

Edible Campus Keynote
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In response to the critical need for regionalization of our food system heightened by the challenges of the pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions, Northern Illinois University (NIU) launched the innovative Edible Campus program. This visionary initiative seeks to revolutionize our approach to food production and sustainability right here on our peri-urban campus. The Edible Campus program is not merely a garden or separate agricultural project; it's a comprehensive endeavor with multifaceted programmatic elements and objectives. By embedding this program within our peri-urban campus, we aim to showcase the potential of urban agriculture and demonstrate how universities can lead in regional food system solutions. A few of the program's key objectives are creating a living learning food systems lab, realignment of health and wellness with our food system, tackling food insecurity and workforce development. We envision engaging students and community members alike in hands-on learning experiences related to sustainable agriculture, food production, and distribution. This initiative not only educates but also cultivates skills that are crucial for a resilient future workforce. Importantly, the Edible Campus program aligns seamlessly with NIU's broader sustainability planning. It reinforces our commitment to reducing our ecological footprint, promoting biodiversity, and fostering community engagement around sustainable practices. The support for this program within NIU's leadership structure has been instrumental. With dedicated resources and enthusiasm from administrators, faculty, and staff, we have been able to develop and expand the Edible Campus initiative rapidly. Crucially, the success of this program hinges on robust partnerships. We have actively collaborated with local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations to build a network that supports and sustains our efforts. These partnerships not only enhance the program's impact but also ensure its longevity and relevance. As we look to the future, the Edible Campus program stands as a beacon of innovation and sustainability. It exemplifies NIU's commitment to being a leader in regional food systems and underscores our dedication to cultivating a healthier, more resilient community. This initiative is not just about growing food; it's about sowing the seeds of change and reaping a harvest of possibilities for generations to come.