demographics of Wesbrook Place. In addition to looking at demographic information from Statistics Canada and from the *University Neighbourhoods Association: Community Profile Survey 2008*, I also conducted a qualitative survey of the people

of Wesbrook to get a better idea of their feelings towards their neighbours and their large neighbour to the west, the UBC Farm. By getting more specific survey results from the public present in Wesbrook, I hoped to gain a better understanding of what amenities already exist for the people of Wesbrook, where and how people construct their community now, and people's thoughts about the role of the Farm in their lives.

After establishing a better idea of who the people of Wesbrook Place are, I looked at case studies of urban agriculture ventures in order to make comparisons and suggestions for actions the UBC Farm might take to improve its own community involvement.

### **Survey:**

Appendix 1 is a copy of the survey that I gave to people using the public spaces of Wesbrook Place and to University Neighbourhoods Association (UNA) members via their weekly online newsletter. The first part of the survey asks questions about the neighbourhood of Wesbrook itself and the types of interactions people already engage in in their own neighbourhoods. The second section asks questions about the UBC Farm and seeks to glean information about usage and preferences of the survey participants. The third section tries to establish basic information about the respondents to get a better idea of the people using the space of Wesbrook.

The survey was administered between March 3 and March 23, 2013, to 37 people found in Wesbrook Place and online via the UNA newsletter. It was observed that the majority of people willing to participate in the survey were those seated in Norman Mackenzie Square and those using the spaces of Smith Park and Noble Park.

### **RESULTS:**

#### **Survey results:**

Due to the small and unrepresentative sample size of 37 individuals that I succeeded in gathering, I did not rely on the last section of the survey, which asks questions concerning the makeup of the participants, to inform my recommendations for the Farm. These included questions about age, gender, marital status, and presence of children in the house. For example, while it would have been useful to get an idea of what percent of the public surveyed had

children in the home, a significant amount of my data was gathered from parents playing with their children in the park. This fact would skew my responses concerning age, marital status, and presence of children in the house. For perspective, a little over half of the people I surveyed had children in the home. This is a large discrepancy from the quantity of households with children found in the 2008 UNA survey, 37% (McAllister 2008, 8). Another important detail is that when I included these Census-type questions in my survey, I thought I would get a larger response from people who actually lived in Wesbrook Place. In the end, only a little over 30% of the people I surveyed using the spaces in Wesbrook Place actually lived in Wesbrook Place.

This being said, the few quantitative style questions that I asked yielded interesting results. The series of questions inquiring about knowledge of the UBC Farm, knowledge of its location, and frequency of visits to the Farm produced useful data. As shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, while 89% of the people interviewed knew about the farm, only 62% actually knew of its location, and then 46% of the people never visited.

The questions in section two, inquiring about what activities would make people visit the Farm more often, people's opinion of the Farm, and people's advice for increasing engagement were very helpful in answering the main research questions. The qualitative nature of these questions allowed the participants to voice their thoughts and advice for the Farm. In order to better synthesize these diverse responses, I counted the number of times key words were mentioned and then created a cloud of words in which for every time a word was mentioned, I increased its font size. Figure 4 is the cloud of words I created from the question, "What advice would you give to the UBC Farm, to increase engagement with the local community?" In this graphic, some phrases that stand out are, "advertisement", "signage", "marketing", "promote activities", "educational programming", "sell produce locally", and "more activities and events".

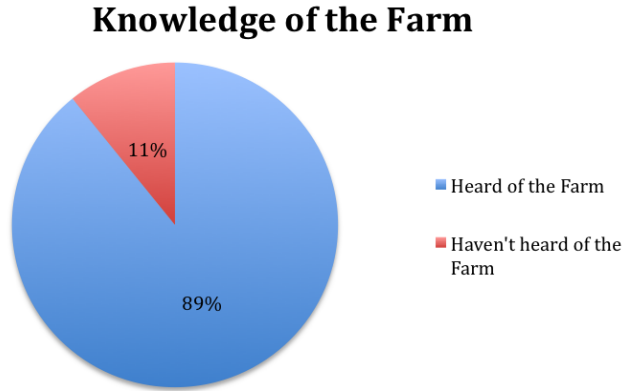


Figure 1: Knowledge of the UBC Farm

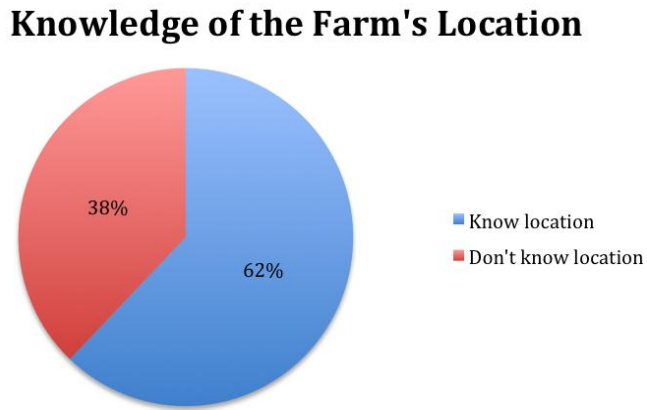


Figure 2: Knowledge of the UBC Farm's location

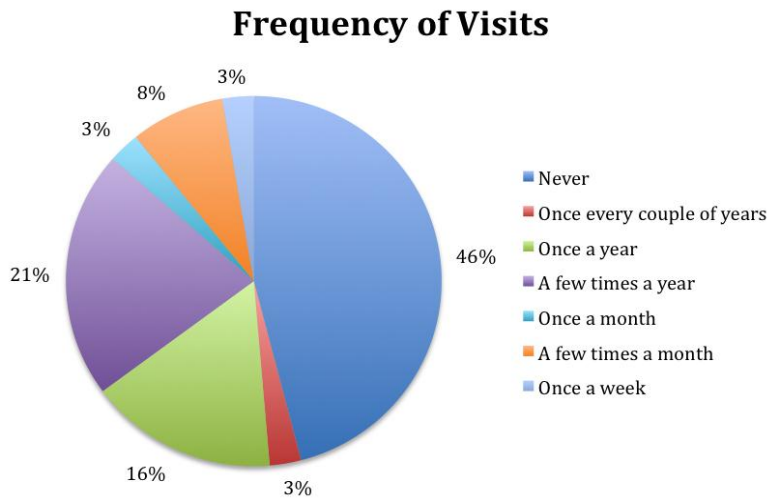


Figure 3: The frequency people visit the UBC Farm



## What advice would you give to help the Farm increase engagement?



Figure 4: Word cloud of qualitative survey results

### Community composition:

In order to construct a vision of the composition of the community of Wesbrook Place, I primarily looked at two documents, the 2011 results from Statistics Canada and the results from a survey conducted by McAllister Opinion Research for the UNA in 2008. Because Statistics Canada looks at “Greater Vancouver A”, which consists of the entire university, and the UNA looks at all of the five neighbourhoods at UBC in their jurisdiction, this statistical data is also supplemented by an analysis of the other business and community oriented organizations located in Wesbrook Place specifically.

The UNA survey was conducted in the summer of 2008 and looked at the five neighbourhoods of Hawthorn Place, Hampton Place, Chancellor Place, East Campus, and Wesbrook Place. Although this data is now out of date, considering the rate at which new buildings and businesses are opening up in Wesbrook Place, it is still important to establish a

baseline. In addition, the survey from 2008 reflects the composition of a residential area within UBC and may not change dramatically in four years. Two important statistics from this survey are that in 2008, 37% of households had children 18 and under and that 13% considered Mandarin as their primary language (McAllister 2008, 5-8). This figure concerning primary language is consistent with the 2011 Census information in which 15% of population identified with Mandarin being their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2012). While definitions of “primary language” and “mother tongue” are distinct, these figures still demonstrate the importance of other languages in addition to English in the area of UBC. Other significant languages identified in the 2008 UNA survey were Korean and Cantonese (McAllister 2008, 5). In the 2011 Census, Chinese (not otherwise specified), Korean, Cantonese, Persian (Farsi), Spanish, and Arabic are also identified (Statistics Canada 2012).

Closely related to my research questions, the UNA survey also asked a few questions concerning the community’s use of the UBC amenities available to them. In the survey, it was found that while 12% of the community had never visited the UBC Botanical Gardens, 27% had never been to the UBC Farm (McAllister 2008, 24). This fact is very interesting considering that the Farm and the Botanical Gardens offer similar activities and are relatively similarly removed from central campus. This result is also interesting because although the Farm is notoriously considered a hidden and removed place, in 2008 the UBC Farm received a large amount of press because of land tenure issues. It is interesting to see that even in a year in which the Farm was receiving more publicity than usual, the number of people who had never visited was more than twice that of the Botanical Gardens.

Another interesting set of facts from the surveys is that in the 2011 Census for all of UBC, only 8% of the population was 64 and over (Statistics Canada 2012). When looking only at the neighbourhoods of the UNA in 2008, however, the percent of people 65 and over rises to 16% (McAllister 2008, 10). This might be due to the fact that the rest of the UBC Census tract is composed of students living in residence. This percent of seniors in the population may increase again when looking specifically at Wesbrook Place because of the presence of the Tapestry Retirement Community for seniors 55 and above. This complex of 154 units may give an even higher concentration of elders. These are all important data to keep in mind when considering future actions of the Farm.

## **DISCUSSION:**

By looking at the results of my survey along with the two previously performed demographic studies from 2008 and 2011, one can recognize some overarching issues. The largest issue that surfaces is a lack of communication between the Farm and the people using Wesbrook. Of the 46% of people who have never visited the Farm, some might have no interest in becoming involved with such an institution, but from the comments that people wrote on the survey, it seems that most people are just uninformed about the activities taking place at the Farm. In the question, “What is your opinion of the UBC Farm? / Why do you (not) visit the farm?” many of the answers followed a pattern. Rather than the answers containing a sense of resentment, answers reflected a knowledge gap. Along with very positive answers from participants, I received many answers such as: “I don't really know the types of activities there are,” “[n]o time, not much information,” “[d]idn't really think I could,” and “[w]e don't know when it is open and whether it is open for public to visit.” These answers reflect a lack of knowledge concerning what activities take place at the Farm and when, the purpose of the Farm, and its general operational hours. There is a general disconnect between the Farm and the community with which it wishes to engage.

In order to engage with and educate the general public, other urban agriculture institutions and community gardens are taking a variety of actions. Two possible solutions in current practice are the creation of dedicated community spaces within organizationally held land and the creation of demonstration gardens.

### **Dedicated community spaces:**

The majority of discussion surrounding the creation of dedicated community space is found within the community garden literature (Armstrong 2000; Ferris, Norman, & Sempik 2001; Kingsley & Townsend 2006; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner 2007). This is mainly because the very creation of a community garden creates a space in which the wider community is welcome to visit. More specifically, in the article by Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, the authors describe the phenomenon of the “casita”, or “small house”, in Puerto Rican community gardens in New York City. This article varies from the previously mentioned articles because the authors make a point of distinguishing the types of

users that frequent Latino community gardens. For example, the authors create the distinct categories of garden users as: “gardeners,” activity organizers, participants, and people who tend the garden; “garden members,” activity organizers, but not gardening participants; and “garden friends,” visitors who attend activities (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004, 402).

In addition to specifically including non-gardeners as active participants and community members involved with the garden, the authors also discuss the importance of the “casita” to these Puerto Rican gardens. In these gardens, the “casita” functions as a gathering place for community members, not just a place for gardeners to house resources (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004, 403). This example is particularly applicable to the UBC Farm because although the Farm offers volunteer opportunities to members of the public, participating in tending the crops is not the main focus of the community programming for the Farm. This example of Latino and, more specifically, Puerto Rican community gardens reveals that by having a dedicated space in the garden that is open to all, it attracts more than just gardeners to participate and experience the garden. In order to make the public feel more welcome at the Farm, it could consider including dedicated community space in the design for the new Farm Centre.

### **Demonstration gardens:**

In addition to creating a welcoming space for community members within the grounds of the Farm, other institutions have created demonstration gardens in order to educate the general public and advertise what they are doing as an organization. In the 2001 article by Ferris, Norman, and Sempik, demonstration gardens exist to “teach city residents about composting, organic gardening and water conservation” (566). In his 2012 Masters of Landscape Architecture report, Schults gives examples of organizations, including the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the Missouri Botanical Garden’s incorporation of demonstration gardens in order to educate the public. The University of California, Davis has also incorporated a form of demonstration garden into its Student Experimental Farm (Parr and Van Horn 2006). While this “garden” is on the premises of the farm itself and is student oriented, it is a good example of a university educational farm trying to reach out to its immediate community.

The most pertinent example for the UBC Farm of demonstration gardens in use possibly is the Dig In! Campus Agriculture Network at the University of Toronto (UofT). While it does

not have one large, dedicated farm space, the network is comprised of “autonomous urban agriculture projects” (Dig In!, About). Incorporated in these groups of agriculture projects are their demonstration gardens. These small garden plots are scattered around the UofT campus and are designed to raise awareness of urban agriculture and sustainability. The Dig In! program takes food education into the heart of the community with which it is trying to communicate.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Even if the Farm has the funding and decides to incorporate some of these larger additions, in order for these recommendations to be effective, the Farm must first create stronger canals of communication with the local area. Without better communication of current programming, location, and hours of operation, the creation of new community oriented services would be wasted. Before the Farm invests resources in developing new programs and features, it needs to create stronger connections with the public with which it is trying to engage.

After researching who lives in the neighbourhoods surrounding the UBC Farm and what their opinions of the farm are, my three recommendations to the Farm are to communicate effectively with the residents and users of Wesbrook Place, to create programming that is appropriate for the current community, and to invite local residents into the Farm.

In communicating effectively with the residents and current users of Wesbrook Place, the Farm must connect with local newsletters, organizations, and websites that currently focus on the people of Wesbrook and the surrounding UNA neighbourhoods. Currently, the UNA, the Old Barn Community Centre, the Wesbrook Welcome Centre, University Hill Secondary School, and the Tapestry Retirement Community all are important parts of the Wesbrook neighbourhood that already communicate with a specific group of the population. The Wesbrook Welcome Centre even prides itself on being “[a] place where people could get info and find out about events” and the “new hub and heart of Wesbrook Village” (Ashley Bauman of UBC Properties Trust as cited in Wesbrook 2012). In order to increase the amount of knowledge surrounding the Farm, the Farm should try and post information about events, camps, workshops, volunteering, etc., within these centers and utilize their already established websites and mailing lists.

In addition to hooking into these already established networks, the Farm should try and contact the businesses of Wesbrook Village to see if they would be interested in buying produce directly from the UBC Farm or if they would be agreeable to put posters of Farm events in their business windows.

Also considering the amount of responses from survey participants commenting on lack of knowledge of about the programs the Farm offers, the Farm should seriously consider investing in better advertising and directional signage. A poignant example of this is that in an answer to the question asking what advice they would give to the UBC Farm to increase engagement, one participant suggested that the Farm have a Farmer's Markets in which they sell a variety of produce. The Saturday Farmer's Market is one of the oldest and most established community activities that take place at the Farm. That a person knows about the Farm and yet doesn't know of its most popular event is a clear sign that more communication with the public is needed.

As a last recommendation with regards to communication, if funding, space, and labour are available, the Farm should contemplate creating demonstrations gardens throughout Wesbrook Place and the UNA neighbourhoods more generally.

Secondly, in creating community appropriate programming, the UBC Farm should look more closely at available demographic information about the area and create programming and advertisements that reflect the interests of these people and is able to communicate with them. An easy way to do this would be to produce multi-lingual posters and to start selling a more diverse range of produce that reflects the distinct backgrounds of the people living near the Farm.

Thirdly, in order to invite residents onto the Farm, the Farm must make sure that the public knows that it is open all year round. In addition to advertising their hours of operation, the Farm should also consider creating a dedicated community space within its lands. This dedicated space could take form as a specific community room inside the new Farm Centre or even just a playground outside. The Farm needs some kind of community-oriented space so that the general public feels like there is a place they can access and spend time at on the Farm.

**POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH:**

Although it is pretty clear that the UBC Farm needs to spend time and effort enhancing its current communication with its new neighbours, there is still much room for future research. In future studies it would be helpful to see a more thorough survey done of the residents of Wesbrook Place. This would be a large undertaking, but it would be very helpful to have a detailed study of the people living in Wesbrook Place now and to see projections for the future of Wesbrook Place. It would also be helpful to see more research done with specific groups. This would include looking more into collaborations with University Hill Secondary School, Tapestry, and the future community centre.

**APPENDIX 1: Qualitative Survey of people spending time in Wesbrook Place:**

UBC Farm Survey Questions

1. Do you live in Wesbrook Village?

Yes No

2. Do you consider yourself part of the Wesbrook neighbourhood?

Yes No

3. How often do you interact with your neighbours?

Never

A few times a month

A few times a week

A few times a day

Don't know

4. Where do you interact with your neighbours? (Example: store, park, coffee shop, outside of the home, etc.)

5. What activities do you do in your neighbourhood?

6. Have you heard of the UBC Farm?

7. Do you know where the UBC Farm is?

8. How often do you visit the UBC Farm?

Never

Once a year

A few times a year

Once a month

A few times a month

Don't know



9. What activities do you participate in at the UBC Farm?
10. What activities would make you visit the UBC Farm more often?
11. What is your opinion of the UBC Farm? / Why do you (not) visit the farm?
12. What advice would you give to the UBC Farm, to increase engagement with the local community?

Gender:

Age:

19-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75 and over

Prefer not to say

Marital Status:

Married/ Common-law Status

Single

Divorced

Separated

Widowed

Prefer not to say

Children:

Yes No

If yes, how many?

1 2 3 4 5 or more

How many family members live in your home?

None 1 2 3 4 5 or more  
How many children live in your home?

None 1 2 3 4 5 or more  
How many seniors live in your home?

None 1 2 3 4 5 or more

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