

# Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems

Annual Report  
2019-2020

Undergraduate Minor  
Graduate Specialization



Havengreen dairy calves



Sackett Potatoes storage



Webster Community Gardens



AllMar Orchard ride & learn

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## SAFS Mission

SAFS programs provide transformative learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students at Michigan State University using critical literacies, experiential opportunities, reflection, discourse, and active community-engaged work. SAFS graduates form a network of leaders prepared to co-create effective, interdisciplinary solutions for a more sustainable agriculture and food system future.

# Letters from the SAFS Director & Coordinator



**Prof. Matt Grieshop**  
SAFS Director

The 2019-2020 year has been full of exciting changes and new beginnings for the SAFS programs. One of these changes was my appointment as the SAFS Director. My role is to provide general programmatic oversight, and to develop and deliver the graduate Ecological Food and Farming Systems (EFFS) Specialization courses. Taking on the directorship is a natural extension of my long-time position as MSU's Organic Pest Management specialist in the Entomology department. I am lucky to have an excellent steering committee and program coordinator, Julie Cotton, to work with. I am no stranger to SAFS, having served on the steering committee since 2009, and I am very excited to be able to help train the next generation of sustainable food system professionals.

We are off to a great start in developing new EFFS program requirements. The new program was developed with a focus on flexibility and community-building opportunities. Upcoming changes include: renaming the graduate EFFS specialization to the SAFS specialization; removing any requirements for graduate committees; and a restructuring of course requirements including a 2-credit field course taught each Fall (CSS 894), a 1-credit capstone seminar course taught each Spring (CSS 896) a single course from "social" and "natural" science tracks (9 credits total). We have also begun hosting joint undergraduate and graduate social events to build and connect the SAFS community.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our program and please keep an eye out for future SAFS events. Growing and eating food are inherently communal activities and it is our hope that you will join us in building an inclusive community where we can share in the joy of experiencing both!

When I began as the SAFS Coordinator in Fall 2008, it was my job to help bring academic programs to life that reflected decades of faculty and community support, commitment, and passion for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at MSU. What an honor! With the input of several key faculty we initiated academic programming in Fall 2009, aiming for an academic space where students from any background or academic area could connect with, learn about, and perhaps find their professional or personal place in the SAFS movement. It was a dream opportunity at a university that serves communities at ground zero of sustainable food system work.

The SAFS undergraduate program aims to create a basis of agriculture and food system literacy (CSS 124), gets students out in the field to talk to farmers and food system representatives (CSS 224), and culminates in a project-driven class that requires students to create a useful end product that helps move our food system forward (CSS 424). We've completed almost 40 capstone projects over the lifetime of our program and are deeply appreciative for the opportunities provided by our community partners and their reciprocity in our efforts.

Over the course of the last year I've built a relationship with MSU Office of Community Engagement and fostered new skills and connections that will enrich the student learning experience and give us more ways to share about the work we do with our community partners.

Now, a decade after we graduated our first students, we have over 100 SAFS undergraduate alumni! They are helping create sustainable food systems everywhere, from local farmers markets to the international policy arena. I can't wait to bring you their stories following our 2020 alumni survey!

**Julie Cotton, SAFS**  
Program  
Coordinator



Students celebrate finishing the field course with a local dinner

Lansing  
Capital  
Area Food  
Council

Field Visits

Coffee Hours

AGROECO listserv

Practitioner Networks

Community engaged projects



Allen  
Neighborhood  
Center

MIFFS

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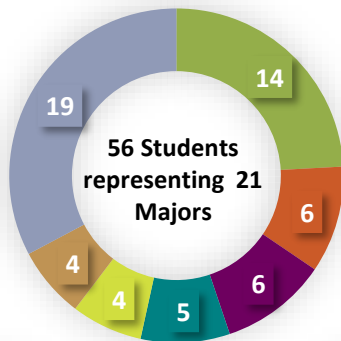
# SAFS Connects

from farm to plate

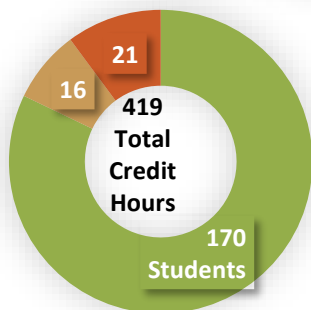


SAFS Students in CSS 124 visit the MSU Student Organic Farm Edible Forest

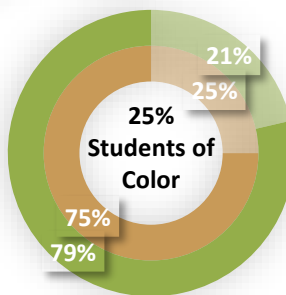
# SAFS Undergraduate Minor



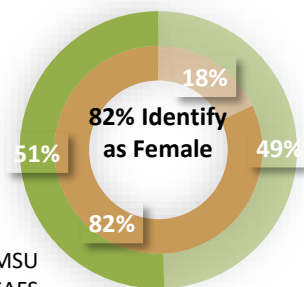
- Envir Studies & Sustainability
- Horticulture
- Nutritional Sciences
- Agribusiness Management
- Ag, Food & Natural Resources Ed
- Crop and Soil Sciences
- Other



- CSS 124
- CSS 224
- CSS 424



- MSU
- SAFS



Data includes students graduating U'19-S'20

# In the Field

## SAFS Field Course Visits

- Hi-Lo Acres (hogs, field crops)
- Sackett Potato\*
- Green Meadow Farms (dairy)\*
- AlMar Orchard & Cidery\*
- Havengreen Dairy (grass-fed)
- Thread Creek Farm
- Morgan Composting
- Andy T's
- The Local Grocer (Flint)

## Local Lansing Community

- Meijer distribution center
- Allen Street Marketplace & GardenHouse
- 517 Coffee Roaster
- Giving Tree Farm
- Magnolia Farm
- Riddle Elementary School Garden
- Webster Community Gardens

\*MSU on-farm research partnerships



Meijer Distribution Center



Thread Creek family farm



Green Meadow Farms heifers



Riddle Elementary School Garden



Giving Tree's rutabaga and muck soils



Hi-Lo Acres Organic hogs



Magnolia Farm urban production

see front cover for more field course pictures

# Capstone Projects

## Michigan Food & Farming Systems History

Institutional and community knowledge is often lost as leadership and service providers turn over. Students interviewed influential change makers in the MIFFS organization, like Morse Brown who helped farmers of color access programs at the USDA, and Dr. Oran Hesterman, one of the earliest sustainable ag advocates at MSU. Now we have some of these audio interviews preserved, and a history that informs both MIFFS and the Sustainable Agriculture movement in Michigan.



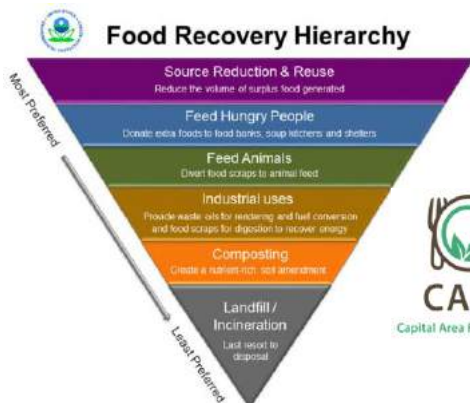
*"Finding cultural rooting foods..., foods that you can recognize as your own in a new landscape and culture that you still don't know, and consuming those foods are acts of self preservation"*

## Lansing Area Global Food Guide

Initiated by Vanessa Garcia-Polanco, a recent James Beard Foundation National Scholar, students created a digital and hardcopy guide to global foods available in Lansing. The Global Foods Guide will help orient and welcome immigrants served by the Refugee Development Center, and MSU international students making a new home in the Lansing area.

## MSU Student Organic Farm Marketing Survey & Plan

The Student Organic Farm grows great vegetables and depends on those funds to help pay for operations. Students surveyed current CSA members, and used this information to suggest a marketing approach. They also created a cohesive set of appropriate marketing materials to make marketing efforts quick and effective.



## Lansing Area Food Waste Analysis

The Capital Area Food Council (CAFC) gathers data to pursue effective programming and policies for a more sustainable local food system. Students created food waste report, including a list of current organizations participating in food waste recovery, and gaps that might be addressed by local action.



Mia during a service-learning spring break trip in Atlanta, Georgia

## Mia expands boundaries

Mia McPherson is our first SAFS student from the MSU school of nursing. Learning about the relationships between diet and disease, and especially the disparities in health outcomes for communities of color, motivated Mia to look beyond the bounds of traditional health care to expand her education. In her search to better understand food system disparities, she found the reverberations of what we now call food apartheid.

Mia put her knowledge into action. As part of the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars program, she served as an intern at the The Farm at St Joe's hospital with their Produce to Patients program. Mia is interested in continuing in community health and advocacy and is thinking about how we move away from an interventions model to systemic change.

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## Alex takes New York

With the help of a SAFS travel grant, Alexander Warshal found his new sustainable agriculture community at the NY State Vegetable Growers (NYSVGA) and National Organic Farming Association (NOFA) - NY Conferences this January.

Majoring in political science, Alex is the type of student that stays after class and continues the conversation in a way that makes everyone want to stay.

After graduation, Alex plans to head back to New York to work with his grandfather on the family's farm. SAFS also connected him to a new part time job as a grassroots campaign organizer with the National Young Farmers Coalition, where he'll be able to put his agricultural policy knowledge to work.



Alex reps MSU with Horticulture faculty





**Julia Kramer, Class of 2013  
Market & Pantry Manager  
at Allen Neighborhood Center**

Photo credit: Greater Lansing Food Bank

“I manage our year round, weekly Breadbasket Food Pantry and Allen Farmers Market. Along with the rest of Allen Neighborhood Center’s (ANC) program managers and administrative staff that make up our Leadership Team, I assist with decision-making and visioning for ANC as a whole. I sit on the Michigan Farmers Market Association's board of directors, and I am a co-chair of the Capital Area Food Council.

By managing my food programs on a daily and weekly basis, I contribute to the food security of my neighbors and to the economic stability of several local farmers and small food businesses. Through my work with MIFMA, I have a statewide impact on educating and connecting market managers and other food systems partners, in order to put farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement. Throughout all my roles, I practice systems thinking and connecting people and programs who could benefit from connection. Sustainability is deeply dependent on relationships, and I believe in the power of relationships - between programs, organizations, individuals - to strengthen our food system and increase its resilience.

My experience with SAFS deeply impacted my ability to pursue food systems work and my passion to do so. Through the courses I took at MSU, I was exposed to a large variety of ideas, experiences, and inspirations. Julie was instrumental in connecting me with first an internship opportunity at the South Lansing Farmers Market in 2012, which was my first experience working at a farmers market, and second with a paid job at the Bath Township Farmers Market in 2013. It was through these opportunities that I developed the skills and confidence to take on more leadership roles at farmers markets, which eventually landed me at Allen Neighborhood Center in 2016. I never would have predicted diving so deeply into farmers markets as a career path, and I am eternally grateful to SAFS and Julie for putting me on this path.

Finding what you're good at and embracing it will help shape your career in a way that feels fulfilling. For example, I've discovered that I love attending meetings and taking notes at meetings. These are things that not everyone enjoys, but they are essential for the sustainability of most organizations. Embracing and cultivating the skill of taking notes at meetings has led to opportunities for career advancement and learning at various organizations. Additionally, I always recommend following pleasure and joy wherever you find it. I got deeply involved with MIFMA not because I thought it would advance my career or benefit ANC in any particular way, but because every interaction I have with their staff is delightful and informative. I love spending time with people who are delightful and from whom I can learn. Allow your passion and your pleasure to pull you along, and you should be able to create a career that is enjoyable and fulfilling.”

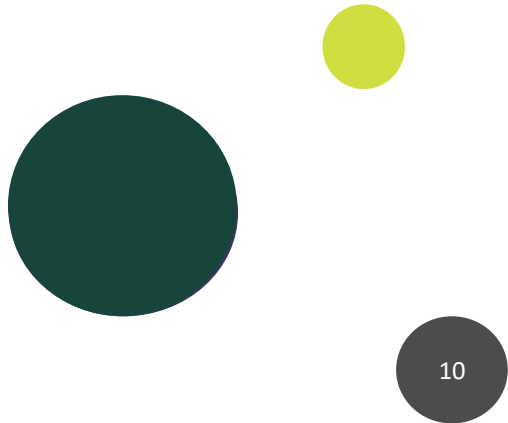


SAFS alumni Kelsey Watson S'18 (left), Kairsten Nitsch S'16 (right), and Julie Cotton (center) prepare for the annual Lansing Garden Project Community Garden Tours in 2016

After the extraordinary events of Spring 2020, we look forward to the opportunity to reconnect with the SAFS students and our food system community. Here's a few ways some of the "seeds" we planted in the last year will emerge in the upcoming academic year:

- Our inaugural offering of the new graduate program courses, with the formal programmatic and name change from "EFFS" to "SAFS" expected in Spring 2020.
- We are conducting a survey of the undergraduate SAFS alumni during Spring/Summer 2020, gathering information about career pathways and reflections on our programming to help us share our story and keep growing!

*Stay connected! Visit the SAFS website at [safs.msu.edu](http://safs.msu.edu)*



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# Seeds for the Future