

The Real Food* Declaration:

A new vision for institutional dining, education, and social change

Institutions of higher learning have a powerful impact on their students and surrounding communities. By virtue of their educational missions, community-building potential, and purchasing power, colleges and universities have a unique responsibility to act as models for the rest of society, and to cultivate socially responsible students as citizens and leaders.

To address the world's most pressing questions regarding the environment, health, education, labor, culture, and the global economy, we must consider the food we eat, how it is produced, and how its producers are treated. While many schools have taken strides to address the wide-ranging implications of food production and consumption, there is still much more work to be done. We, the undersigned, call on leaders in higher education to follow these guiding principles and to lead our nation towards a more just, sustainable, and healthy food system for all.

1) Institutional dining should be based on seasonality, prioritizing food that is sourced locally from farmers who practice sustainable agriculture. When food must come from far away, it should be certified organic and fair trade. In addition, campus-wide recycling and composting programs must be developed and implemented to reduce waste on all college and university campuses.

Why?

- *“Real Food” is fresher, healthier and more delicious.*
- *The true cost of conventional food is far too large. Cheap food hides serious costs: degradation of the environment, harm to human health, inhumane labor conditions, unequal food access, and contribution to rapid climate change.*
- *Colleges and universities have enormous purchasing power, spending over \$4 billion a year on food alone. If colleges and universities demand and pay for “Real Food,” the market will respond.*
- *Food waste can be a source of fertility for agricultural lands instead of polluting waterways or sitting in landfills.*
- *Farmers and farm workers deserve fair wages and safe labor conditions.*

2) Education should reflect and elucidate the complex relationships between food, the environment, health, labor, art, culture and the global economy. More academic opportunities, college farms and gardens, and other food & agriculture-related extracurriculars will fulfill this goal.

Why?

- *A school's footprint is not only measured by its operations, but also by the quality of education it imparts on its students.*

- *Stewardship and a sense of responsibility arise with a specific connection to place. That connection is realized through studying, working, and eating from the land on which one lives.*
- *College graduates must be ready to make active, socially and environmentally conscious decisions about food every day for the rest of their lives--as individuals, family members, government officials, businesspersons, and community leaders.*

3) Colleges and universities should **cultivate loyal and diverse relationships** with local food producers, community members, and community organizations. These relationships will support local economies and land stewardship, preserve and cultivate diverse, productive landscapes, promote resource sharing, and increase access to Real Food across lines of race, class, and gender.

Why?

- *Farmland and rural communities in the U.S. are disappearing at an alarming rate.*
- *A very small handful of corporations--with profit as their bottom line--increasingly control our ability to feed ourselves in accordance with our values.*
- *Consumers have the right to know exactly what they are eating and where it is coming from.*
- *The health and sustainability of our entire food system depends on the quality of the social, political, and economic relationships that tie us together.*
- *Equal access to healthy food is a basic human right.*

How do we get there from here?

- ***Initiate transparent dialogue*** between campus and community stakeholders, including administrations, students, faculty, staff, community members, and food producers and distributors.
- ***Set ambitious goals*** that reflect the urgent need for education and immediate food system changes.
- ***Implement institutional purchasing practices*** and policies aligned with the above principles.
- ***Create accountability mechanisms*** so that colleges and universities can regularly assess progress.
- ***Commit to creating a renewed, just, and sustainable food system, on campus and beyond;*** a world where everyone can eat food that truly nourishes people, communities, and the earth.

**Real food is a term to describe the intersection of many food movements: just, local, sustainable, organic, humane and fair trade.*