Informational Interview

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The topic for my research is “how to increase the interaction and communication between farm and campus”, and I chose to interview the farm manager, Perry, to know more related information.

Perry Acworth is the manager of UW Farm. She used to own and operate a commercial grass-based sheep dairy in Maine for 17 years. She had worked with many different species of livestock while she running the farm. Based on her various experiences and knowledge, she had been the recycling coordinators for Chittenden county, and also an educator at a rare breeds livestock foundation in Maine. After she pursued a graduate degree in farm and food system related fields, she had running 3 different student farms in different universities or communities before the UW Farm. As the manager of UW Farm, she needs to know and take care of everything on the farm. She needs to manage the crop production, farming plan for every year, the certification and permission for the farm from the government, activities, and events, how to connect with the related organization and how to help more people get fresh food.

      Here is a list of the questions I asked during the interview:

1. What does a manager need to do running a student farm?
2. Do you have farming experience before working on the UW farm?
3. How did the farm let students know about itself? How about the very beginning?
4. Have you guys down any advertisement about the farm?
5. How do you let students know when we got an event or activity?
6. Do you work or cooperate with any student organization on campus?

After Perry answered the first two questions about her biography, we started to talk about more research topic related questions. At the beginning of running the student farm, the location of the farm was different. It was next to the biology building, which would be much more visible and students who took biology-related classes always needed to walk by the farm. After the building for the original location was taken down, they move to the CUH where gave a larger area but also became less visible from students. To help to make more students know about the farm, professors and staff from student organizations would talk about the UW Farm and Dirty Dozen in some nutrition or environmental related courses, and that was where most students heard about the farm. During the yearly Sustainability events and career fair, the student organization that the farm work with would pass some advertisements on campus which could make people know the student farm. Since people do spend a lot of time on the internet, UW Farm started to have a social media account which dragged more student involvement. The farm would post recently production, activities or events and weekly newsletter of crops and nutrition on the social media. For the activities, the farm mostly uses social media, talks in related major courses or nearby neighbors to make more people know about their recent events. The UW Farm does work with student organizations, like Dirty Dozen, Campus Sustainability and etc. They would need some food or crops from the farm, and they would have students to volunteer on the farm. They would also help the farm planning, preparing and advertising events or activities. Perry had also said that the farm does need more students’ help or involvement, especially in the summer because that’s the busied time and they were always lack of help from students.

From the interview, I learned more about the UW Farm. I was very impressed by Perry’s biography and how many things she needs to deal with to maintain a student farm. I got more information about my research topic, like their original ways of advertisement, cooperation with student organizations and how and why they need more interaction and communication with students on campus. It gave me more ideas and direction when I am doing the research.