

Developing a Sustainable Food Procurement Policy For Cornell

Hosted by: Jane Mt.Pleasant, Dan Dosztan, and the Food Focus Research Group

Date: February 25, 2015

This topical lunch was hosted to discuss the feasibility, opportunities, and challenges for developing a campus-wide food procurement policy. Prior to the meeting, the Food Focus Team, one of ten campus-wide committees charged with addressing issues of sustainability, had obtained funding from the Atkinson Center to hire undergraduate research interns. The research interns examined Cornell Dining (CD) purchases for two large dining halls on North Campus over the fall semester. Results from this research were presented at the luncheon. Although preliminary and incomplete, this initial examination shows that the vast majority of food purchased by CD is unprocessed or very minimally processed. Preparing food on-site sets Cornell apart from most other university dining halls that buy already-prepared food from large service vendors and simply reheat it. Preparing meals in CD kitchens accounts for the very high quality of food served in Cornell venues. The quantities of food purchased are truly astounding (see attached PowerPoint) and indicate both the complexity of CD operations and the potential leverage that Cornell has as a food purchaser. CD purchases most of its food from Maines, a large wholesaler in the northeast, but it also buys from multiple smaller vendors including some owned by Cornell (Cornell Orchard, Cornell Dairy, CUAES). According to Maines, approximately 30% of their produce is local or regional, although we have not yet verified that figure.

The students also gathered preliminary information on sustainable food procurement policies used at other locations including Michigan University and Los Angeles County. We judged the Michigan policy as weak and unsuitable, while the Los Angeles policy was more robust, although it was an evaluation system, rather than a guide. We also gathered information on the Real Food Challenge, a national program that has gained considerable traction over the past year. Many institutions of higher education have signed on to this rigorous evaluation program which awards points for food which is local produced, grown or raised under environmentally sound and/or humane conditions, and meets specific social and economic justice standards. Student researchers expressed considerable support for the Real Food Program, as they felt that Cornell would score very well on this system, and it would allow us as an institution to establish goals and our progress could be measured over time.

Lunch participants, including staff from CD, Procurement, Student and Academic Services, Maines, Statler, and Mandible, as well as faculty and students from multiple departments and units across campus offered multiple perspectives on the topic. Many expressed interest and/or support for developing a sustainable procurement policy for Cornell. Many wanted to further explore the Real Food Program. But CD and other staff expressed considerable skepticism about the feasibility of a procurement policy. They noted the tremendous budget pressure that their units are experiencing and indicated that any actions which would increase

their costs were not possible. They also noted the enormous difficulty in making even small changes on a campus-wide basis because of Cornell's decentralized structure. Several individuals agreed to be part of working group that would further explore the issue.

Last Name	First Name	NetID or email	Dept (if known)	College (If known)
Mt. Pleasant	Jane	jm21	Horticulture	
Wolford	Wendy	www43	ACSF	

Participant RSVP (attending): 22

Last Name	First Name	NetID or email	Dept (if known)	College (If known)
Bealo	Ryan	Ryan.Bealo@maines.net		
Buck	Spring	scb23	FMCZ	
Chabot	Brian	bfc1	EEB	
Constas	Katharine	kmc379	student	
Dosztan	Dan	dd259	SAS BSC	
Fortenberry	Brandon	bf52	CU Dining	
Grannis	Peter	Peter.Grannis@maines.net		
Hoffmann	Mike	mph3	CUAES	
Klein	Kate	knk8	AA&D	
Leigh	Kat	kl86@cornell.edu	student	
Leonard	Betsy	bai1	CUAES	
Miner	Avram	agm32	CCE	CCE
O'Connor	Therese	tao3	CU Dining	SASCL
Porter	Jay	jip92@cornell.edu	Procurement	
Shanks	Eli	els284	student	
Siegrist	Claire	ces262	ACSF	
Silverman	Jessi	jes423	NS	
Virgadamo	Travis	tjv9	HOTEL	
Zemanick	Sarah	sarahzemanick@cornell.edu	ENERSUS	