

Dear Reporter:

Can an augmented reality app help reduce food waste in Orange County? Three UNC-CH entrepreneurs are betting it can.

The three – Alex Hoppe, Samantha Cullum, and Jason Straus – are launching Green Gears to help educate students about the impact of food waste on energy use and the environment. Green Gears, while continuing development of the application, has since broadened into a sustainability consulting company with a mission that includes creating and implementing an environmental literacy curriculum for local schools.

Green Gears was established with funding from CUBE, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's social innovation incubator. CUBE has launched around 45 ventures since it was created in 2012, including Musical Empowerment, The Meantime, and Hope Gardens. Students and faculty who wish to tackle a social problem can apply to the CUBE program through a competitive process. If selected to participate in the yearlong accelerator, they are given work spaces, academic instruction, coaching and mentoring from professionals, as well as seed capital for the development of the businesses.

Green Gears is one of CUBE's current ventures, and its founders have used CUBE's mentoring programs to create partnerships and start forming a client base. The three came up with the idea for the company in an emerging technologies masters class at UNC. After the class, Jason and Samantha graduated from the masters programs. The three wanted to continue work on the business so Alex, still a UNC masters student, applied to CUBE to further develop their idea.

Green Gears wants students to understand the energy it takes to grow food and the energy it wastes when food goes into landfills. Though their target is school-aged children, they believe that their research and resources can be used by all ages.

Within the CUBE program, the team at Green Gears does hypothesis testing and research each week to develop their business model. They present their findings to the class for feedback from instructors and other ventures and have board meetings throughout the semester and report their progress in the company. Alex, Samantha, and Jason say the most valuable aspect of the CUBE program is the knowledge they have been provided in how to start a business from the ground up.

If you would like to speak with CUBE or Green Gears about social entrepreneurship and innovation, we can set up a meeting or phone call.

Thank you.