



Gills Onions, LLC 2009 Group Project Proposal

The purpose of this internship/group project is to assist Gills Onions on a continued path of sustainable innovation and conservation by revising and expanding their recycling and waste reduction program to achieve zero waste by 2010. The Group Project will focus on the aspects of the operation, located in Oxnard, CA. This includes the processing facility and administrative offices with tangible objectives of mapping the flows of what comes into and out of their operation with the intentions of becoming eligible to apply and win the WRAP (Waste Reduction Award Program).

<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WRAP/>

Statement

Achieving Zero waste is not about being in compliance with regulations or securing positive press coverage. It is about driving cost savings through the business, improving operating efficiencies and minimizing our impact on the environment. We must take full responsibility for energy and materials which can be either produced or consumed in our process. We hold ourselves accountable for our environmental impact by continuously developing and achieving sustainability goals at every organizational level of our operation.

Objective

This project's main objective is analyzing Gills Onions current recycling /waste management program to discover new uses for all waste energy and materials from our administrative offices and processing plant operation. Extending this concept to its limit, we will achieve our goal of **Zero Waste.** We recognize the aggressiveness of our goal and have placed the following objectives as stepping stones along the way:

1. Develop quantitative monitoring and evaluation programs to track and measure our current efforts and accomplishments so that they may be substantiated
2. Help facilitate the start up of a composting/digestion program for all food and yard waste at our Oxnard facility
3. Identify source reduction and re-use opportunities with our suppliers (...what comes into our facility must go out...)
4. Quantify financial investments and savings that can be applied to the waste reduction program
5. Document our achievements so that we can apply for the WRAP Program (Waste Reduction Award Program) through the CA Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) WRAP provides an opportunity for California businesses to gain public recognition for their outstanding waste reduction efforts and lets the community know that Gills Onions is serious about waste reduction. <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WRAP/>

Significance

As the Nations' largest Fresh-Cut onion processor, Gills Onions is a leader in many arenas. By taking the initiative of incorporating zero waste into our business we will set an example and motivate others to do the same. We want to be ahead of the trend and in a position to help design reasonable and effective policies that benefit all stakeholders. The least desirable approach is to wait for government to impose strict and possibly unreasonable laws without understanding their full range of consequences. Gills Onions has always been proactive, conscientious, and exemplary in their desire to be in harmony with their surrounding environment.

Background

Since Gills Onions inception 25 years ago, the Gill Family has been aware of the impact that our business has on the environment and has continuously explored ways to minimize that impact. By nurturing the land we farm and conserving our precious resources we are able to consistently produce onions of the highest quality without compromising the valuable resources necessary for future generations of people and onions.

Gills Onions was started to solve a problem, namely how to deal with peeling waste in processing onions. La Victoria, a well known salsa marketer, had been buying bins of onions from Rio Farms, owned by Allen, Steve and David Gill. After struggling to keep up with their production, La Victoria approached the Gills in the early 1980's about taking on both the farming and peeling operations. Having had early successes in turning problems into opportunities, the Gills embraced the challenge. Little did they know, they were starting a huge, new industry, "freshly prepared and ready to eat" vegetables and salads. The phrase "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" envelopes the Gills' "Can Do" approach to business. Currently, Gills Onions peels up to 1 Million pounds of onions a day, creating 200 – 300k pounds of waste onion peels. Gills has developed a proprietary process to convert this waste into ultra-clean, base load electricity for their operation, unique health enhancing anti-oxidants, and high grade animal feed. Gills farming philosophy of "waste not, want not" has turned yet another problem into three profit centers. Gills is serious about their commitment to sustainability and zero waste. In working with the California Energy Commission, the CA Public Utility Commission, the Climate Action Registry, the Gas Technology Institute, and many others, Gills is recognized as a leader in cutting edge innovation. In this proposal we describe a group project for a team of highly capable and motivated Environmental Scientists.

We are passionate in our mission to provide quality and service to our customers. The key to satisfying our customers is our curiosity and exploration of new technologies and practices to minimize our impact on the environment by continuously improving conservation of resources, efficiency with energy and labor, and vigilance in protecting food safety in our operations, such as:

- Energy efficiency
- Water conservation
- Reduction in chemical usage
- Efficient land usage and conservation
- Environmentally conscious and safe packaging choices
- Stewardship on our land, water and air

Stakeholders

- Gills Onions, LLC
- Similar food processing facilities looking for ways to incorporate ways to reduce waste and become more efficient in areas of their operations.

Approach and Deliverable Data

Approach

Evaluate our current waste management practices including collection, separation and handling of all materials. Audit what comes into the facility and evaluate our options for how we direct the by-products and waste to reuse recycle or landfill.

Deliverables

A final report and presentation will provide an evaluation of the various waste streams, their origins, opportunities for their reuse and recycle and both short-term and long-term strategies for how Gills Onions can measure, then improve their processes. We feel that the WRAP program serves as a 3rd party validation/ substantiation of our achievements and urge the team to apply for the award. Also, the team should develop a good financial model of our internal savings and generated income from this project. Proof of good financial returns will entice other food operations to follow our example.

We have high expectations for our Zero Waste initiative and are committed to continuously improving our practices and processes. As our saying goes, we want to contribute by "Doing our part/peeling the onion, one layer at a time"

Client

Gills Onions, LLC

Contact

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Anticipated Financial Needs and sources of support

- Paid summer internship available for 1 or 2 project members.
- Modest supervision of the project in coordination with Bren students and faculty.