Dear AASHE STARS Committee,

I am writing to affirm Grand Valley State University’s Sustainable Agriculture Project has developed a demonstration garden in the heart of the Allendale campus.

The majority of university gardens exist on the peripheries of campus. Indeed, even our own Sustainable Agriculture Project (SAP) first broke ground on the outer edge of the Allendale campus. Most farms in higher education, especially land grant institutions, perform quality research and education, however the information is often compartmentalized to specialized disciplines. In contrast, the SAP is unique in our interdisciplinary nature and aim to foster collaboration across university programs. Our innovative approach led to a national award by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities in 2018.

While our 5 acre farm demonstrates sustainable agriculture practices at a small commercial level, the scale can be intimidating for those who have not had growing experience. At first glance, it is hard to fathom implementing the multitude of techniques used on the farm, in a backyard setting. Thus, in pursuit of bringing this experience to the wider GVSU community, in 2018 we founded a demonstration garden right in the center of the GVSU Allendale campus. The 15’ x 15’ plot clearly shows the abundant harvest which can be reaped at an approachable scale. Hundreds, if not thousands, pass by this garden every day, planting seeds of possibility into the fertile minds of students. Mini-workshops hosted at the garden demonstrate homegrown abundance can be had for less than an hour per week of work.

I am proud to say our demonstration garden will continue to serve as a testament improvements do not need to be massive in scale, to have a massive impact in the community.

Respectfully,

Youssef Darwich

Farm Manager and Educator