

Greenfield Community College expanding its agriculture, green energy programs

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GREENFIELD — Greenfield Community College will spend the next two years expanding its sustainable agriculture and green energy programs, thanks to nearly \$225,000 in grant funding.

The National Science Foundation has awarded the college \$197,000 to pay some staff costs, develop new courses and add some new physical improvements to the school's greenhouse. The Wallace Genetic Foundation has given a separate \$25,000 grant, which will be used to plan a one-acre botanical garden on campus.

“What we're doing here is taking something that's organic to the community and developing it,” said President Robert Pura. He said that while many schools have developed new agriculture or green energy programs, few have had a community as invested in the field as Franklin County.

GCC faculty members involved with the college's Sustainable Agriculture and Green Energy (SAGE) Education Center said that they'll use the greenhouse and surrounding gardens as classrooms for both theoretical learning and hands-on skills.

The grants will pay for the creation of a greenhouse management course, for instance, which they say will be of interest to both students and community members. And the college will be setting up a water "catchment" system that will trap water that comes off the greenhouse and use it to irrigate the permaculture garden below.

The botanical garden project, which will need additional revenue to get off the ground, will bring new flowers and plants to the college for students to learn about and help grow.

The college will also use the grant to pay for about 20 credit-free internships, allowing students to work at local organizations that focus on sustainable agriculture and green energy. Peter Rosnick, director of the SAGE Education Center, said that there are 80 organizations that the college collaborates with on these issues, and the list keeps growing.

"There's so much amazing work going on in this region about resilience and sustainability," said Teresa Jones, program coordinator for the college's renewable energy and energy efficiency program. "We're one piece of that and we keep staying in conversations and connection with as many as these groups and individuals as we can."

Rosnick said that grant funding begins this month and that GCC officials are working this week to create a project timeline for the next two years.