

The Farm at Royal Roads University

Annual Report

2023-2024



Royal Roads
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

For centuries, local Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) and Lekwungen (Songhees) families gathered and produced food on what is now Royal Roads University (RRU)'s campus. In the early 1900s, this land was also a vibrant working farm, where more than 120 Chinese gardeners, farmers, and cooks lived and worked, supporting the property's development into the 1930s.

Today, the site is zoned A1 Agriculture, one of only three properties of that status in Colwood, B.C. Unfortunately, this land has sat fallow and underused for decades. Through this project, and with thanks to TD Bank Group's support, RRU is revitalizing and reimagining this greenspace, providing a critical ecological service for a stronger, more resilient community.

Led by a Guiding Committee and consultation with the Indigenous-led Heron Peoples Circle, Cowichan Elder and Ethnobotanist Ken Elliott, Iyé Creative and other key partners, RRU is reimagining this former 5.26 acre walled Edwardian kitchen garden into the Farm at RRU. Our vision is for this edible and medicinal greenspace to be a living lab for research, teaching, learning and community engagement, and a cultivated space for significant food production to benefit students and community members. Beyond the growing of food, free workshops and community events, courses and research projects, and volunteer opportunities create a strong foundation for learning that drives regional food security and increased connections to nature.



Students, staff and community members engaged in experiential learning at the Farm at RRU

The Farm at RRU took root in 2022 with the establishment of a Giving Garden. Through this project, the Farm is expanding to double food production from the Giving Garden while also developing a Market Garden, a restored and expanded polyculture orchard, and an Indigenous Medicine Garden with irrigation throughout. The project is enhancing and activating a quality green space for community, increasing the number of trees, pollinator plants and biodiversity of plantings by 100%.

The following annual report provides an overview of the project milestones and outcomes achieved between June 1, 2023 and May 31, 2024. In just twelve months, we're delighted to share that we've expanded the Giving Garden, and established a Market Garden and an Indigenous Medicine Garden. Free workshops and community events, courses and research projects, and volunteer opportunities also created a strong foundation for learning that drives food security in the region. By 2025, the Farm at RRU is expected to harvest as much as 15,000 lbs of fresh produce each season to provide to local food banks, community fridges, RRU students, and community-serving partners. We hope you're as excited as we are!



RRU Farm and Food Systems Lead Solara Goldwynn, RRU President Philip Steenkamp, Jesse Willis of Upbeet Garden and Anna Maria Stone of Iyé Creative at the 2022 Giving Garden Fall Harvest

Key Milestones



Enhancing and Activating a Quality Green Space for Community

One of the project's main goals is to enhance and activate this quality green space for the community. We've made significant progress towards this goal by increasing the number of pollinator plants, tree plantings, growing the biodiversity of plantings, soil testing, and increasing produce yield.

Between June 2023 and May 2024:

100

Pollinator plants added to the Farm at RRU

20

Trees added to the Indigenous Medicine Garden

90

Different species planted at the Farm at RRU

9

Soil samples collected at the Farm at RRU

4,500

Pounds of produce grown and distributed to the community



Over the past year, the Farm at RRU has grown a lot! Connections to community partners, workshops, and the newly expanded Market Garden and Indigenous Medicine Garden have added huge potential for food production, ecosystem health, and community well-being. It has been incredible to be part of this space transformation and to witness people and the more-than-human world interact with the Farm. I am very excited about what this next year will bring and for the harvests to come!”

- Solara Goldwynn, Farm and Food Systems Lead

Enriching Community Members' Connection to Nature

Another of the project's main goals is to enrich community members' connection to nature by fostering a sense of appreciation and care for the environment. We've advanced this goal by offering impactful learning, research and volunteer opportunities throughout the growing season. Throughout the past year, the Farm has been a living lab for:

- Over a dozen learning opportunities including coursework for RRU's Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication program and six workshops engaging 200 participants on topics such as introduction to food gardening and ancestral foods;
- Two research projects exploring the soil composition within the gardens and the impact of regenerative food production on reconciliation and decolonization; and
- More than 170 volunteer sessions providing over 300 hours of experiential learning opportunities.

The following pages include some of the highlights from the Farm at RRU Engagement Survey for the 2023-24 season, which demonstrate the impact the Farm has had on our community.

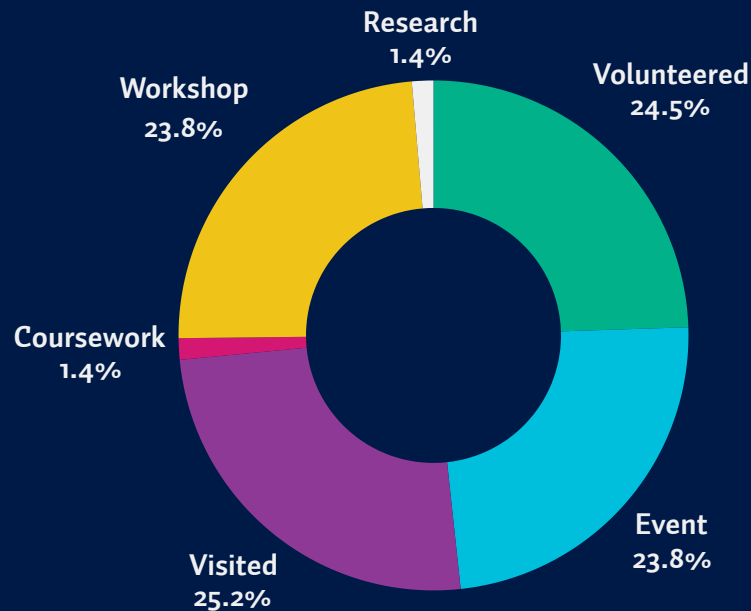


RRU staff members helping to plant the Indigenous Medicine Garden

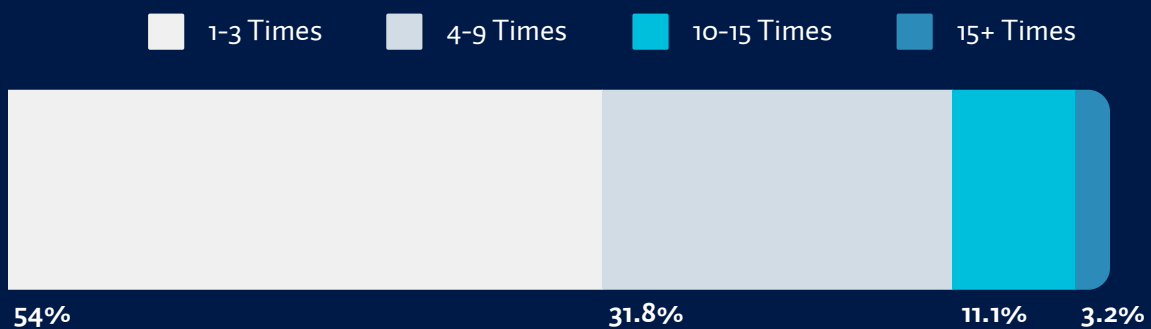
Who we're Engaging at the Farm



Most survey respondents volunteered, visited or attended an event at the Farm.



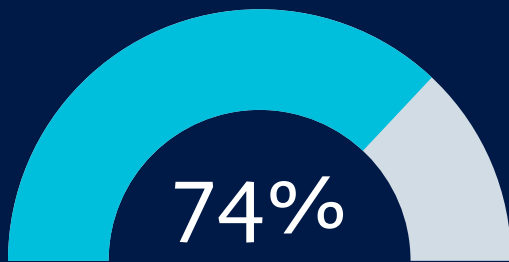
Most survey respondents engaged with the Farm between one and three times.



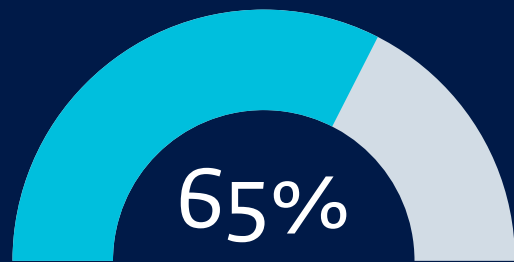
37% of survey respondents received produce from the Farm at RRU

Learning Outcomes

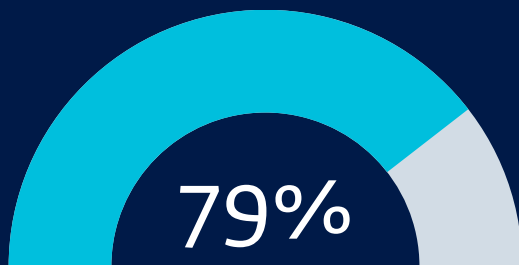
Of the 63 survey respondents,



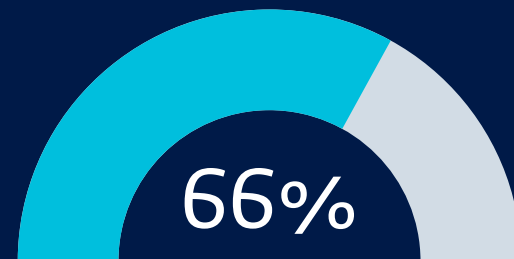
Agreed or strongly agreed that the Farm has helped to grow knowledge of how to grow food.



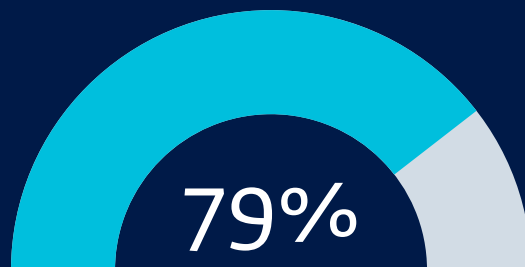
Agreed or strongly agreed that they have gained new skills through their involvement with the Farm.



Agreed or strongly agreed that the Farm has contributed to collective understanding of how local food systems can support food security.



Agreed or strongly agreed the Farm has enhanced their ability to adapt to food-related challenges such as climate change, rising costs of living and food access.



Agreed or strongly agreed that the Farm has contributed to their appreciation and care for the environment.

Impact

Over the 2023-24 season, the Farm has already had tremendous impact on our communities. From growing cultural awareness to increasing local food production, the Farm at RRU has fostered lasting appreciation and care for the environment.

“More than just a gesture of respect...”

“As an international student, I was fascinated by the Indigenous plants at the farm. Introducing these plants to individuals, especially international students, is more than just a gesture of respect; it represents heritage, culture, and ancient wisdom. This experience is not only enriching but also enlightening, providing a deeper insight into the relationship between nature and traditional practices.”

- Bahareh N., RRU Student



“Great to expand our knowledge of food...”

“Our Heartwood (Gr. K-6) students have really enjoyed getting their hands dirty in the garden. It has felt great to participate in a community garden initiative that is sharing food within the community. It has also been great to expand our knowledge of food we can grow here, and gardening in general.”

- Adrienne B., Heartwood Learning Community

“A huge asset to RRU...”

“The Farm (and Solara) is a huge asset to RRU. It is community building, a learning hub, a gathering place for friends and colleagues, a place of quiet solitude, and a place of connection and relation. I am grateful that I can spend lunch hours there.”

- Brie D., RRU Staff



“Working together to grow cultural crops...”

“At Iyé Creative we have been impacted by the work Solara has been doing at the [Giving Garden]. We have received donated produce for members of our communities. We've been working together to grow cultural crops and Solara's knowledge has been vast and we're growing together to understand the stories of those plants and how they relate to people.”

- Ariel RA., Iyé Creative

“will be growing our own...”

“When Solara gave my partner and I Callaloo, my partner was so excited, he went crabbing immediately so we could make Crab Callaloo - a dish he used to eat growing up in the Caribbean. We now have the seeds from the Farm and will be growing our own Callaloo this season.”

- Emily M., RRU Staff & Former Student



RRU alumni touring the Farm at RRU as part of the inaugural Alumni Weekend on May 4, 2024

Farm at RRU-Related Research Projects & Coursework

Jaya Jacob, a Master of Arts in Environment and Management Student, conducted research on heavy metals soils in the food garden at RRU and its associated human health risk. Jacob's final report, which was published in May 2023, identified that the concentrations of most of the elements were below the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment (CCME) soil quality guidelines for agricultural and residential/parkland use suggesting minimal potential health risk. Soil testing also indicated that the current practice of using raised beds with imported soils for growing food should be continued to prevent exposure to any potentially contaminated cadmium or chromium soils, which were higher than the CCME's soil quality guidelines.



Dr. Leighton planting Camas in the Indigenous Medicine Garden

Dr. Hilary Leighton, Ecopsychologist & Associate Professor, Program Head & Research Coordinator for the MA Environmental Education and Communication, School of Environment and Sustainability, has also done some preliminary research on the Farm. Her project, called “Reconciling Past and Present in How Our Garden Grows: A Critical Examination of Power, Peoples and Plants” explores gardens as a mode of spatial storytelling of human settlement. Leighton's research looks at how a focus on

regenerative food production, past and present, contributes to a reconciliatory, decolonized future narrative at RRU.

Beyond research, several of RRU's programs have begun to use the Farm at RRU as part of their curriculum and coursework. Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication (MAEEC) students have been working within the garden space as a living laboratory where curriculum has been built around the Giving Garden, including plant and pollinator identification, reflective and creative writing classes, and connection practices and increased relational intelligence with the more-than-human world. The Farm at RRU has been the inspiration for a Masters Research Project for an MAEEC student around community gardening in Nova Scotia, and another project on community orchards in Vancouver, by another student who was nominated for the Governor General's award.

This summer during the MAEEC residency, Knowledge Keeper and Cowichan ethnobotanist Ken Elliott will be giving the 20th annual Robert Bateman lecture in the Indigenous Medicine Garden as the cohort explores the inter-relatedness of peoples and plants from an Indigenous perspective. Normally, these events are held indoors, however this year the event will be held 6:30-8:30 p.m. August 7th, 2024 and will be open to the public as well as staff, faculty and students.



Ken Elliott at the Indigenous Medicine Garden

The Bachelor of Arts in Professional Communication program has also incorporated the Farm into its coursework. As part of the Communication Theory course last fall, Dr. Geoffrey Bird brought the students to the Farm to learn about its production. The experience offered a chance for the students to holistically enjoy and appreciate the campus and their RRU journey, as well as a peaceful moment away from the classroom. This spring, as part of the Digital Storytelling course, one team of students worked on a promotional project related to building greater awareness about the Farm among students. This project is still underway.

RRU's Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program, which is 100% project-based, also plans to use the gardens for projects this year. Professors Hilary Leighton and Geoffrey Bird will be working with the Farm and Food Systems Lead Solara Goldwynn to prepare an Education Plan for the Farm at RRU to guide further Farm-based curriculum and research.



Great Camas, ready to be planted in the Indigenous Medicine Garden

Looking Ahead to the 2024-25 Season

Over the next year, with thanks to TD Bank Group and Vision in Bloom donors' continued support, we will begin to restore and expand the Polyculture Orchard in the upper field, install irrigation systems in all gardens, and increase community learning and engagement opportunities through workshops, events and weekly volunteer sessions.

Our sincere thanks for supporting the Farm at RRU!



RRU Food Systems Lead Solara Goldwynn together with community partners from Iyé Creative and New Roads Therapeutic Recovery Centre with a sampling of last year's squash harvest

Plantings List

Giving & Market Garden

Bush beans

Runner beans

Leeks

Sunflowers

Grape

Nasturtiums

Summer squash (2 types)

Callaloo (4 types)

Tomatoes (6 types)

Winter squash (6 types)

Onions

Fava Beans

Peas

Strawberries

Mint (4 types)

Chamomile

Thyme

Chives (2 types)

Sage

Rosemary

Phacelia

Buckwheat

Barley

Rye

Potatoes (Russet, Red

Chieftain, Ozette

Potatoes)

Collard Greens

Perennial Kale

Broccoli

Garlic

Rhubarb

Indigenous Medicine Garden

Saskatoon berry

Pacific crab apple

Black hawthorn

Beaked hazelnut

Oval Leaved Blueberry

High bush Cranberry

Red huckleberry

Evergreen huckleberry

Red flowering currant

Nootka rose

Lingon berry

Kinnikinic

Licorice fern

Basket sedge

Woolly sunflower

Nodding onion

Great camas

Chocolate Lily

Riceroot

Wapato



Thank you for your support!

Royal Roads University acknowledges that the campus is on the traditional Lands of the Lekwungen-speaking Peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

With gratitude, we live, work and learn here where the past, present, and future of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, faculty and staff come together.

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