ACRES Student Farm, University of Wyoming
Agricultural Community Resources for Everyday Sustainability
25 September 2009

ACRES Mission Statement: UW ACRES (Agricultural Community Resources for Everyday Sustainability), Student Farm is a University of Wyoming student managed agricultural operation that provides quality nutritious food for the local community. The Student Farm will additionally provide educational and research opportunities for the Laramie and University of Wyoming communities.

Student Involvement: ACRES has approximately 10 “core” student members from a variety of scholastic disciplines, who occupy officer positions (Alix Hakala, President; Erika Schoen, Vice-President; Lyndsy Soldau, Secretary; Alicia Beedle, Treasurer), a seasonally active Americorps employee, and a variety of other farm operational positions are ran by the other students. ACRES members are solely volunteer-based (with the exception of the Americorps employee). The farm holds weekend volunteer days, where anyone in the community is more than welcome to help with harvest or weekly farm duties in a “work for food” program that each outside volunteer is given a food token to be cashed in at farmer’s markets held in downtown Laramie. ACRES, being a Recognized Student Organization (RSO) at the University of Wyoming, also have a faculty member, Dr. Urzula Norton, who advises and oversees many of the farm’s functions.

FACETS OF ACRES FARM:
History: ACRES was formed in 2007 as a small-scale project by a group of like-minded UW students on a plot of land that was used as a supplementary sod farm for the football stadium. After a tough first year, the group managed to get a small amount of money funded by the Association of Students of the University of Wyoming (ASUW). A small hoop house was constructed, and by 2008 the farm was up and running. Armed with forthright goals, such as community involvement, education, and service, the student farm has since secured over $13,000 in grant money through the sustainability council, ASUW, and the Conservation Corps. Most recently, the farm has secured funds for construction of a new structure for harvesting, and storage as well as the most recent addition- an extension and upgrade to the hoop house.

Experimentation: The focus of the farm is to experiment with the feasibility of different crops and growing ability of different produce against difficult growing conditions in the Laramie Valley. Faced with space constraints of the farm (approx. 1.5 acre), the students are constantly challenged with effective cropping plans, feasibility of growth, and hoop house cultivation methods. Every year, the student farm performs analytical testing on the different area soil at the farm, which is sponsored by Wyoming Analytical Laboratories. This provides information on methods for soil conditioning, restoration of organic matter, and ability to grow certain crop varieties in different areas.
Currently, ACRES is focusing on the eradication of the large seed bank of noxious weeds at the farm by planting a winter cover crop (Winter Rye, Winter Wheat, Austrian Winter Pea) and subsequent Nitrogen fixation using Hairy Vetch (spring planting).

Community Service: One of the cornerstones of ACRES farm is the education of the community regarding organic farming practices, no-till agriculture, and sustainability in agricultural processes. Some of the past activities include: assisting the early care center kids with their garden, hosting the Laramie Garden Tour, a lecture on compost given to the community by ACRES member, Peter Gallins.

Compost: ACRES performs tri-weekly compost runs to various businesses and University entities in Laramie in order to enhance the organic material on the farm. Participating businesses dispose of their organic wastes in either 5-gallon or 35-gallon buckets that are subsequently picked up by farm members and brought back to the farm for breakdown and usage. The compost includes a variety of vegetable matter, coffee grounds, and expired grain from the local brewery.