

# Bard Farm Podcast

0:00 Josh: Hi Everyone welcome back to another edition of our podcast, I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission, today we're going to talk about the Bard Farm and I'm here again with Mackie Siebens, Hi Mackie.

0:11 Mackie: Hi Josh, as Josh said I'm Mackie Siebens I'm the Director of Admission. I'm an alumna of the college I graduated from Bard in 2012 and we're joined by our colleagues who work and the Bard Farm and we're going to talk a little bit about everything that happens here to do with food and ag, so do you want to introduce yourself?

0:28 Nicole: Yes, hi my name is Nicole Vascimini, I am a rising senior and I've been working on the Bard Farm for three years now and plan to work my senior year as well.

0:38 Katrina: Hi everyone, my name is Katrina Light, I am the supervisor of Food and Agricultural Programs at the college, I've been here for four and a half years.

0:46 Josh: So Katrina, could you tell us a bit about the farms that we have on campus and how they came to be?

0:52 Katrina: Sure, the Bard Farm was actually started—about—it's our eighth season - so it started in 2011 and it was started as a student initiative. A couple of students got together and really wanted to know not only where our food was coming from in the dining halls but how we could participate on campus, and so they lobbied some staff and faculty and then they got a coalition together and were able to form an acre and a quarter of farm right in central campus.

1:21 Mackie: And can you tell us a little bit about, there are some other things outside of that quarter acre that happen, there are some mushrooms and things like that that are grown down by the Sawkill, et cetera.

1:31 Katrina: Definitely, so 8 years ago we hired a full-time farmer to come help students in this process and the first year was really just about getting things in the ground and starting to grow food for the dining hall. The second year we were able to build a barn. The third and fourth year we started looking around at other parts of campus and so yes we have a mushroom operation that grows shiitake and oyster mushrooms down by a waterfall it's very beautiful and um we also have a greenhouse at Montgomery place on campus where we start all of our starts not only for Bard but also for the Bard Prison Initiative. So, there's two farms in those programs as well. We have an urban cultivator that grows microgreens right in the campus center and am I missing anything? Oh, we have the community garden where this year we are actually starting to do a diaspora garden and growing some native plants and exploring kind of native food ways.

2:27 Mackie: Cool.

2:28 Josh: Fantastic.

2:29 Mackie: And Nicole do you want to tell us a little bit about how you got into doing this kind of work and also where you came from and how you heard of Bard too, just to get a little background there.

2:39 Nicole: Yeah, sure I um..so I, I had a cousin that went to Bard and I would visit her a lot and I was really like taken by just the scenic like beauty of Bard itself and I did see the farm when I was visiting and I didn't know much about it but I thought it was a really cool place. I also knew Katrina from a, from The Putney School school when I went there during camp and she worked the farm program there and while I didn't work the farm program at The Putney School, I was intrigued by it and I knew Katrina through that and so when I eventually came to Bard I really wanted a job that involved outdoor work and outdoor spaces, um that wasn't necessarily like horticulture or landscaping and so I heard about the Bard farm and I had no experience farming, I've done like little gardening projects here and there but I had no experience whatsoever and I joined the Bard farm and it was one of the best experiences because it was so inclusive and you learn a lot and there's no experience necessary because everyone's at different levels and you go at a different pace and you're challenged no matter what level you're at and given responsibilities and tasks and you learn and it's really, it was a really nice experience to be able to work outside and learn these new skills and be with a really wonderful group of people..uh..so yeah, that's, that's in short how I got there.

4:11 Josh: Nice.

4:12: Mackie: And how engaged is the farm with the wider community? So we talk a lot about being on campus and having the land to do some of these things on campus but in terms of extending out to the wider Hudson Valley community?

4:25 Katrina: Okay, I can jump in. I think what we've been trying to do with a lot of outside groups is just being open to tours and engagement. We have a preschool on campus and so those kids come every week and we had a group of students actually this year develop a curriculum to talk to preschool kids about like pollination and composting and so that's part of our outreach efforts. We've partnered with the YMCA Farm project in Kingston and so we go there and help with some projects, they come here. So there's a lot of opportunities to kind of engage with other folks that are interested in food and agriculture.

5:00 Josh: That's great. So, along those lines what do you really feel the mission of the Bard Farm is and the purpose of the farm?

5:08: Katrina: I think it's changed over the last few years, I think initially it was just to really have that connection, we really wanted students to, you know ask where our food was coming from and then having that experience of this is what a carrot looks like when it's in the ground you know we've really lost that with urbanization. But now our missions really changed and Nicole was actually in a recent course, we had a practicum course in the environmental and urban studies department that was really exploring kind of what is the purpose of having campus farms and having these non-profit farms, so we looked at our campus, we actually visited a bunch of non-profit farms in the area and as a group kind of developed our mission and it really had a lot to do with inclusion, social equity, having this like ecological, you know, duty but also how this relates to us as social beings. Is there anything else you'd want to add to that?

6:03 Nicole: Yeah. We looked at a lot of case studies on different SEPs which are student experimental farms which really broadened a lot of like the students in our classes perspectives on different types of student farms and how they went about creating them, maintaining them, or lack of maintaining them and so we learned a lot from that and tried to apply them to our farm and see what worked and what didn't work, um, but yeah it was a really interesting course because you have a lot of, like Katrina said, like the mission has changed over time and I think it's important to acknowledge the changes and like the stagnation in certain missions of just any program on campus or purpose. So, yeah the class was called 'reimagine farms in spaces' and it was helping us to look at these spaces whether it's the community garden or the Bard farm on campus and see how we can kind of change them and reimagine them to make them more of a concrete space on campus that's more inclusive and more sustaining like over time for students and engagement and yeah those are really big challenges but we're, we're, yeah we're striving for it.

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7:24 Mackie: Yeah, that is great. And I mean the Bard farm also supplies a lot of food to the main dining hall, right? What is the, the poundage there?

7:34 Katrina: So again, we're only an acre and a quarter which is pretty small but we produce over, or you know depending on the farm season it's been a little rainy at the beginning of this season so we're about twenty-thousand pounds a year which is pretty substantial and we're, we're looking into that too with like soil health and we should let the land rest at some point so that was also what we were looking at with changing our mission. Is it really just about production? Is it really just about making sure that we're hitting our bottom line? Or is it, what piece of it is educational? what piece of it is taking care of the land and..

8:05 Nicole: Yeah and on the farm with the new farm coordinator Rebecca Yoshino, we've been attempting to kind of, based on our class that was co-taught with Katrina and Rebecca, the practicum course, Rebecca and I on the farm had been thinking about different, um, regenerative like agricultural practices to help with soil and just sustaining the land over time such as intercropping, to um yeah, which um..changing the way plants are, like the location of plants on the farm, maintaining better soil quality, um, just new practices that we haven't really done in the past or experimented with, we're trying to start doing that now even if it is experimental.

8:53 Mackie: And are there, um, like are these sort of strategies/practices taken into the classroom and built into classes and the actual sort of curriculum of the college?

9:06 Katrina: Yeah, I think that we're definitely starting to there's a lot of momentum around food and ag classes, um this fall we'll have our first cider-making class at Montgomery place orchards so we didn't mention this earlier but we also have another farm on campus and that's Montgomery place orchards which is an apple orchard that dates back to the 1700s and we grow over 80 different kinds of apples, a lot of those heirloom varieties, a lot of those for cider-making, so we have a microbiologist on campus who really wanted to explore that and so he's co-teaching this course with the farmers to look at, kind of, different apples in the microbiome of these, of these amazing trees so it's going to be pretty exciting.

9:45 Josh: That is exciting

9:46 Katrina: Yeah, I'm like, can I, I want to take it but not an option. Um, but yeah, I think that what's happening is there's a lot of momentum and you know there's a lot of, we don't have a specific food agriculture major but we do have a lot of these courses kind of going across disciplines and so there's a painting course that comes to the farm and paints, you know, on a weekly basis, there's, there's other classes that come and do soil tests. So it really is this kind of interdisciplinary program and really utilizing the space that we have.

10:17 Nicole: Yeah

10:18 Katrina: Which is such an asset

10:19 Nicole: And at the end of the day the farm does have a purpose of supplying the dining hall with that twenty-thousand pounds of food, roughly, a year, but it also one thing we talked about is it, really is like an outdoor classroom and we've been trying to kind of focus on that a lot more and how it is such an interdisciplinary space and student experimental farms are experimental in the fact that you should try new things on it and it's easy to remain stagnant over a lot of... over a long period of time but at the, but it's really cool to be able to be like 'oh we want to work more on like soil health and different biology and painting' and be able to use that outdoor classroom or farm as a space to do that.

11:05 Mackie: Cool, yeah.

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11:06 Josh: And along those lines, where do you see the farm going, you've already talked a lot about the changes that have happened in the past few years and the history of the farm, but what are some new developments and what's in store for the future?

11:19 Katrina: There's a lot going on. We didn't mention this earlier but with, you know with the creation of the Bard farm came a lot of other interest with food and ag and so a lot of students created this group called BardEats. Which is really around kind of the back end of food and ag and so not only were they like, 'okay, you know twenty thousand pounds are coming from our property,' now it's more than that. We buy a lot of seconds from Montgomery place orchards as well, so we are growing a lot of our own food but we're also a big school and so we get food from a lot of other places and so we are a Real Food Challenge school which means we have students looking into where all of our food comes from across the country and what that means and so we like have divestment campaigns of trying to move away from certain companies and we're trying to support more Hudson Valley producers and so we have a bunch of initiatives that kind of happen behind the scenes.

12:11 Katrina: We have a zero-waste initiative where if you come to Bard you get a first-year sustainability kit that kind of helps you make these good decisions—you're able to take food to go in these little containers that are made out of recycled, um yogurt, containers and these are all student initiatives. So, I think what makes Bard so exciting is that there's, there's endless potential for students to get involved and you really see that in the food and ag programs, you really see like, 'we want to farm,' okay here's the farm and figuring that out, we really want to know where our food comes from and okay well you know we'll sign on to this national, student-led movement. We want to reduce our waste, alright, we want to choose what's in the dining hall. Every Thursday students get to choose the meals that they supply. We have farm students who actually cook meals and so that students look up and see their peers and so there's so many interesting programs, um, that we've established in the last couple of years, um so those are, you know, those are all happening and I think what's really exciting is there's some, some larger shifts happening with this food lab, we're about to get a food lab that will be another classroom ready to explore you know how food is prepared. We have a teaching kitchen now that was started by students where it's like a dinner club that basically moves around campus. Now we'll have a space for that, we'll have classes in the space, we'll be able to take Bard farm produce and make hot sauce and I would love to see, you know I'd love to see this be like an incubator, right? Where students who come here can be like, 'I really want to learn how to make something' and have a space to do it. So there's, I think there's just so much potential for food and ag at Bard right now. And, you know, we're a thousand-acre campus with two farms and so I think down the road we'll see the Bard farm maybe shift and kind of come together with Montgomery place orchards.

13:52 Mackie: Cool

13:53 Josh: Sounds exciting

13:54 Katrina: Yeah we're pumped.

13:56 Mackie: Um well, Nicole and Katrina, thank you so much for joining us. For anyone who's listening, if you have questions, um, please let us know about them. Send them our way. You can reach us at [admission@bard.edu](mailto:admission@bard.edu) and if we can't answer the questions here, we can list Katrina and Nciolle's help in answering the more specific questions, particularly about the Bard farm and food and ag on campus, so..

14:23 Josh: Great and thank you for listening, everybody, we hope you tune into our next episode, thanks take care.