

A Sustainable Agora – An Idealistic Student Perspective

Chatura Dilgir, Sachie Kamakura, Kameldeep Khangura, Wendy Lo, Megan Lockhart,

Mike Nugent, Ajit Sandhar

University of British Columbia

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AGSC 450 Group 10:

Chatura Dilgir

Sachie Kamakura

Kameldeep Khangura

Wendy Lo

Megan Lockhart

Mike Nugent

Ajit Sandhar

Abstract

████████████████████
Agora (██████████) is currently not developing community values, not providing good quality food, and is non-profitable as a business. As students in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, we have made several recommendations based on our findings. According to our survey, we discovered that students are dissatisfied with Agora and they responded well to our ideas. It is critical that Agora be more involved with our Faculty's underlying values in order to become more sustainable. Student participation and education, incorporation of the UBC Farm, and the addition of a student kitchen will all help to initiate Agora's transition to sustainability.

Part A: Our Definitions of the Problems in the U.B.C Food System:

[REDACTED]
As agricultural science students, we understand the characteristics of food required to be considered of superior quality. The UBC food system lacks several of these qualities: variety, freshness, palatability, affordability and good waste management. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In addition, we do not have any connection to the food we are consuming. It is important to know where the food we eat is from, what means of travel was used for the food to reach us, and how many hands the food has been passed through. We want to evaluate the ecological footprint that has been made in the production process of our food. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Agora, formerly known as Roots, is one of the retail providers under the mandate of UBC Food Services and suffers from all of the problems identified above. Located in the basement of the Macmillan Building (Faculty of Agricultural Sciences), Agora employs one full-time worker and one part-time student. It represents approximately 1% of the UBC Food Services' retail chains [REDACTED] and is not currently contributing to their annual profit. Prior to 1998, the Macmillan building facilitated the education of both Agriculture and Forestry students. In that year, the completion of the new Forestry building removed a significant chunk of Agora's clientele, and profitability has shown a significant decline. As a result, UBC Food Services has reduced Agora's hours of operation and may eventually close the outlet.

Agora lacks a sense of connection to the students and staff of Agricultural Sciences.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Our recommendations that follow may help redefine the faculty and the core values it represents. It is our goal to make Agora sustainable, and an example to the rest of the retail services on campus. We would like to use Agora as a showcase for foods produced at the UBC Farm and for foods and services provided by the students in the Food, Nutrition and Health programs. Integrating Agora into our faculty's curriculum and food system would provide many benefits to both UBC Food Services and Agricultural Sciences. For foods that cannot be developed by the faculty (i.e. at the UBC Farm), it is essential that we know where, how and from whom Agora will receive these foods and

ingredients. We will also explore better methods to manage our food waste. Agora is not providing food that students enjoy, our discussion will focus on how Agora can better serve the needs of Agriculture students while becoming more environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.

Many ethical perspectives inform our group's value assumptions. A community-based view was shared by all group members, and was considered as the most important perspective. Our recommendations and suggestions are mainly human-centred; however, they were also deeply connected and driven by an ecological ethical perspective.

The community-based view recognises the need to include all members of a population. As students of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, we feel there is a lack of consolidation between the different departments within the faculty (there are no departments anymore in the Faculty, only Programs) Having the different programs spread among three different buildings makes it even more difficult to form a link between students in different programs. In this paper we will suggest several ways that we think will improve Agora and help bring the various components of our faculty together.

It is our belief that Agora should be more student-centred in the future. The construction of a student kitchen, near or in Agora would enable students and faculty members to prepare their own food. The ability to prepare and eat healthy, inexpensive food in the Macmillan building is a service not presently available. Same problem as above: conclusions before the presentation of the research...

Our group also discussed opportunities to improve Agora's ecological impact. We understand the degree to which the environment is affected by and linked to our lives here on campus. We discussed the utilisation of the UBC farm located at South campus, and to link the farm would be achieved by using fresh farm products and its composting facility. We envision the use of farm produce, eggs, milk and meat for consumption in Agora. We would like to see the implementation of hands-on courses into Agora's daily operations. This would allow students to apply the theories they have learned in the classroom. For example, students in programs such as Agroecology or Animal Science would be involved in the production of the foods potentially sold in Agora.

An economic perspective is not of significant concern for our group: Economic sustainability in the long-term would be a by-product of our suggested changes.

The educational

and environmental benefits are far more important. Why? Decreased consumer volume is the major economic problem for Agora. We believe that if Agora is made more appealing to the students in our faculty (i.e. if there were more nutritious choices at cheaper prices, better facilities for the students etc.), students will want to eat at Agora and even participate somehow in the production of that final product. A sense of pride might develop among students while sales and volume increase as a result.

[REDACTED]

To assess the current sustainability of Agora and determine what indicators of social, economical, and ecological sustainability are necessary, we conducted a student survey. Great. We also interviewed executives at UBC Food Services to obtain data regarding the profitability of Agora and the possibility of incorporating the UBC Farm into the Agora food system as both a food source and a waste management system. Although our original focus primarily surrounded the assessment of the social aspect of sustainability, we found it was also necessary to address the ecological and economical aspects. Great...

A Social Agora

We believe that we can improve the social sustainability of Agora by creating connections within our faculty. But what were the findings of your survey? In this sense, we view social sustainability as the interconnection of people in the UBC community. Students in Agricultural Sciences are from diverse backgrounds from Nutritional Sciences to Agroecology. However, all agriculture students have a common goal: To learn about the different aspects of food related issues. Participating in the operation of Agora could give students hands-on experience in their relative fields, while directly involving them in the expression of the faculty's values. We would like to see students get directly involved with Agora, in food production and management, even for academic credit. Good. For example, Dietetics students could focus on assessing the quality and choice of foods and the development of a menu, while Food Science students could be involved in food sanitation and safety. Agroecology students could contribute in promoting and providing local food to Agora while Food and Resource Economic students could assure financial management that coincides with social and ecological sustainability. Great ideas

Moreover, we envision the development of a classroom kitchen situated in Macmillan for use by Agricultural Science students in both social and academic activities. We envision student

participation in Agora through “communal meals” where students come together after or before a class to prepare and eat meals; this would encourage a sense of belonging within the faculty and plant seeds for long-term friendships. We believe that such activities would support community values in Agora while providing inexpensive, tasty, quality food to students.

Currently, Agora is managed by the UBC Food Services and is run by one full-time employee and one part-time student. This demonstrates a lack of student involvement in Agora operations. In attempts to find out what Agricultural Science students would think about such student empowerment, we designed and conducted a survey (see appendix) that asked students and faculty about their interests in Agora. The survey demonstrated that students would be interested in participating in communal meals and in using Agora as a food preparation facility. Moreover, we also found that Agora workers and UBC Food Services would be interested in becoming involved with students as they feel that is congruent with their current mission statement in promoting and supporting the university. However, this would not come without its challenges. We realize that student involvement could not come at the expense of losing current Agora staff. Through student interactions, we discovered that students would be interested in gaining academic credits through managing Agora. We think that students’ involvement in Agora would benefit both UBC Food Services and Agricultural Science students by allowing the educational environment of UBC to become involved with its stakeholders.

An Ecological Agora

We believe that we can improve the ecological sustainability of Agora by producing and/or buying food used in Agora more locally as to reduce the negative impacts associated with food production and transportation on the environment. Here, we view ecological sustainability as the management of ecological relationships while using local resources. We also believe that ecological sustainability means adjusting to the local environment. In particular, we would like to see Agora adjusting to incorporate the UBC Farm. Agora could incorporate fresh farm products into the menu. Using farm products would not only mean that the food is produced nearby, but also that the food is produced in an ecologically sustainable method, since the UBC farm is currently in transition to organic production techniques. Food that cannot be produced at the UBC Farm could be purchased locally (e.g. BC products). In essence, Agora could potentially serve as a venue for UBC Farm products and could serve fresh food that is in season. Furthermore, in efforts to manage ecological relationships within our campus, we envision food waste from Agora being put back into the farm directly via composting. Therefore, we believe a “social Agora” could help create an “ecological Agora”. Good link!

After interviewing an Agora employee, we discovered that most of the products served at Agora are purchased from a supplier outside campus (mainly Konings) that may or may not be locally produced; food that is needed is purchased at the cheapest prices. In particular, although we found that cinnamon buns, rice bowls, and sandwiches are the only Agora products made on campus, we realized these foods may, or may not be made with food products that are locally and/or produced in a sustainable way. We talked with UBC Farm management to see whether buying food from the UBC Farm and composting at the UBC Farm would be feasible. Considering that Agora serves food to a limited consumer base, food supply from UBC Farm should be sufficient, however seasonality will affect supply. Waste products from Agora can be collected and easily transported down to the UBC Farm for composting because of the close proximity of Agora to the farm. The UBC Farm has recently installed large scale composting bins that could easily accommodate Agora's organic waste. These steps will help to create a sustainable food system at Agora and serve as a small example for potentially larger sustainable food systems. What about the type of materials and utensils used in Agora? Everything is "disposable" right?

An Economic Agora

We believe that we can improve the economic sustainability of Agora by not only advocating a social and ecological Agora, but also by increasing the quality of the food system as a whole. In this sense, we feel that economic sustainability is the attainment of profitability while maintaining ecological and social sustainability. Excellent concept! The current approach by UBC Food Services in assessing economic success is inadequate as it views lack of customers as the chief contributing factor for declining profits. We feel that improving the quality (good taste, freshness, appearance and nutritional value) and variety of food will help to attract customers from other buildings and maintain a regular customer base. Our survey provided us insight into student and faculty opinion towards these issues. Contrary to our original belief, we discovered that many students saw Agora as moderately priced rather than expensive. The majority of students felt that the Agora menu was not appealing. We feel that student involvement in the creation of a new menu and the use of fresh farm produce would help to alleviate some of these concerns. Therefore, we see that a social and ecological Agora can help foster the creation of an economic Agora.

Indicators of Sustainability

Agora is not currently socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. Using our understanding of Agora's sustainability, we suggest some potential indicators of sustainability. They are identified and then can be used to measure a transition towards sustainability. In our analysis, we realized that all of our indicators are interrelated: Improving the sustainability of one component will lead to improvements in other components.

An indicator for social sustainability would be to see if there is an increase in student participation in Agora if an on-site or nearby kitchen becomes available. Another indicator would be to see participation in communal meals and the cooperation of the UBC farm in Agora.

Agora's ecological sustainability can be measured by its ecological footprint. The ecological footprint would measure the environmental impact of food production for Agora. For example, using the UBC farm for food production will reduce the use of natural resources such as fuel for transportation. In addition, menu items that are made within the campus using food sources, which are not only locally produced, but also attained by sustainable agricultural methods, could be indicative of Agora's ecological sustainability. In addition, the amount of produce purchased from the UBC farm system could indicate ecological sustainability. What do we need to know to attain these goals? What barriers must be removed?

Primarily, an indicator for economic sustainability will be an increase in revenue generated from Agora's sales. Furthermore, since we see economic sustainability as profit achieved through the use of sustainable approaches, Agora's profitability will be (indirectly) indicative of all components of sustainability.

Part D: Recommendations and Future Considerations

Central Findings and Recommendations:

Both Agricultural Science students and UBC Food Service management and employees would be interested in connecting Agora to social and academic activities, and to the UBC South Campus Farm. To attach results of a survey in an appendix is not the same as a report on findings... Findings include your learnings through secondary sources and literature review. Purchasing food for Agora in conjunction with the UBC Farm and other local producers would be socially and ecologically sustainable. Utilising the UBC Farm would be economically and ecologically sustainable by incorporating the UBC community as a whole. Money allocated for Agora operations would stay within the UBC food system. Likewise, food wastes could be recycled back into the land from where they came. It is also apparent that economic sustainability is linked to success in other aspects of sustainability. All three aspects of sustainability must be achieved in order to ensure the long-term existence of Agora.

The following recommendations revolve around working with Agricultural Science students in the operation of a sustainable Agora:

- Food items to be served at Agora are prepared at a nearby location. To facilitate this, we recommend the addition of a “class-room” kitchen in Macmillan for use by students, the UBC farm, and the staff of Agora.
- Use Agora as a retail food outlet, as well as a preparation and service facility for communal meals.
- Use the UBC Farm as a source of fresh food for Agora.
- Ensure food supplies purchased for Agora are from local producers.
- Use the UBC Farm as a location of active on-site composting for raw food wastes produced at Agora.
- Create a menu that provides students with food choices that are both nutritious and sustainable.
- Ensure long-term sustainability by continuously applying the social, economical, and ecological indicators of sustainability.
- Finally, we suggest that UBC Food Services remain current (up-to-date?) on the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences’ values by conducting reviews and surveys with students and associating with faculty members.

Research Questions and Recommendations for Future Research:

We cannot ensure that our recommendations will create a more sustainable food system in Agora, we recommend that our indicators be continuously redefined. Future students should consider that each indicator is connected with one another and the UBC Food System. In coming years, more thorough investigation of Agora’s food system is needed, such as the introduction of UBC Farm products, the utilization of a student kitchen and more specifically, the management of Agora to incorporate student education through various agriculture science courses.

Some Questions to Consider for Future Projects:

- How much money and time are needed for our recommendations to be implemented?
- Will the suggested recommendations help secure Agora’s financial future?
- How will changes in Agora impact other food service outlets?
- How will Agora influence UBC Food Services and the UBC community?
- Will the creation of a student kitchen nurse social interactions?
- How will involving students in managing Agora impact their education?
- Will using UBC Farm products for Agora food items be feasible?

- Will Agora decrease its ecological footprint if a waste management system incorporated composting?

These specific recommendations to Agora will have profound ramifications on both Agricultural Science students and the entire UBC community. Continued analysis is required annually in order to build a solid knowledge foundation on Agora and its needs during this transition towards sustainability.

Appendix

Question in Survey*	Yes	No
1) Do you use Agora?	93%	7%
2) Do you purchase from Agora?	84%	16%
3) Are you satisfied with selection/quality of food at Agora?	31%	69%
4) Do you consider Agora to be priced moderately?	71%	29%
5) Do you consider Agora to be priced expensive?	29%	71%
6) Would you use a student kitchen in Agora?	61%	39%
7) Would you participate in post-class communal lunch/dinner?	73%	27%

*A total of 97 students were surveyed.

How do these questions relate to the problem definition and to the goals of the research project (i.e. assess the sustainability of the UBC Food System, and in this case, the contribution of Agora to the problem of sustainability at UBC?)

Suggestions from students*:

Increase in choices	35%
Fresher food	21%
Cheaper prices	10%
Greater student involvement	8%
More comfortable chairs	7%
Longer operation hours	5%
Purchase from local suppliers	4%
Brighter lighting	2%
Install another television	1%
Provide Interac service	1%
Install another microwave	1%
Install another toaster	1%
Build an outdoor patio	1%
Install heater	1%
Improve in cleanliness	1%
Install some computers	1%

*A total of 97 students were surveyed.

REFERENCES? NO OTHER SOURCES CONSULTED?

