Big Red Farm Spring 2019 Progress Report
Overview
The beginning of the 2019 season saw continued growth in Big Red Farm aspirations and accomplishments. Lamb and pig operations increased in size. Together with curricular and co-curricular offerings, these changes will connect more students and community members to the importance of sustainable agriculture and locally-sourced food. A second straight year of cool, wet spring weather has not dampened the spirits of those involved in providing nutritious crops and meat to the dining hall. During the school year, the Farm committee developed a new mission statement:

*The mission of the Big Red Farm is to enrich our community by growing nutritious food that connects hands, heads, and hearts to the land. In the words of Lawrenceville alumnus Aldo Leopold (Class of 1905), we seek to install in students a Land Ethic that "enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."

Animal Operations
In March 2019, Farm Operations Manager Ian Macdonald expanded pig and lamb operations to include more animals and to maintain populations of each through animal husbandry. Since meat at the dining hall is the largest component of the school’s carbon footprint for food, it makes sense to expand animal operations alongside current levels of vegetable operations.

Forty pregnant ewes arrived on the farm by early March, and since then nearly twenty lambs have been born with more on the way. One boar, 1 pregnant sow, and 2 additional sows arrived at the same time. The pregnant sow gave birth to 10 piglets in March. Another sow is due in June.

The piglets and lambs will take about 8 months to mature before being processed and sold to the dining hall. To support this significant increase in animal operations, Macdonald planted new pasture grass and installed perimeter fencing around the whole farm to provide additional protection for animals from predators and to keep animals inside farm boundaries.
Spring Farm Crew

This spring we have a robust Lifetime Farming group. They are a hard-working crew that needs little instruction and will stay focused on a task until it is complete. We have spent significant time planting seedlings in the science and farm greenhouse, prepping garden beds, and transplanting to outdoor beds. Crops planted include kale, chard, lettuce, cucumbers, squash, onions, peppers, tomatoes, and flowers.

Greenhouse and Infrastructure Improvements

This winter and spring, Macdonald and new Operations Specialist Al Veltri improved air circulation in the Kirby Math and Science Center greenhouse. This reduced rooftop heat loss and greatly expanded the Farm’s ability to grow seedlings in that space. Macdonald also added multi-tier shelving to expand the number of seedlings that fit in this limited space.

In other infrastructure improvements, the Farm garage received new doors, shingles, and paint to improve access and protect it from leaking and wood rot. Farm staff and students also installed a 50 ft. by 15 ft. by 20 ft. pole garage that will allow for storage of farm implements. This will expand the available area in the main garage.
Deans Garden

The Deans Garden was created by the class of ’74 in memory of Howard Deans ’74. It was expanded in the 2018 growing season and this new area was again planted in late April 2019 for Alumni Weekend. Crops included lettuce, kale, chard, garlic, onions, and an assortment of flowers. This summer, students in the Leopold Scholars program will create a walking tour app guiding visitors from the Deans Garden to the farm and pointing out stopping points along the way that emphasize campus natural areas.

Beekeeping and Maple Sap

Our two beehives did not survive the winter, and a new colony ordered by lead beekeeper and school carpenter Ryan Yura arrived in late April. The number of hives was expanded to four to increase the chance that bees would successfully overwinter. We are also hoping that the bees will collect enough nectar to make honey for the Farm.

Beehives and maple sap provided opportunities for farm outreach teaching on seasons, pollinators, and parasites in classes and other farm events.
Maple sap collection began in late January and lasted through early March. Cooler weather led to lower harvest volume since there were fewer days at the ideal collection temperature of 45 degrees. Following boiling by Sustainable Fare staff, several bottles of maple syrup were filled. With additional years of collection we will use sap collection data in our introductory science unit on statistics.

Community Service and Outreach

In the fall of 2018, seniors Katherine Xiong and Serena Chen added a farm stop to the regular “Friday Fun Day” serving youth grades K-5 visiting campus from the Greater Trenton area. Groups have planted seeds, toured the farm, harvested vegetables, and held farm-themed scavenger hunts as a way to raise awareness where our food comes from and how it is grown. Lawrence Cub Scout Troop 28 also visited the farm in April 2019 to learn about the science of farming.
Summer Plans

Plans are in place to greatly expand summer programming that will involve collaboration between Farm Program Manager Steve Laubach and Farm Operations Manager Ian Macdonald.

- Seven interns will work three days/week from June 17-August 23. In addition to planting, tending, and harvesting crops, students will hold bimonthly discussion groups, staff the farm stand, and help deliver food to the school dining hall, school camp, and Arm in Arm food bank in Trenton.
- The Leopold Scholars program from June 16-29 will have a sustainable agriculture theme to it. Students will read selections from *The Big Ratchet: How Humanity Thrives in the Face of Natural Crisis* by Ruth DeFries of Columbia University, work on the farm, and bring surplus farm produce to Arm in Arm. Students will consider sustainable farming, inequities in access to food, and biodiversity conservation.
- Over 350 youth will experience the farm as part of the Lawrenceville Summer Scholars program from July 7-27. Sixty of these are Upper School students who will visit the farm in 4 different cohorts once per week for their interdisciplinary curriculum. Lower School youth will visit the farm each afternoon in groups of 15 to help with harvest and planting activities.

Conclusion

The Big Red Farm continues to thrive in providing the Lawrenceville School with nutritious food that connects hands, heads, and hearts with the land. In the 2019 growing season, Farm leadership will build on the gains made over the past year and develop a long-term plan for the place of the farm at the school. The Farm would like to thank its generous supporters for their continued interest. Readers of this report can keep up with the latest updates including student blog entries by regularly checking our webpage; links to BRF Instagram and Facebook feeds are also available on the webpage. Please contact BRF Operations Manager Ian Macdonald (imacdonald@lawrenceville.org) or BRF Program Manager Steve Laubach (slaubach@lawrenceville.org) with any questions.