

# Sterling College

WORKING HANDS. WORKING MINDS.

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This memorandum of understanding summarizes an agreement between Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, Vermont, United States of America ("Sterling"), Gopikabai Sitaram Gawande Mahavidyalaya in Umarched, Yavatmal, Maharashtra, India ("GSG"), and the Student Education and Support Association in Boulder, Colorado, United States of America ("SESA"), to partner in connection with Sterling's new EcoGather initiative.

### *Our Shared Purpose*

**Sterling** is a place-based, liberal arts institution that advances ecological thinking and action through affordable, experiential learning that prepares people to be knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible leaders in the communities in which they live. Its areas of curricular focus include agriculture, ecology, and education. Through programs of study and work, Sterling uses education as a force to address problems caused by growth including fossil fuel dependence, threats to biodiversity and loss of wild places, destructive agricultural practices, and structural oppression that encourages estrangement from community, nature, and place. To these important ends, the College is expanding its reach by launching **EcoGather**, a collaborative and transformative learning network dedicated to the regeneration of ecosystems, communities, and economies. EcoGather blends remote-learning, community-centered design, place-based pedagogy, and experiential application to equip learners at all stages of life with the context, skills, and connections to face the challenges of the present and future. Initial EcoGather courses will focus on agroecology and food systems.

**GSG** is an oasis of opportunity for learners in one of the most underdeveloped regions of India, the Yavatmal District. As a nationally accredited college, GSG provides high quality undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education to the local, largely agrarian population as a way to help address the region's high levels of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and morbidity. GSG emphasizes vocational and technical education and is oriented as a lifelong learning center for its enrolled students and members of the surrounding community. It also values and hosts international student exchange programs. GSG college has a strong agriculture program, but the methods widely used in the region – including by GSG graduates – tend to toward reliance on "Green Revolution" technologies, which are proving to be unsustainable in the worsening climate crisis.

**SESA** believes that access to education is essential in promoting opportunities and combatting poverty. Since 1992, SESA has supported education in the rural home communities of its founders, Drs. Atmaram and Sushila Gawande, including through transformational support of GSG College. SESA has supported building and water infrastructure development, solar electrification, introduction of computers & multi-media equipment, installation of high-speed internet access, technology installations and trainings, english language education resources, teaching and research trainings, and the provision of psychological support services (in a region that has the highest rates of farmer suicide in the world) at GSG.

With the guidance of Sterling's Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, Nicole Civita, SESA has undertaken the formation of the **Maati-Paani-Asha Center** in Umarched, India ("MPA Center"), which will operate alongside GSG College. The Maati-Paani-Asha Center aims to address the challenges in and around Umarched by modeling and supporting a transition to agroecological farming practices that regenerate soil, water and hope, increase food access and provisioning, improve food marketing practices, coordinate community infrastructure improvements, disseminate novel psychosocial supports, and host a multi-stakeholder advisory board. The Center aims to establish a Transition Support Program, that will provide robust, technical and financial assistance to smallholders to motivate, educate, and de-risk the transition away from chemically dependent, extractive, and unsustainable methods of producing monoculture commodities for export. The MPA program will help farmers adopt diversified, agri-ecological farming methods that favor traditional seeds and on-farm inputs and connect them buyers seeking sustainably sourced ingredients. MPA farming will generate sufficient yields, improved soil health and ecosystem services, human health benefits, and conditions that support community resilience.

Sterling, SESA, and GSG agree that there is a need for remote-enabled, experiential learning opportunities that integrate renowned experts in agroecology, resilient food systems, circular economies, and entrepreneurship with local holders of place-based, indigenous knowledge. Further, our preliminary conversations regarding Sterling's objectives with EcoGather and the mission of the MPA Center make us confident that a partnership will inure to the benefit of both institutions. EcoGather courses can be designed to support the development of a model teaching farm at the MPA Center and a transition to agroecological farming in Yavatmal.

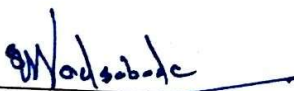
**Our Agreement**

Sterling, GSG, and SESA leadership agree to partner in the EcoGather program. Utilizing grant funding that Sterling has already secured, we will work together to define, develop, produce and disseminate courses aligned with the overlapping missions of EcoGather and the MPA Center. It is understood that Sterling is seeking a mission-aligned partnership with an organization that has deep relevant local knowledge, access to local experts, relationships with underserved farmers and agri-food entrepreneurs, and the ability to actively support the co-creation of EcoGather course content. It is also understood that the Trust is seeking to expand the resources available to farmers and agri-food entrepreneurs in India and is eager to connect its stakeholders with others similarly situated around the world through the EcoGather platform.

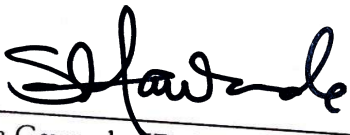
This MOU can be terminated at any time by either party until it is superseded by a formal letter of agreement.

This Memorandum of Understanding was entered into on April 30 2021

\_\_\_\_\_  
Matthew Derr, MSW, President  
Sterling College

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Someshwar V. Vadabade, Vice Principal  
Gopikabai Sitalabai Gawande Mahavidyalaya  
**Principal**  
**G.S. Gawande College,**  
**Umarkhed Dist. Yavatmal.**



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sumeeta Gawande, JD, Director  
Student and Education Support Association, Inc.