

A Proposal in Development for Diversifying the Food & Agriculture Industry in Wisconsin

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Background

This draft proposal evolved from the Community and Regional Food System (CRFS) project, a research, education, and outreach initiative funded by the USDA from 2011-16. The project's four original partners were UW-Madison, UW Extension (UWEX), Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI), and Growing Power. (See Appendix more information on organizations and individuals named in this proposal.)

While the CRFS project was broad in scope, one specific component involved the development of a new "food system track" within PEOPLE Program, a 3-summer preparatory program for high school youth on the UW-Madison campus. (See PEOPLE sidebar.) CRFS staff worked closely with Jacqueline DeWalt and her staff at PEOPLE, with Tom Browne at the College of Agricultural & Life Sciences at UW-Madison.

For six years the CRFS project and PEOPLE staff designed and delivered educational experiences for ten "cohorts" of students. These included classroom projects and discussions, guest speakers, and tours that exposed the youth to different aspects and issues in *their* food system. The track was eventually expanded to include two internships that combined urban farming, culinary arts, food and nutritional sciences, and business concepts.

In 2015 three rising seniors from Milwaukee, Waukesha, and Menomonee Nation worked with South Madison farmer Robert Pierce and his PEAT Program youth to develop a savory-flavored carrot-pumpkin protein bar. Partners included the City of Madison, CUNA Mutual Foundation, the food science department at UW-Madison, and FEED Kitchens on Madison's North Side.



South Madison farmer Robert Pierce with PEOPLE students.

**“Between 2015 and 2020,
we expect to see 57,900
average annual openings...”**

Employment opportunities in food, agriculture,
natural resources, or the environment. USDA 2015

In 2016 five rising seniors from Madison, Milwaukee, and Verona worked with Will Green and his Mentoring Positives youth to develop a “healthy frozen pizza.” New partners included the School of Business and Applied Arts at Madison College and two local businesses, Fraboni’s and Naples 15.

Since June 2015 PEOPLE and CRFS staff have met to explore ways to keep the food system track going after the conclusion of the CRFS project at the end of 2016. A corporate fundraising strategy is now underway as we also explore new grant opportunities.

Last February we approached many potential partners in Madison about the USDA’s request for application for its “SPECA” grant program. The SPECA goals are (1) to enhance the quality of K-14 education to meet future workforce needs of the food and agriculture industry and (2) to increase the diversity of students pursuing 2- or 4-year degrees in related fields of science.

We decided to postpone a proposal until 2017 but continued discussions with partners while developing this draft proposal.

Rationale

The food and agriculture industry has a daily impact on every American resident. Farms and other private companies grow, manufacture, and distribute calories and nutrients that we all require for survival.

At the same time, inadequate access to nutritious foods generates negative health outcomes for many Americans, and our minority populations are disproportionately impacted.

The industry is also an economic powerhouse with remarkable resiliency. Even during the worst years of the Great Recession, it sustained millions of jobs while persistently creating new business



The Pre-College Enrichment Opportunity Program for Learning Excellence, more commonly known as the **PEOPLE Program**, is a pre-college pipeline for students of color and low-income students, most of whom are the first in their families to potentially attend college. Their journey prepares them to apply, be successfully admitted and enroll at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. PEOPLE accepts highly motivated students into a rigorous program to build study skills, explore and strengthen academic and career interests, and gain a positive experience on a world-class campus.

<https://peopleprogram.wisc.edu>

Careers in Food & Agriculture		
Knowledge workers	↔	Manual labor
Technical skills	↔	Low tech
Specialized skills	↔	Low skill
Higher pay	↔	Poorly paid
Opportunities for advancement	↔	Few if any
Ownership opportunities	↔	Few if any
Ability to affect change	↔	Limited sense of agency
Disproportionally white	↔	Disproportionally minority

Figure 1: Distribution of job opportunities in the food and agriculture industry

opportunities. There are also many well-paid and influential jobs in government, academia, and the non-profit sectors that are directly tied to the industry.

Unfortunately, the more skilled and financially rewarding jobs across these sectors are not distributed equitably across racial and ethnic populations. (See Figure 1.) These are jobs that require specialized education and training as well as opportunities to learn about the industry and larger system early and often in life.

Our proposal is built around the hypothesis that individuals from minority populations can achieve greater food sovereignty when they attain positions in the industry that enable them to make decisions and control resources, and with that power they will be more able to

promote food justice in the communities where they were raised or will reside in the future.

What we hope to determine through our project is how Wisconsin's food and agriculture industry and larger food system can achieve greater racial and cultural diversity in positions of influence.

The innovation that is required to accomplish this is one of scope. Ultimately, the transformation of the industry and system would require thousands of people across the state to implement it: high school teachers in communities of color; non-profit executive directors and staff; faculty and staff at multiple universities and colleges; corporate executive leadership and human resource managers.

We will contain the scope of the project to reflect the resources we are assembling by focusing primary attention on students in the Madison Metropolitan School District. As project staff time and travel funds permit, we will also reach out to constituencies in Milwaukee, Waukesha, Racine and Kenosha Counties and the Menominee Indian Tribe.

Observations and Propositions

Our project work plan and approach is guided by evidence-based data and observations. For instance, we know that students spend a small fraction of their time in school (see Figure 2), which means their extracurricular exposure to food and agriculture is important.

We also know that students in middle and high school experience elements of food and agriculture through gardening, food preparation, science projects, tours, summer programs, internships, and other activities designed for that purpose. We will need to assemble and share additional evidence that will show that our proposed course of action is appropriate to current conditions and will be effective.

One of our key propositions is that improved collaboration between schools, community organizations, university and technical college departments, and local companies will increase the flow of students of color into careers in food and agriculture.

A second proposition is that employers in food and agriculture may support this collaboration if over time it provides them with outstanding employees and future leaders. For our proposal, we will need to bring representatives from this various constituencies on board as collaborators.

Six Constituencies

We see six separate constituencies who need to be involved and engaged in this project. The numbers below correspond to those in Figure 3. Many of the actions describe below could begin prior to receiving new grant funding.

1. We can invite ***non-profit organizations*** (community, neighborhood, faith-based, etc.) ***and county Extension 4H*** to provide input to this proposal and share details of their programs related to food and agriculture.
2. We can invite the appropriate ***leadership and teachers at MMSD*** to contribute information about courses, clubs, and other programs in middle and high schools related to food and agriculture. We can begin the formal process with MMSD to seek their support on SPECA and other grant opportunities.

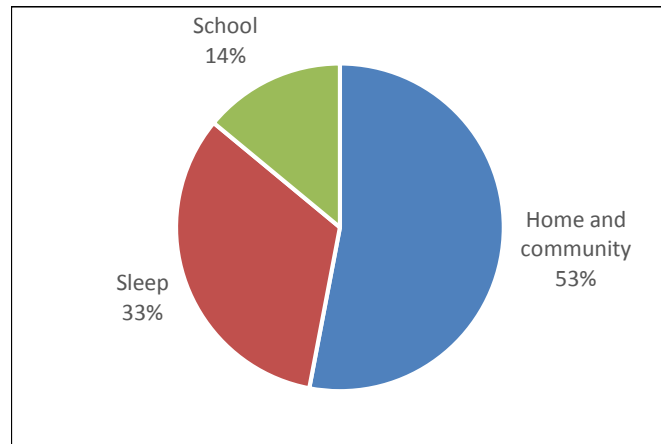
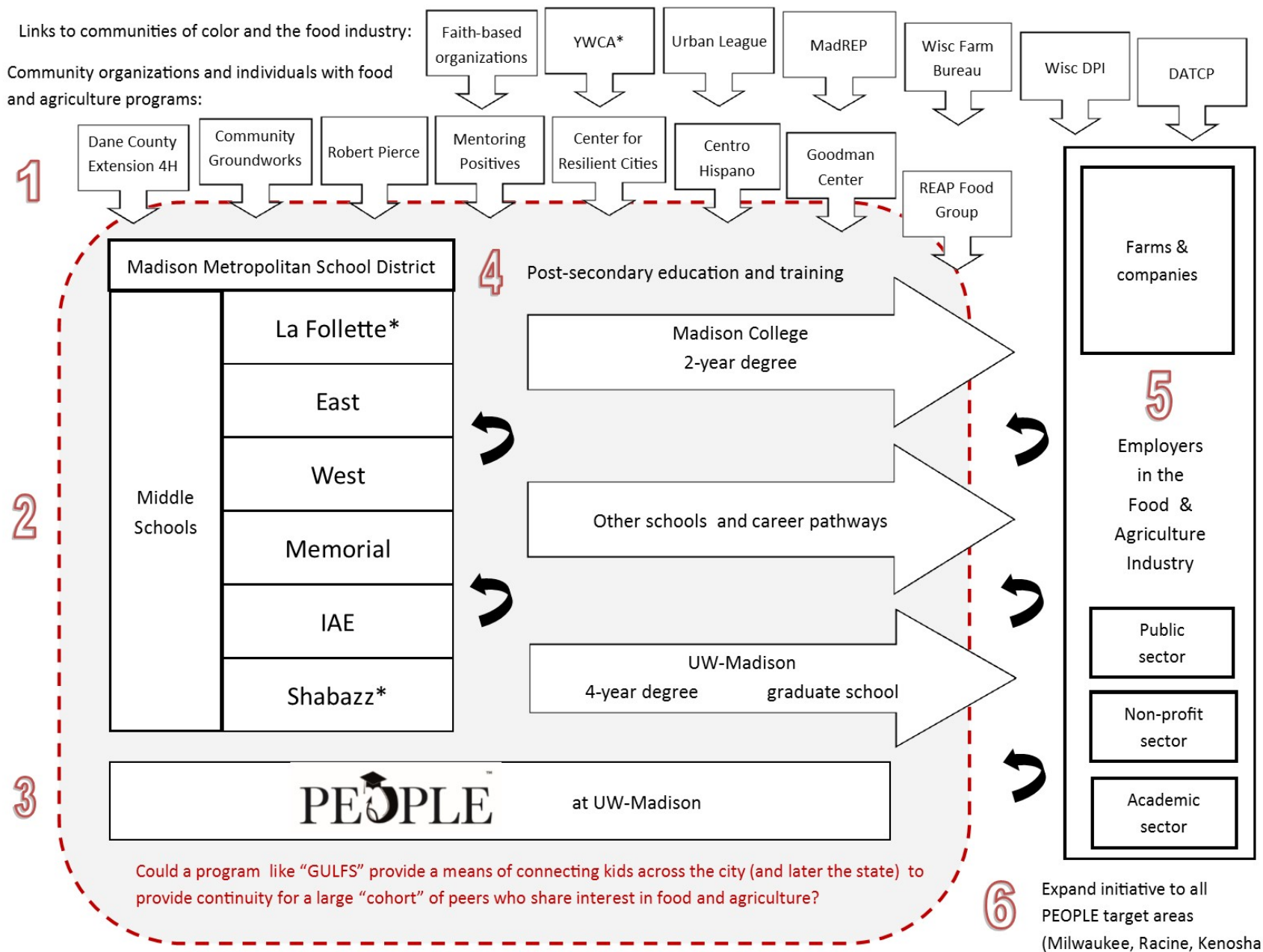


Figure 2: Percentage of time during the year that students spend in school, out of school, and sleeping. Source: *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, National Research Council, 2000.



* Restorative justice programs at YWCA and two MMSD high schools could reach kids who are not part of the PEOPLE program.

Figure 3: Conceptual strategy to encourage students of color to explore career opportunities in the food and agriculture industry.

3. We can continue partnering with the **PEOPLE Program** to do early outreach to high school students and to engage PEOPLE Scholars and other students of color at UW-Madison who in food and agriculture fields. These collegiate students can serve as guest speakers, role models, and mentors by sharing their experience with high school students at appropriate times throughout the year.
4. We can ask the **academic leadership** from CALS at UW-Madison, from the agriculture and culinary programs at Madison College, and from other post-secondary schools in Wisconsin to provide information about their degree programs related to food and agriculture.
5. We can reach out to **companies in the food and agriculture industry** and other employers in the larger food system in Wisconsin will be invited to design this initiative in ways that effectively provide them with excellent interns and employees in the future. They will also be asked to contribute to the cost of maintaining the collaboration after the initial 2-year period of developing, launching and evaluating the initiative.
6. We can begin identifying the five constituencies above in other communities served by the PEOPLE Program: **Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha Counties** and **Menominee Indian Tribe** and gradually expand our evolving strategy statewide.

Additional Next Steps Proposed

We will host a meeting in November 2016 to seek further input on this proposal and discuss the following next steps that would require additional funding.

- A. We will ask community partners to consider joining us in the development of a shared cohort program modelled after the “GULFS” proposal developed by the City of Madison’s Food System Coordinator, George Reistad, when he was at Michael Fields Ag Institute. (See GULFS sidebar.) A well-designed cohort program could provide a means for collaborating organizations to track and support young people as they move from one learning experience to the next on their unique pathways to careers in food and agriculture.
- B. We will also explore whether the “restorative justice programs” at WYCA and

Growing Urban Leaders in Food Systems (GULFS)

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute’s GULFS program cultivates young leaders from diverse communities in Madison and Milwaukee to help shape the future of food and agricultural policy and benefit communities like theirs. With public schools and other public and private partners, GULFS educates young people of color about basic strategies of civic engagement and community empowerment, helps them gain skills to pursue work in Food Systems/Sustainable Agriculture change-making, and works with non-profits/agency partners to create job opportunities for leaders who emerge.

two MMSD high schools can be an effective way to reach more students and provide them ways to explore topics and career pathways in the food and agriculture industry and food system.

- C. We will strengthen the relationships between student groups on the UW-Madison and Madison College campuses and facilitate their visits with high school students to serve as role models and advisors.
- D. We will reach out to companies in the food and agriculture industry who might provide internship opportunities to college students and participate in special career events to meet prospective new employees.
- E. We will develop an evaluation method that tracks the progress of the youth over time and determine whether we are achieving our goal of diversifying the food and agriculture industry in Wisconsin.

Appendix

Proposal Terminology, Organizations, Acronyms, and Contributors

Food and agriculture industry: We use this term primarily in reference to for-profit companies—including farms, cooperatives, corporations and other business models and alliances—that grow, produce and distribute food for sale.

Some non-profit organizations are beginning to engage in commercial food sales as a way to serve their missions while easing their dependence on grants and gifts.

Food system: The industry described above is a central to a larger “food system” which also includes the public, non-profit, and academic sectors of society.

Public policy establishes the rules under which for-profit industry can operate. The public sector can also subsidize and even operate aspects of the private industry’s necessary infrastructure, like waste management and interstate highways.

Non-profit distribution organizations that supply food pantries can be seen an extension of the for-profit food and agriculture industry. Other non-profits advocate for public policies and run education and outreach programs that address problems in the food system.

The academic sector includes K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions, private and public, that educate and train the workforce all of the sectors described above. Most schools also provide meals to their students and in that respect they connect directly with the food industry.

That connection between the industry and schools is an example of multiple systems interacting. The food system also interacts with the health care industry and public health system and with waterways, climate, and other environmental systems.

Finally, the food system operates at every geographical scale, and it is constantly changing.

Food justice:

This term has been used as a call for more equal access for all consumers to affordable and healthy food options. It can also raise issues affecting migrant and other poorly paid workers, without whose labor the rest of us would go hungry.

Food sovereignty:

We use this to mean the power of individuals and communities to affect their situations with regard to food.

Organizations and Acronyms

More coming soon...

FEED Kitchens:

Food Enterprise and Economic Development (FEED) Kitchens is a project of the Northside Planning Council of Madison.

MANNRS:

Michael Fields
Agricultural Institute (MFAI):

PEAT Program:

The Program for Entrepreneurial Agricultural Training (PEAT) was developed by South Madison farmer Robert Pierce. For more information, visit:
<http://michaelfields.org/robert-pierce-local-food-youth/>

POSSE:

Contributors

This proposal is still under development. Contributors of ideas so far include:

- Kendra Alexander, School of Human Ecology, UW-Madison
- Tom Browne, College of Ag & Life Sciences (CALs), UW-Madison
- Jacqueline DeWalt, Div. of Diversity Equity & Educ. Achievement, UW-Madison

- Gail Ford, PEOPLE Program, UW-Madison
- Devon Hamilton, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
- Margaret Krome, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
- Greg Lawless, Food System Development Program, UW Cooperative Extension
- George Reistad, City of Madison, formerly with Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
- Donale Richards, PEOPLE Scholar, Biological Systems Engineering, UW-Madison
- Steve Ventura, Soil Science, CALS and Nelson Institute, UW-Madison
- Eric Williams, PEOPLE Program, UW-Madison
- Randy Zogbaum, School of Business and Applied Arts. Madison College