

An Open Letter to Dean of College Pericles Lewis Concerning the Yale Sustainable Food Program and Food, Agriculture, and Climate Change Certificate

APPROVED by the FAS-SEAS Senate
May 21, 2026

Dear Dean Lewis,

After speaking with students and colleagues across the University, the FAS-SEAS Senate writes to raise concerns about your decision to eliminate the Director position for the Yale Sustainable Food Program (YSFP) and sunset the Food, Agriculture, and Climate Change (FACC) Certificate. We believe that these decisions were made without sufficient consultation with impacted faculty and students, and we ask for a more consultative decision-making process going forward.

The Yale Sustainable Food Program has a long history of student, faculty, and community engagement (<https://www.sustainablefood.yale.edu/our-history>). It has been a special academic program for over a decade. Over the past four academic years (AY 2021-22 through AY 2024-25), the program and the “Yale Farm” supported around 5,000 student visits and 1,000 students engaged in credit-bearing course work annually. Eighteen courses use the Farm for required instruction, reaching around 500 students each term. The Farm also engages up to 50 students in paid roles each year as Lazarus Summer Interns, O’Shaughnessy Global Food Fellows, farm managers, and via communication, outreach, and farm events teams. The Farm supports an active and dynamic set of partnerships that includes 17 Departments in FAS and SEAS; 10 professional schools; and over 30 centers, programs, and projects ranging from summer-session courses to cultural centers and interdisciplinary research programs.

The YSFP has many faculty partners and a Stewardship Council of long-standing donors but does not appear to have faculty leadership (e.g., a faculty co-director, a faculty advisory committee). The outgoing Director, Mark Bomford, holds a staff position and reports through Academic Affairs in the YCDO. Our understanding is that the Director position has been eliminated and that the current director has been let go.

The Food, Agriculture, and Climate Change Certificate was established in AY 2024-25. It had 32 students declared in the first academic year. Deborah Coen, Professor of History and History of Science & Medicine, is the Chair of the FACC Certificate Faculty Advisory Committee. That Committee is composed of 10 faculty members from all three divisions of FAS and one professional school. The faculty contacts for the FACC Certificate are Deborah Coen and Hi’ilei Hobart; Mark Bomford is the day-to-day contact. There appeared to be considerable confusion around the YCDO decision on the Certificate program. At one point, the community understood the program was being canceled; however, the program will be continued for two years to allow

declared students to finish the certificate program and to allow for additional conversations with the faculty.

Concerns: The decisions to eliminate the YSFP Director position and to sunset the FACC Certification program were made without consulting the faculty most involved in these programs. We are concerned that the FACC Certificate Faculty Advisory Committee was not consulted before the decision was made to terminate Mark Bomford, who served in a dual role as Director of the YSFP and primary contact for students in the Certificate program.

Recommendations: We believe early and meaningful communication with faculty would have produced better outcomes for the diverse community of students and faculty engaged with the YSFP and FACC Certificate program. We hope you will take the following steps:

1. Include faculty in the governance of YSFP. This could be accomplished by appointing a faculty Co-Director, creating a faculty advisory committee, and/or creating a concurrent reporting line to an existing entity such as the Marsh Botanical Garden.
2. Discuss the future of the FACC Certificate with the FACC Faculty Advisory Committee before making any decisions.
3. Reconsider the decision to eliminate the Director position in consultation with the new faculty governance structure of YSFP.

In making these recommendations, we are asking you to reaffirm a commitment to shared governance for decisions that have wide-ranging impact on academic programs, research activities, and co-curricular activities.