

THE REAL FOOD CHALLENGE

Real Food Campus Commitment

I. Introduction

The youngest generation of Americans today will be the first in our nation's history with a shorter lifespan than their parents, thanks in part to the food they eat.ⁱ Our food system is driving an epidemic of diabetes and diet-related diseaseⁱⁱ, while also fueling climate changeⁱⁱⁱ and the loss of our nation's family farmers.^{iv} **The challenge is there's just not enough 'real food' out there—it's less than two percent of our national food economy. Fortunately our nation's colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to address these 21st century challenges and help build a truly healthy food economy.** With a combined annual purchasing power of almost \$5 billion, U.S. colleges and universities have the capacity to significantly impact our nation's food system through their decisions. Further, by educating students—our future CEOs, politicians, parents, and (yes!) farmers—we can cultivate the leadership and the ingenuity needed to successfully transition to a healthier, more sustainable food system.

Real Food Challenge's Real Food Campus Commitment provides **a unique opportunity for college and university administrators to exhibit leadership in this field** by, (1) making a commitment to purchasing *at least 20% 'real food' by 2020*,^v (2) sharing their progress and accomplishments over time, and (3) engaging their communities in research and education on critical food system issues. RFC makes this process easy by providing a Baseline Campus Food Survey, a Real Food Calculator tracking system, and a comprehensive set of Campus Food Policy Provisions designed for implementation at every school, small or large, private or public. By signing the commitment you will join a celebrated community of leaders dedicated to supporting a healthy food system that strengthens local economies, respects human rights, ensures ecological sustainability, and facilitates community involvement and education.

II. The Context

The past decade has seen an incredible upsurge in interest in food-related issues on college campuses. Schools as diverse as Cornell University in New York, University of Wisconsin – Madison, and Lane Community College in Oregon have been making 'real food' a priority on their campuses, with other institutions joining the cause in increasing numbers. **Since 2008 the Real Food Challenge has successfully championed this cause**—training over 3,500 student leaders on hundreds of campuses and working with a select group to shift \$33 million in existing purchasing budgets to local, fair, ecologically sound and humane food sources. Now, according to some food service industry estimates, about half of the country's 15 million college students have access to some organic food on campus.^{vi} Other reports show that nearly 100% of the 200 wealthiest colleges and universities are now purchasing local food.^{vii}

Despite these significant changes, **little consensus exists** on what makes "good" food and too little substantive coordination occurs between schools and industry players. By providing a proven policy model and implementation process that can be adapted to meet the needs of all schools, **RFC's Real Food Campus Commitment will eliminate the need to "go it alone"** and instead knit together these separate efforts into a supportive, productive network. Just as the *President's Climate Commitment*^{viii} enabled colleges and universities to formally codify their dedication to mitigating global climate change through a nationally recognized pledge, the Real Food Campus Commitment will support signatory schools, connect them with potential partners in their region, and bring national attention to the great strides they make.

III. Why Real Food?

Food has always been **a key concern for prospective students**, and issues of social and environmental justice are more important to them now than ever before. Students want their schools to reflect and promote their values, including through the food served in their dining halls. According to the *Princeton Review*, 65% of

prospective college students interviewed said a college's "commitment to environmental issues" would influence their application and enrollment decisions.^{ix} Real food, and related environmental and social issues, now plays a critical role in attracting students to institutions of higher education.

In addition to drawing prospective students, **investing in locally produced food is also proven to improve the surrounding community's health and economic stability.** University procurement dollars spent locally have the potential to circulate two to four times more than when spent on non-local products.^x Recent studies show that a dollar spent on local agriculture earns back \$2.80 in community income—40% more than agricultural products procured at a distance.^{xi} Adding real food to their budgets provides schools with an opportunity to engage the surrounding community, enrich relationships that can often be tenuous, and demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting the local [economy](#).

IV. Why the Real Food Campus Commitment?

The Real Food Campus Commitment provides a **simple, expert-approved, student-tested model** for achieving food policy changes and evaluating progress. At a time when increasing numbers of sustainability tracking tools, surveys and programs are being introduced, many college administrators and students are tuning them out as a jumble of "green noise."^{xii} The Real Food Challenge has navigated this confusion and designed a comprehensive model, which, while compatible with other assessment programs (such as AASHE's STARS), goes beyond them in scope and efficacy. The Real Food Campus Commitment's implementation process is straightforward and flexible, and was developed and tested by campus sustainability experts including Anim Steel, Amie Frisch, Tim Galarneau, Erin Gaines, and Sue DeBlicek.

V. Implementing the Commitment

RFC's food policy provisions have already been implemented with great success at schools across the country. For example, the University of Missouri-Columbia, MO has introduced the new *Missouri Food 4 Missouri People* program that will soon increase the percentage of locally produced food at "Mizzou" to 15%. Further east, dining services at Yale University in Connecticut has pledged to provide 45% "sustainable" food by 2013. Schools of all shapes and sizes are successfully making real food an affordable reality for their students, faculty, and staff.

The Real Food Campus Commitment process includes just a few easy steps.^{xiii} After completing the Baseline Assessment^{xiv}, schools use the Real Food Calculator to determine the breakdown of their current purchases. **This standardized, comprehensive evaluation of food quality allows schools to identify their current standing and make realistic goals for the future.** Following the Calculator Assessment, schools use the Real Food Policy Provisions to create a customized Campus Food Plan, which outlines the step-by-step transition toward 20% real food. Throughout this process, the Real Food Challenge will closely support signatory schools to ensure that they can successfully meet their goals.

VI. Conclusion

With their **substantial purchasing power**, U.S. colleges and universities can **dramatically impact our nation's food system by choosing to support real food** that is produced locally, fairly, sustainably, and humanely. Students across the country value these purchasing priorities, and the Real Food Campus Commitment makes them a manageable option for schools. Equipped with effective assessment, planning, and implementation programs and connected with potential partners, signatories will have all the tools and support they need to be successful. With the support of the Real Food Challenge, schools are already changing the type of food served on their campuses and shifting millions of dollars toward **small farmers, fair trade businesses, sustainable agriculture, humane animal husbandry, and healthy food.** By signing the Real Food Campus Commitment, administrators and food service professionals like you can **join these leaders in building and strengthening a healthy food system that supports your whole community.**

VII. List of Endorsers (as of 8/2/2011)

Cooperative Food Empowerment Directive (CoFed)
Fair Food Network
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG)
Red Tomato
Student/Farmworker Alliance
UNITE Here!

ⁱ Olshansky, S. Jay, Ph. D., et al. "A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 352.11 (2005): 1138-145.

ⁱⁱ "Obesity - At A Glance." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. 26 May 2011. Web. <<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/obesity.htm>>. "More than one-third of U.S. adults (over 72 million people) and 17% of U.S. children are obese... In 2008, overall medical care costs related to obesity for U.S. adults were estimated to be as high as \$147 billion."

ⁱⁱⁱ Agriculture accounts for 13.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Smith, P., D. Martino, Z. Cai, D. Gwary, H. Janzen, P. Kumar, B. McCarl, S. Ogle, F. O'Mara, C. Rice, B. Scholes, O. Sirotenko, 2007: Agriculture. In *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, L.A. Meyer (eds)], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.

^{iv} *Chapter 3: American Farms*, Agricultural Fact Book 2001-2002, U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 2003.

^v Real Food is defined as having four attributes: local, fair, ecologically sound, and humane. Local and fair refer to *who* produced the food, and ecologically sound and humane refer to *how* the food was produced.

^{vi} Horovitz, Bruce. "More University Students Call for Organic, 'Sustainable' Food." *USA Today* [New Haven, CT] 27 Sept. 2006. Print.

^{vii} "Food & Recycling - Green Report Card 2011." *The College Sustainability Report Card*. Sustainable Endowments Institute, 2011. Web. <<http://www.greenreportcard.org/report-card-2011/categories/food-recycling>>.

^{viii} *American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment*, 2007.

<<http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/about/commitment/>>.

^{ix} "2011 College Hopes and Worries Survey." *Princeton Review*. 2011. Web. <<http://www.princetonreview.com/college-hopes-worries.aspx>>.

^x Harvie, Alicia, and Hilde Steffey. *Rebuilding America's Economy with Family Farm-Centered Food Systems*. Cambridge, MA: Farm Aid, Inc., 2010.

^{xi} Sonntag, Viki. *Why Local Linkages Matter: Findings from the Local Food Economy Study*. Rep. Seattle, WA: Sustainable Seattle, 2008.

^{xii} Williams, Alex. "The Era of Green Noise." *The New York Times*. 15 June 2008. Web.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/15/fashion/15green.html>>.

^{xiii} All of these steps are explained in detail in the *Campus Food Policy Provisions*, which are attached to the Charter.

^{xiv} See the Campus Food Baseline Assessment online at: <https://spreadsheets.google.com/a/thefoodproject.org/viewform?hl=en&formkey=dFNfcWcwaFZVVDdNc2tTRzUyc2loRGc6MQ#gid=0>