

A conversation with Brighter Green, April 11, 2017

Participants

- Mia MacDonald – Executive Director, Brighter Green
- A member of Brighter Green's China team
- Lewis Bollard – Program Officer, Farm Animal Welfare, Open Philanthropy Project

Note: These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Ms. MacDonald and a member of Brighter Green's China team.

Summary

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Ms. MacDonald and a member of Brighter Green's China team to get an update on our 2016 grant to Brighter Green. The conversation focused on Brighter Green's plans for its "good food" road trip in China, including its plans for workshops, coordination with local partners, plans for social media and live streaming, budget and spending, and challenges it has faced.

"Good food" road trip

Brighter Green has been preparing for its road trip to present workshops on "good food" throughout China, which will start in mid-April. The first leg of the road trip, starting in Beijing and going south, will last through June 10.

Brighter Green originally planned to start the road trip in late February. However, its local partners told it that February would not be ideal because many local ingredients would not be in season; starting later will allow Brighter Green to source these local foods from smaller-scale farms and use them in its workshops' cooking demonstrations. Planning for the road trip (e.g., the logistics of the route, finding local partners, finding venues that can accommodate cooking in addition to PowerPoint and film, etc.) also took longer than expected.

Initially, Brighter Green planned to travel in an RV. It is now planning to use high-speed trains, which will allow the team to travel more quickly from province to province, although these are more expensive.

Workshop components

Workshops will typically be about three hours long and include:

1. A speaking session about factory farming and the "true cost of food." Brighter Green has been working to figure out how to best present information on factory farming (regarding, e.g., environmental, ethical, public health, and climate issues) in an accessible but robust way.
2. Screenings of short films, including *The Matrix* and a new animated film on chicken and egg production in China tied to the Year of the Rooster.

3. A demonstration of ecological, plant-based cooking, involving local grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits that participants are familiar with, prepared in appealing but relatively simple ways so that people can easily cook the presented dishes at home.

Brighter Green will aim to balance the workshops' focus on individual health and nutrition and larger-scale issues (e.g. factory farming and farm animal welfare).

In a few places, Brighter Green plans to tour local, independent, organic farms, and sometimes those farmers will attend the workshops, participate in a Q&A session, and provide the key ingredient for the food that's served.

Brighter Green expects to spend between a half- and full-day preparing with its local partner for each workshop.

In a few weeks, Brighter Green will have a better sense of how the workshops are going and which components seem to work well.

Cooking demonstrations

Brighter Green expects the cooking demonstration to be the workshops' main draw, since it thinks most people will be less interested in attending a lecture (and that those who are interested are more likely to already agree with Brighter Green's message).

The cooking demonstrations have been complicated to arrange (e.g., finding local partners who can provide cooking facilities, researching local cuisines, preparing menu plans and the food itself, etc.), and have taken somewhat more time and money than expected.

Social media and live streaming

Live streaming is fairly new in China, but has become popular very quickly. Brighter Green plans to incorporate a live streaming component into its workshops, using a number of platforms that specialize in live streaming; for instance, social media platform Veg Planet, which has about 300,000 subscribers, will livestream Brighter Green's second event, held in Beijing.

Brighter Green visited South Carolina last year and partnered with the Waterkeeper Alliance to live stream video of pig farms and manure lagoons from a plane for a few hours. About a million people in China watched that live stream. (Because the farms were flooded at the time, following Hurricane Matthew, this was particularly sensational and Brighter Green thinks it drew more viewers than will be typical.) These farms belonged to Smithfield Foods, which is a subsidiary of the Chinese company WH Group. Brighter Green would like to do more outreach/reporting like this in the future that links China with the U.S. and other countries around issues related to factory farming to increase awareness, knowledge, and salience.

Local partners

For partners for its workshops, Brighter Green has targeted: 1) schools, 2)

community organizations/associations, 3) business and government organizations, 4) restaurants and health/lifestyle centers, and 5) Buddhist monasteries. It has also added some farming associations.

To find local partners, Brighter Green has relied on the network of supporters it built during its previous film tours and its social media campaigns. Social media platforms like Veg Planet as well as ChinaFit and people in Brighter Green's What's For Dinner? WeChat groups have helped Brighter Green with organizing. Jim Harkness, who is creating a manual of people working on sustainable agriculture in China, gave Brighter Green some suggestions of potential partners from among groups he has worked with.

Brighter Green also plans to use its WeChat network to reach a broader audience (since it wants to avoid only reaching those who already agree with its message).

Budget

Of the \$63,250 total budget for the road trip, Brighter Green has spent between \$15,000 and \$18,000 so far (though it expects its spending rate to accelerate now that the road trip is starting). This spending includes just under half of the \$11,000 total budgeted for travel for the road trip, and between \$6,000 and \$8,000 for Brighter Green's four-person road trip team, whom it has been compensating as consultants (though some are now working full-time). Some of the road trip team members have been working with Brighter Green since last year. Three of the four team members are based in Shanghai; the fourth is a U.S.-based vegan chef/educator.

Brighter Green has somewhat restructured the three-person advisory team it envisioned guiding the road trip: it is now functioning more like a programmatic team, working roughly full-time, with collaboration and input from other Brighter Green staff.

Activist trainings

Brighter Green plans to run skills training for activists and potential activists in August after the road trip is complete. It hopes to identify potential participants, as well as potential speakers, supporters, venues, etc., for these trainings during the road trip. It has already found one entrepreneur who can provide a venue.

Brighter Green is also liaising with groups such as Wild Aid, Green Monday, and Compassion in World Farming, as well as groups not actively working in China that have relevant experience, for advice on both the road trip and skills trainings.

Challenges and lessons learned

Hiring and compensation

Brighter Green thinks it may have underbudgeted for the cost of people, and it has been looking for some additional funding for this. Brighter Green would also have liked to include a video team in the budget.

Brighter Green has had some challenges finding good hires, and it took a few rounds of hiring to find its current team. Brighter Green tried working with two people with private sector backgrounds, which didn't work out. In particular, it was difficult for Brighter Green to find people with project management expertise who were also passionate about the issues Brighter Green is working on in China (and elsewhere) who also had free time that aligned with the projects' timeline.

Brighter Green suggests it might be worth Open Philanthropy talking to future potential grantees about how they have navigated this issue.

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at
<http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>*