

Campus Crops

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TO: The Board of Governors of McGill University

CC: The Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility of McGill University

Dear Members of the Board of Governors,

Campus Crops is a student-run urban agriculture collective at McGill University's downtown campus. We offer opportunities for the McGill and larger Montreal communities to learn about organic gardening possibilities in the city, as well as the environmental, social and political aspects of food production and consumption. Since its creation in 2005, Campus Crops has used its gardening space on campus to empower individuals by teaching gardening skills, emphasizing the importance of gardening in the city, and engaging in alternative food systems. The collective also stimulates discussion at McGill around various food-related issues through workshops, film screenings and other social events.

Campus Crops believes that McGill University should divest from companies and financial institutions engaged in tar sands extraction and Plan Nord. Support for this petition among our members was unanimous. Campus Crops is against these projects on the basis that the decisions to implement them are made without the consent of area residents, including First Nations and Inuit communities. In our mandate, we emphasize the importance of our non-hierarchical and inclusive structural organization, as well as our consensus-based method of decision-making. The exclusion of these communities from government decision-making, project-planning and implementation is additionally troubling due to the colonial history of mistreatment - including territorial appropriation - that Indigenous peoples in Canada have endured.

Resource extraction industries in general have serious environmental impacts such as cutting large patches of forest, using large amounts of freshwater for the processing of crude resources, and disturbing waterways and surrounding areas. Those activities are also linked to high levels of pollution in waterways and high emissions of greenhouse gases, which negatively affect local and global ecosystems and climates necessary for the biological and cultural survival of animal and human communities. These and other environmental impacts have detrimental effects on local and global communities, human or not, that do not benefit, and even suffer, from these activities, without guaranteeing that the damage done to those communities will be repaired or compensated for in the future.

The environmental issues raised by the Tar Sands and the Plan Nord cannot be addressed without mentioning the impacts they have on local communities that do not consent to the use of their traditional lands. Highly polluting activities such as the tar sands, mining ore processing, and massive deforestation drive away and poison traditional food resources. This further challenges First Nation peoples' right to self-determination and food sovereignty; they should instead be able to choose and shape the ways of life they want to embrace, including the management of their territories and their food systems.

McGill, as an institution for higher education which prides itself on its sustainability initiatives, should find alternatives to investing in corporations which generate pollution and social damage. One university's actions to divest from these projects will not solve the ailments of today's society; however, it can send a strong message to the community and to corporations about what is no longer acceptable. These actions can encourage other associations and institutions to follow suit and ultimately change the status quo. As a matter of fact, there are movements like Divest McGill in more than 210 universities and colleges across North America. We encourage McGill to take responsibility as an internationally recognized university and divest.

Signed,
Campus Crops