

Veggie "Co-op" remains small despite eco-advantage



ALLIE STEWART/GUILFORDIAN

Boxes overflowing with greens line the walls of the Greenleaf foyer. Co-op supporters come every Thursday at 1:00 p.m. to pick up their local vegetables.

By Pete Kostin
STAFF WRITER

"Food is such a big part of our lives," said Bryce Bjornson, head of Guilford's student-run vegetable cooperative. "The problem is that our knowledge of where it comes from and how it is produced is usually very little."

Juniors Bjornson and Henry Cordeal are a two-man team, not a school-funded club, who provide bulk vegetables to students from a North Carolina-based produce distributor.

The distributor, called Eastern Carolina Organics (ECO), is a farmer-owned company that finds urban markets for family farmers if they agree to raise their crops through environmentally friendly practices.

"A lot of the stuff at groceries is grown in some other state, meaning trucks have to drive those products for an unnecessarily long distance," said Bjornson. "Our food has a smaller carbon footprint."

ECO's produce is also organic; part of the definition of organic means that their farmers use techniques that do not damage the lands' reusability.

"Organic is a federally regulated word; food that is organic gets an FDA label can have to do with what they put in the soil, using non-toxic sprays, and converting the land to organic which is a three-year process," said southeast coordinator for Real Foods Challenge David Hamilton in a phone interview.

Here's how Bjornson's program actually works: every Monday students turn in ten dollars at the Greenleaf to one of the cashiers. This pre-pay system guarantees a box of varied vegetables, depending on what's in season. Bjornson orders the produce and the veggies arrive from ECO on Thursday. When they arrive, Cordeal sorts the bulk vegetables into individual boxes which in turn get picked up by the buyers.

Despite its simplicity and eco-advantages, the veggie co-op has remained relatively small. Only 13 students participated for the week of Feb. 16, which Bjornson said was the highest number of customers all semester.

"We seem to be creatures of spontaneity, maybe the reason that the co-op isn't more popular is because of our pre-order system," Bjornson said.

Participants must turn in their money four days before they receive any vegetables.

Eliza Hudson '06 started the veggie co-op in 2005 and handed it over to Bjornson upon her graduation.

Even though his vegetable operation is still called a co-operative, Bjornson stopped utilizing a co-managing system last semester. Bjornson claimed members were not showing up regularly to participate in work.

These days the veggie "co-op" is no longer co-operative by definition.

A co-op is defined as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their (needs) through a jointly owned

and democratically controlled enterprise," according to the International Co-operative Alliance.

Both Bjornson and Cordeal ended the shared ownership among members in order to lower prices for all customers.

"Co-operation made it so the non-member price of \$15 seemed inflated (compared to the member price of \$10)" he said. He added that the program didn't require beyond Cordeal's labor and his own.

Today's prices are \$10 for a box and \$5 for half a box. Yet criticisms exist about the veggie co-op's low usage.

"I think the number one issue is that it's not cooperative," said sophomore Maia Buess, who works in the Greenleaf co-operative - the space within which veggie co-op is headquartered. "There seems to be no sense of ownership from the people who use it."

Despite low numbers of customers, the continuation of the veggie co-op's operation is related to a desire to know where food comes from.

"People generally like to have a connection with the local land and farms that their food is coming from," Hamilton said in a phone interview.

Bjornson's veggie co-op attempts to stimulate sustainable agriculture and regional economies of North Carolina by bringing organic produce to students that Bjornson says is almost always cheaper than supermarket vegetables.

QLSP conference examines Greensboro Massacre and conflict resolution

GUILFORDIAN STAFF REPORT

Annually, juniors in the Quaker Leadership Scholarship Program (QLSP) organize a conference around a theme of their choice. From Feb. 20 through Feb. 22, they held a conference titled Transforming Aggression: Responding to Conflict in the Greensboro and Guilford Communities.

Those participating watched a documentary about the Greensboro Massacre of 1979, entitled "Closer to the Truth," in Boren Lounge.

The event served to educate people about the Nov. 3, 1979, event where protesters, many from the Communist Worker Party, marched against members of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) near the Morningside housing projects.

"The protest came after the film 'Birth of a Nation' came out," said junior QLSP member, Laura Herman. "Which (was a film that) portrayed Klan members in an extremely positive light."

The KKK shot and killed five people and wounded many others.

"I've been living here for three years and I didn't even know about it," said junior Ruth Lowe, who attended the conference.

Before watching the film, Wesley Morris, community organizer for The Beloved Community Center, asked the group how many people were familiar with the Greensboro Massacre.

One response to Morris' initial question helped to illustrate the central concept of conflict.

"Many people raised their hands in response, but Kevin Muhanji raised his

leg," said sophomore Daniel Hood, who attended the conference. "Morris noticed this and was surprised - it's outside of what's normally accepted in this situation. He used this scenario to get us thinking about what conflict is."

Morris led students in defining causes and extensions of conflict.

"If what someone is doing doesn't fit into what I, in my group, think is correct," said Hood, "I'm going to have strong feelings and I have to deal with them before I can greet that person as a fellow human."

Morris stressed the importance of physical, intellectual, and emotional responses as separate reactions to conflict that are different and varied for each individual.

"The workshop Wesley Morris led in the afternoon was about what to do if you see a conflict like this happen," said Lowe. "We got into small groups and talked about the film."

While reflecting on the Greensboro Massacre, students discussed the role of the police during the protest. According to the documentary, an undercover police officer rode along with the Nazi and Klansmen's caravans that day. Behind the convoy rode a police detective and photographer who did not attempt to intervene in any way.

The police never officially showed up to the officially sanctioned "Death to the Klan March."

"Police presence at rallies is for two reasons," said Herman. "First is to make sure a riot does not happen and second is to protect the protestors."

The documentary featured footage from a video recording. Though many of the attacking party's faces were clearly shown



CLOUD GAMBLE/GUILFORDIAN

Wesley Morris, a representative from Greensboro's Beloved Community Center, engages participants in a conflict resolution activity. His talk was a highlight of the third annual QLSP Transforming Aggression Conference from Feb. 20 to Feb. 22.

on the video, all were acquitted in the state's trials.

"Another suspicious thing is many of the members of the shooting were charged with murder and only given \$50,000 bonds," said Herman. "While one of the marchers was arrested on a felony charge of inciting a riot and was given a \$150,000 bond."

Much information about the Massacre came from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for this attack, which in 2004

started to examine the reasons for the massacre and the consequences of it.

"It is important in a community like Guilford to look at situations like this one," said junior QLSP member Kevin Muhanji. "With our own conflicts here such what happened in Bryan Hall, conferences like this will help re-strengthen people's faith in the institutions of conflict resolution. Their views can be heard and thus their confidence will be renewed."