Date: 2/1/13

Student Sustainability Committee
Pilot Lab Food Processing/SSF Collaboration

Dear Committee:

This letter is to lend my support and advocate for enhancing the Department of Food Sciences Pilot Lab to allow for the processing of food crops from the Sustainable Student Farm (SSF). Having the ability to process tomatoes and other products from the SSF will broaden the farms ability to provide year round food to the dining halls. It will also become a visible model for food hub processing and provide opportunities to research small-scale food processing systems.

The SSF currently sells the bulk of its produce to the dining halls on campus. The remainder of the seasonal produce is sold directly to the university community on Thursdays from 11am-5pm on Anniversary Plaza, May through November. Last year we brought approximately 7,000 pounds of tomatoes to these two markets, with 6,000 of those pounds going to the dining halls. However, I would estimate that 2,000 pounds of tomatoes were either never harvested or allowed to over ripen. That’s a 25% reduction in potential sales and product wasted. The cause of this was simple; there are certain windows of the year where our supply exceeds demand at the farm stand in regards to tomatoes. In addition, although the dining halls have agreed to purchase everything we can produce, there are still times during the summer where it is a challenge to use the amounts of tomatoes we have available either for fresh use or processing in their production kitchens. Having a facility to process this extra produce would help alleviate that burden and reduce the amount of waste in the field, especially as we gradually increase our production every year.

Student involvement will be paramount for this collaboration. There will be increased ability to allow students to see and experience food systems from seed to finished product, whether that is a raw whole food item, or, in the case of the Pilot Lab, a processed item. Opportunities for students to help with wholesale harvesting, packing, and processing will enhance the educational aspects of the SSF and pilot lab.

The SSF/Pilot Lab collaboration will ultimately contribute significantly to the campus mission of local food purchasing and waste reduction strategies. I fully support this great venture and hope we can receive SSC support for this highly visible and progressive concept.

Sincerely,

Zachary Grant
Farm Manager/Coordinator/Educator Sustainable Student Farm