

The good, the different, and the downright odd

When it comes to environmental projects, schools have looked beyond the obvious

By JAY KASBERGER

The Flat Hat, College of William and Mary

At Mater Dei College in Ogdensburg, N.Y., more than 2,000 pine seedlings are slowly turning 10 acres of vacant campus into healthy, reforested land.

The trees, planted by student Walter Perrin and other campus and community members, are an example of students extending environmental action beyond recycling and Earth Day activities. Schools across the country have initiated creative environmental solutions.

And it doesn't get much more offbeat than compost. Students at Lansing Community College, the nation's ninth largest community college, have started a community wide program to turn garbage into fertilizer.

"One of the problems we were concerned about was the college's waste," said Chris Kelly, who spearheaded the student campaign. "We did a waste-stream analysis. Of what the college was throwing away, 69 percent was recyclable,

and of that, 28 percent could be composted."

Kelly and other students approached the administration about composting biodegradable waste. Despite a cost-analysis showing the project's potential payoff — as much as \$27,000 — the college rejected the idea. "We were kind of dumbfounded," Kelly said. The plan could have helped ease the college's budget crunch, but "I think they just didn't want to deal with it," he said.

But Kelly's group did. They met with the city manager and learned of a law about to take effect banning leaves and food waste

from the local landfill. Armed with this new information, the group returned to the administration and convinced them to compost. Volunteers hauled away compostable waste in vans borrowed from the college.

Kelly also took his composting plan out into the community. By designing, building and selling 75 small, backyard composting units, Kelly and his friends simultaneously cleaned up the environment and raised funds for the project. "And [residents] were actually excited to use them," Kelly said. "They couldn't wait 'til spring to use the soil conditioner they made."

Students at the College of William and Mary didn't have problems convincing their school to become environmentally conscious, but they weren't happy with the direction their food service was heading.

W&M student Alexandra Scott knew Marriott, the campus dining service, had to cut its trash 25 percent by 1993, and planned to switch to Styrofoam dishes — a strategy Scott felt was wrong. "They hadn't done an environmental impact study on it," she said.

After Scott and other members of the Campus Conservation Coalition met with Marriott and relayed student opposition to Styrofoam, the company opted for a strong cardboard paper. "We just presented them with alternatives," Scott said.

Instead of looking at the waste and trash coming out of the campus food service, the Environmental Interest Group at Bowling Green State U. in Ohio decided to examine what was going in. Eating lower on the food chain — less meat and dairy products, more grain and vegetables — eases the strain of food production on the environment.

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— Chris Kelly



JAY MURDOCK, THE BIG NEWS, BOWLING GREEN STATE U.

Where's the beef? Not in the new vegetarian entrees at Bowling Green State U. The campus dining option has met with favorable response from students since it began.

To help students learn food facts, senior Dave Brodin organized weekly vegetarian potluck dinners to teach students how to cut back on meat. EIG also showed a film on animal agriculture's environmental effects to freshmen. "Coming out of high school, they're exposed to a lot of new ideas for the first time," Brodin said. "It's a great opportunity."

The group then turned to the campus food service. Brodin and others approached managers with the idea of providing at least one meatless entree each meal. Within six weeks, the service made plans to try vegetarian dishes. "I was really surprised at how quickly things went," Brodin said.

Students at Virginia's Emory and Henry College also got a healthy lesson as they learned to walk instead of drive to get around campus. Though the campus is small, many of the 850 students drove to class. "We had

this horrible pattern," said Clayton Hensley, organizer of the Students for Peace and Environmental Concerns. "We needed to raise awareness of what they were doing."

The SPEC sponsored "No-Drive Day," encouraging students not to use their cars on campus for 24 hours, and volunteers "ticketed" cars driven that day. SPEC calculated a 20 percent drop in campus traffic that day, preventing about 51 pounds of carbon dioxide from reaching the atmosphere. The group estimated 50,000 pounds of carbon dioxide could be kept out of the air and thousands of gallons of gasoline saved yearly if students left their cars parked.

"It really did get people to change," Hensley said. Word has since spread of No-Drive Day, and other schools have sponsored similar events. "We're a very small school, but this was national publicity," Hensley said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HARVARD CRIMSON

Ecolympics winners were crowned with hats, not wreaths.

Environment big winner at Ecolympics

By GEOFF LEPPER

The Tufts Daily, Tufts U.

Forget going for the gold. Harvard U. students are going for the green.

Through the Ecolympics, a series of inter-residence hall challenges, Harvard is competing to benefit the environment. And the energy-saving measures have helped the school cut nearly \$500,000 from its energy bill.

After its highly successful inaugural year, the Ecolympics entered a key phase last year.

"Last year was just a banner year," said Harvard senior Brett Huff, a founder and current head of the program. "But because there was such great inefficiency in the heating system last year, it's going to be much harder to conserve." Keeping up such rates gets more difficult after the biggest waste areas have been pared down in the opening year.

In the Ecolympics, measurements for each residence hall's monthly usage of water, electricity and heating oil were compared to the same month's totals from the previous year, and the percentage of savings or increase became points for each house. For example, if a house used 8 percent less

electricity, 4 percent less heating oil, and 2 percent less water in November 1990 than it had in November 1989, it scored a total of 14 points.

But heat, water and electric weren't the only areas in which a house could gain points. "We felt compelled to make it a fully environmental program," said Brian Trelstad, a 1991 Harvard graduate and a founder of the Ecolympics. So houses were awarded two bonus points each month for recycling cans, bottles and newspapers. Those two points could make a big difference, because houses that scored more than 15 points were declared "winners" at the end of each month.

Ecolympic coordinators in winning houses received green hats with the Ecolympics logo and green wool socks, while residents were treated to a study break featuring tubs of Ben and Jerry's ice cream. The monthly winner received a small tree as a trophy, and the overall winning house for all five months of competition was awarded the Ecolympics Cup.

And the project is catching on nationally. Thirty to 35 other schools — ranging from the U. of California, Los Angeles, to Texas A&M to Williams College — are expected to run a resource conservation program this year, Trelstad said.