

UCSC Makes the Farm-to-College Connection

Perched in the hills above Monterey Bay, UC Santa Cruz's view encompasses the rich farmland of the Pajaro and Salinas Valleys, home to some of the most successful and productive organic farming operations in the country. The campus's own 25-acre farm, managed by the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, has been training organic farmers for nearly 4 decades. Yet until three years ago, students eating in the campus dining halls seldom had a choice of organically grown produce.

Today, all five UCSC dining halls and the University Center's Terra Fresca restaurant serve certified organic produce every day of the week. Growers from the seven local farms that make up the Monterey Bay Organic Farmers Consortium (MBOFC)—including the campus's farm—pool their produce through the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) in Salinas to sell to UCSC Dining Services. ALBA's contract to provide locally grown organic produce is a first among the UC system's 10 campuses.

This transition didn't come easily. It's the result of several years of collaboration and hard work by students, staff, and local growers, as well as some fortuitous timing. In this article we'll discuss the history of the effort to bring organic produce to UCSC's dining halls, describe some of the strategies and obstacles involved in changing UCSC's purchasing practices, and report reactions from participating farmers and campus chefs. We'll also talk about the key role that students across the UC system are now playing in a campaign to create sustainable food systems at all of UC's campuses, and offer advice on how other campuses can implement such efforts.

The Roots of the Campaign at UCSC

In the winter of 2003, UCSC's Students for Organic Solutions (SOS) brought together diverse stakeholders of the campus food system at the annual Campus Earth Summit to discuss how to create sustainable change in the system, including the advantages of purchasing organic produce from local farmers. This grassroots effort was largely unsuccessful in garnering support from Sodexo, the largest food and facilities management services company in North America, which was then under contract to provide all the food to UCSC campus dining halls.

During this period, UCSC's Students for Labor Solidarity—unhappy with Sodexo's labor practices—began organizing to “dump Sodexo” in conjunction with campus labor unions. After a six-month student campaign, the administration ended its 30-year contract with Sodexo in June 2004, enabling Dining Services to contract directly with suppliers for the first time. This transition to an “in-house” service structure created a crucial opportunity for sustainable agriculture and social justice advocates to work with the UC administration to design a more sustainable food system.

During the 2004 UCSC Earth Summit, Students for Organic Solutions facilitated a group of students, faculty, staff, and representatives from student and community organizations in brainstorming ways to bring local organic food to campus dining halls. The two top strategies that emerged from the group were:

- To develop guidelines for the purchase of local, organic, “socially just” food by campus Dining Services
- To educate and organize students to demand socially just, organic food in the dining halls.

Among the University staff present at the Earth Summit meeting was Scott Berlin, the new Director of Dining Services, who would soon be contracting with vendors. His support of the purchasing guidelines idea was key to the success of efforts to bring local organic produce into the dining halls.

Developing the Purchasing Guidelines

The campus Food System Working Group (FSWG) grew out of the 2004 Earth Summit meeting. It included representatives from the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, Community

Alliance with Family Farmers, Comercio Justo, Community Agroecology Network (CAN), Students for Organic Solutions, and the Education for Sustainable Living Program (ESLP)—all of whom had expertise in some aspect of sustainable food systems. Coordinated by graduate student Linda Wallace the Food Systems Working Group developed the following guidelines (modified in 2006) to assist Dining Services in selecting a prime food vendor (**define**) and a local organic produce vendor:

Requirements: All vendors supplying food product to UCSC CUHS (stands for?) will source from producers who pay minimum wage or higher to farmworkers, as required by state and federal law, and who provide safe workplaces, including protection from chemical exposure, and provision of adequate sanitary facilities and drinking water for workers, as required by law.

Preferences:

1. **Buy local:** Local food is grown within a 250-mile radius of Santa Cruz, with priority given to growers closest to Santa Cruz.
2. **Buy certified organic:** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established a uniform set of standards to which all organic produce must conform.
3. **Buy humanely produced animal products:** Humanely produced animal products are cage free, range fed, and antibiotic free.
4. **Buy direct:** Cultivating closer relationships between producer and consumer helps to eliminate middle folk, deliver more income at the farm level, and empower producers. Direct purchasing also helps to create an educational network amongst students, researchers, administrators, and producers that facilitates dialogue and fosters awareness of the production chain.
5. **Buy certified Fair Trade:** Certified Fair Trade products are produced according to an established set of social criteria. Farmers generally use environmentally friendly cultivation methods and are paid per-pound commodity prices above open market rates to ensure adequate family income. Certified fair trade products are purchased through democratically operated producer cooperatives.
6. **Buy worker supportive food products:** Worker supportive products are purchased from socially just companies and organizations that incorporate one or more of the following into their employment practices:
 - a) Pay a living wage to their workers, defined as union or prevailing wage
 - b) Provide benefits to their workers, such as medical insurance, on-site housing, year-round employment, and childcare.
 - c) Actively seek to build the capacity of their workers through provision of education, training and opportunities for advancement.

Under these guidelines proposed by the FSWG, preference would be given to price-competitive bids for the prime foods contract that meet the greatest number of criteria. All produce purchased under the local organic contract must be grown within 250 miles of Santa Cruz and be certified organic. In selecting a vendor, preference would be given to price competitive bids that are “worker supportive” as defined in the guidelines.

In May 2004, the Food Systems Working Group formally presented the completed guidelines to UCSC’s Dining Services. In the meantime, SOS continued to build support for bringing local organic food to the dining hall by putting on educational classroom presentations and organic “taste tests” for students. A campaign spearheaded by student organizations, including Comercio Justo and CAN, and timed to coincide with the presentation generated over 2,000 postcards from meal plan holders to Dining Services in support of the guidelines’ adoption.

Honoring the guidelines, Dining Services selected Ledyard, a local distributor as the prime food vendor in 2004. The sole source contract with Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium (MBOFC) was entered into in late summer 2005 after a year-long struggle to find a way to include “worker supportive” as a criterion in the selection of a local organic produce vendor. However, under UC purchasing regulations,

“worker supportive” cannot be used as a criterion because, unlike organic and local (the equivalent of fresh and seasonal), employment practices are not a characteristic of food.

In order to qualify for a sole source contract, local organic farmers had to form a consortium and operate under the umbrella of ALBA, a worker-supportive operation, in order to meet UC insurance, ordering, delivery, and invoicing requirements. The participating growers also agreed to make their farms available for organic farming and food system research conducted under the auspices of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems.

What’s made the effort to get organic food in the dining halls successful?

Opportunity

- The termination of UCSC’s 30-year contract with Sodexo
- The collaborative relationships established between student groups and campus administration created opportunities.

Resources

- UCSC is an academic leader in sustainable food systems research and application, and the home of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS). Many students and faculty associated with the Food Systems Working Group had worked on sustainable food system issues and were anxious to use their knowledge to bring “sustainable food” to the campus.
- The Food Systems Working Group was composed of representatives of campus and community groups with staff and volunteers who were willing to devote considerable time to developing the purchasing guidelines, contacting local organic farmers, and organizing students in support of bringing local organic food to the dining halls.
- The proximity of UC Santa Cruz to organic farms that grow a wide range of produce year-round ensures an abundant supply of local organic produce and the support of local organic farmers.

Processes

- Collaboration, student organizing and outreach, and ongoing student education facilitated acceptance and support of sustainable food by both Dining Services and students.

What made the effort difficult?

- Under UC purchasing regulations, “worker supportive” (a key component of sustainable food) cannot be used as a criterion in the selection of a vendor because is not a “characteristic of food.”
- The FSWG did not initially include a representative from UCSC’s Purchasing Department and consequently did not have a good understanding of the regulations and policies governing vendor selection.
- UC’s system is not set up to purchase from individual small farmers for a number of reasons: invoicing numerous farmers is not cost effective, large quantities of produce are required, ordering must be computerized, deliveries are required three times a week at minimum, etc.

Small local organic farmers did not initially have an umbrella organization in place to enable them to contract with the University. The formation of the grower consortium and the contract with the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Center (ALBA) to pool and deliver produce from the various farms was the “work around” to address this issue.

From the Farms to the Campus

Dining Services currently contracts with ALBA for approximately 15% of the dining halls’ produce budget. Ledyard, UCSC’s prime food vendor, supplies organic produce equal to another 3% of the value of Dining Service’s purchases. At the start of the contract year, each of the seven farms participating in the Monterey Bay Organic Farmers Consortium (MBOFC) provides UCSC’s Purchasing Department with a list of the produce it grows and what it will have available each season. All of the participating farms

jointly price the produce (which includes the farmer's price plus ALBA's overhead for pooling and delivering orders). The Purchasing Department negotiates prices with MBOFC twice a year; it then bases the contract with ALBA on produce availability and pricing.

Each of the campus dining halls places an order with ALBA, which delivers to campus three to four times a week. ALBA invoices Dining Services for produce orders; the University pays ALBA, which in turn pays MBOFC's participating growers.

Terence Welch, Sales Manager for Phil Foster Ranches and one of the members of the MBOFC talked about the advantages and challenges involved with providing produce to UCSC.

"ALBA took on the nuts and bolts of the whole thing. In a way, we were relatively not as involved as we would have been because of ALBA's role. This has both been a boon and could also be seen as a disadvantage. Overall it works, but the growers don't have as much of a direct relationship with the campus as perhaps some would like. At the same time the growers don't have the responsibility of maintaining the relationship and ALBA's doing a great job in representing the growers and encouraging the relationship. Fortunately, the growers have been asked to come up to campus to talk to students and faculty providing, a great opportunity for everyone involved."

"In terms of volume, the portion of produce that goes to UCSC is relatively small for our farm and we'd like it to be bigger. A greater share of organic produce going to the campus would be a nice thing for us."

When asked if he had suggestions for growers considering a similar marketing situation, Welch replied, "It's really important that growers looking to do this type of marketing with an institution find a base or an ally at that institution and cultivate it. The student organizations at UCSC are a model of the type of ally growers would want to cultivate."

Dina Izzo, the Marketing Coordinator for ALBA Organics who works directly with the farmers in the Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium, also offered her outlook on the program's progress. "A like minded group of family farmers came together to feed the students at UCSC. They are a happy bunch, happy with each other, and happy with the distribution of their produce through ALBA Organics," she says. "We realized the uniqueness of the situation: we were creating a pool of produce from three micro-climates for one common market, a true testament to community spirit."

She also commends the efforts of the people involved in creating the opportunity for local growers. "Those who worked so hard to get locally grown produce into the University have our gratitude. Having an advocate, in this case hundreds of advocates, lies at the heart of the success of the program. The growers who answered the call, got a call to answer! We have forged a viable working relationship that is working for both the farmers and the University."

The Chefs' Experience

When we asked Dennis Wake, the Dining Hall Manager at College 8, how the chefs are reacting to the recent changes in the campus food system, he enthusiastically replied, "I believe all of the campus chefs feel fortunate that we are able to access such fine local product. This has been a long time due and I see the program setting the trend across the land."

He's also pleased about the effect that local, organic produce purchasing has had on meal planning. "With the variety of seasonal product" says Wake, "our menu can reflect different 'specials of the day'. This not only keeps the chefs stimulated but the students as well." Wake adds, "The area in which we live is so rich with various fresh produce and seafood, it is a chef's dream. To have a program developing such as this can only enhance the experience of everybody involved."

He also notices that the more students are educated and aware of the program, the better the reaction. Candy Berlin, program coordinator for UCSC Dining, has done an outstanding job on educational and outreach materials in the dining halls that inform students about the origin of their food, the importance of sustainable food choices, and what it means to eat locally and seasonally.

“Students are reacting to these new changes in their food because they see the vibrant colors of fresh and local produce,” Berlin says, “And it’s a huge change to hear the chefs talk about their menu planning around purple cabbage as opposed to creating a menu and then looking for the ingredients.”

Dwight Collins, Executive Chef of CUHS (Colleges and University Housing Services) Dining Services, echoes Berlin’s and Wake’s enthusiasm for the new program. “The chefs are very excited about the involvement of local, organic growers—a lot of the chefs have been into organics and vegetarianism for a long time,” says Collins.

He sees a significant impact on meal planning thanks to the availability of fresh produce. “We’re seeing a lot of different vegetables now since we’re going more with what’s in season rather than using frozen vegetables. This is great for the students to try new things—we’re making sure there’s signage with the food, especially with vegetables they’ve never seen before, like romanesco broccoli which looks like something out of ‘Alien’.”

Citing examples of how the program has changed menu planning, Collins notes, “Since we can get organic onions, and organic sub ingredients, we’re able to make an all organic marinara sauce. And we have access now to more organic dry beans and have been making organic chili. We never thought of trying this before because these ingredients weren’t available.”

Collins adds that a younger audience visiting UCSC will also experience the option of fresh, organic produce. “A lot of the groups that come for summer sessions will benefit from seeing what’s available in the dining halls. Youth groups will become more aware and educated. The cheerleader groups that come love pizza and chicken nuggets and will benefit from learning about the benefits of eating fresh and organic produce.”

Engaging Students: The Role of Educational Outreach

Education and outreach to students have been essential to fostering student demand for local organic food and a sustainable campus food system. Over the past year, the Food Systems Working Group’s educational outreach activities included –

- hosting three local organic College Night dinners with over 1,500 students in attendance
- facilitating “growing in season” tastings and dialogues between Dining Services staff and local farmers
- organizing regional farm tours for students
- holding organic taste tests at the colleges
- bringing together student leaders from other UC campuses to a sustainable food system resource exchange and networking convergence (see below)
- hosting a Fall FSWG farm tour at ALBA and stakeholder dinner event at CASFS
- hosting Mangaliso Kubekha from the Landless Peoples Movement of South Africa for a talk to students and faculty about food sovereignty
- collecting over 2,000 postcards for the statewide UC Foods initiative from meal plan holders (see below)

Students have also benefited from new academic opportunities that have developed as part of the campus’s sustainable food systems movement (see related story, page x).

Going Beyond UCSC: Taking the Effort Systemwide

As dining service departments begin to address sustainability around the country, UC Santa Cruz has served as a springboard for a student-initiated effort for the entire UC system. In Fall of 2004, students across the state began discussing sustainable food system activities taking place at each other's campuses. These University of California students converged at UC Santa Barbara in October of 2004 to launch the UC Sustainable Foods Campaign of the California Student Sustainability Coalition (CSSC).

The campaign is seeking the UC Regents' commitment to sustainable campus food systems through the creation and implementation of clear guidelines that prioritize local, organic, and socially responsible purchasing, as well as waste reduction and green dining facility standards. Adoption of these guidelines will support the health of consumers and workers, local economies, the environment, and California agriculture. The campaign focuses on:

- 1) Providing resources to educate students about the benefits of organic, local, and socially just agriculture, and,
- 2) Empowering students and campus stakeholders to engage in effective and cooperative dialogue with administrators throughout the University of California system to improve the sustainability of our campus food systems and economic bonds with local economies in which they're embedded.

At present, Tim Galarneau, UCSC FSWG coordinator, is also the statewide campaign advisor for UC Foods and has facilitated students collecting over 5,000 postcards from across the state, made presentations to the UC Regents, is in communication with the UC Office of the President, and is working towards building collaborative Food Systems Working Groups on other UC campuses. The campaign's rapid growth and successful undertakings have been based in part on their ability to share UC Santa Cruz's successful track record and offer models of requests for proposals, purchasing documents, outreach materials, event design templates, and strategic advice.

The FSWG has also been sharing information about its activities with campuses from outside the UC system. In the fall of 2004, Linda Wallace made a presentation to an enthusiastic group of staff, faculty and students about UCSC's sustainable food guidelines at the Sustainability in Higher Education Conference held at the University of Oregon. Tim Galarneau also gave a talk at the 2005 UC Sustainability Conference in Higher Education and the National Association for College & University Food Services Conference at Stanford, in 2005, gaining national recognition for FSWG's work with UCSC's administration to make the campus's food system more sustainable.

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Farm-to-College Movement Growing Nationwide

Sustainable food system initiatives in higher education are emerging across the nation. For example:

The dining facilities at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst serve 14,000 meals a day. This self-operated university dining program has overcome the obstacles of state bidding requirements and other purchasing challenges to steadily increase their local and sustainably harvested procurement. By October of 2005, dining services had surpassed its 15% target of local farm procurement of its \$1 million produce budget (<http://www.umass.edu/diningservices/index.php>).

Six Wisconsin campuses are buying food directly from farmer cooperatives within their counties. In December of 2000, the University of Wisconsin at Madison became the first major public university in the U.S. to commit to putting foods grown on local organic farming operations on the regular dining hall menu. Their web site offers insightful descriptions of the benefits and challenges of sustainable food transitions. This exciting transitional program, with over 15,000 cafeteria meals served every day and \$120,000 invested in sustainable food procurement, makes a difference in the health of Madison's students and the lives of local small and medium scale farmers (<http://www.cias.wisc.edu/>).

With a dining facility in Vermont that serves 5,200 meals daily, Middlebury College has been developing local and sustainable procurement over the past decade. Over \$875,000 of the college's \$3.5 million annual food budget is invested in local and sustainably produced food for campus dining hall consumption, including meat, eggs, produce, and processed goods. The program has successfully incorporated undergraduate research and class curriculum, farm tours, web site information, and special events to raise awareness around sustainable food consumption (<http://www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/dining/>).

See www.farmtocollege.org for information on individual farm-to-college programs across the country.
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Sidebar

Building on a Tradition of Organic Farming and Education

While efforts to formalize a local, organic farm-to-college connection at UCSC are relatively new, the campus's students, staff and faculty have long enjoyed organic vegetables, fruit and flowers grown at the campus's own 25-acre UCSC Farm and 3-acre Alan Chadwick Garden. Now managed by the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, both sites have for nearly 40 years served as training grounds for organic farmers and gardeners, as well as outdoor classrooms for undergraduate and graduate students, research sites for faculty and cooperators, and resources for visitors from around the world.

Participants in the Center's 6-month Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture market produce through a 100-member Community Supported Agriculture project focused on the campus community, and at the the roadside Market Cart set up at the base of campus twice a week. In 2004 the UCSC Farm began selling its produce and flowers to Terra Fresca, the University Center's restaurant, which features fresh, organic, and sustainable foods from Santa Cruz and the Central Coast region. In 2005 we became one of the grower members of the Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium, marketing produce to the campus dining halls. This year we will also be initiating produce sales to the Kresge Coop, students from the Program in Community and Agroecology (PICA), and College 9/10's dining hall.

Since 2004 Center staff have been involved in the Campus Food System Working Group efforts, working with UCSC students, staff and faculty to create a more sustainable food system on the campus. In 2005, The True North Foundation funded the Center's Apprenticeship program for one year to support farm to college work (this is along with its continued support of our Community Supported Agriculture training and demonstration program). Since that time, Nancy Vail has been working 1/2 time on both Farm to College projects and the CSA program. This support gave us the opportunity to take part in a new program last fall, Building Community and Sustainability at College 8, a Course Core Service Learning Project (see related article, page x).

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Expanding the Program at UCSC

Each year the Food Systems Working Group reviews the goals and guidelines for the campus food system in collaboration with Dining Services, making necessary adjustments based on student demand and local supply capacity. The goals for 2006/07, which included increasing the value of "sustainable" produce purchased by Dining Services from 5% to 10% of the total value of produce purchased, have already been exceeded, with the total now 15%. The goal for 2007/08 is to increase the value of produce purchased by another 5%, from 15% to 20% of the total.

This year's goals also include soliciting an organic dairy vendor and contracting for a minimum of 5% of the value of all dairy purchased by Dining Services from this vendor. Next year the FSWG would like to see Dining Services initiate a process to contract with a vendor(s) to provide other sustainable animal products (in addition to dairy) to UCSC dining halls.

For those interested in starting a similar effort at their university or other institution, we recommend the following:

- 🌐 Establish a Collaborative Working Group, including: representatives from:
 - Purchasing
 - Dining Services
 - Student Organizations
 - Student Government
 - Local farmers and/or Sustainable Agriculture NGO (
 - Graduate students
 - Undergraduates
 - Faculty

- 🌐 Ensure that the Core Organizers are:
 - Willing to take responsibility
 - Willing to make a commitment over a period of at least 1–2 years
 - Prepared to engage with diverse stakeholders and communicate effectively
 - Compensated for their time (i.e. funding, academic credit, etc.)

- 🌐 Working Group Strategic Approaches:
 - Collaborative—be inclusive and find ways of drawing in diverse stakeholders
 - Cooperative—be prepared to accept differences, develop compromises, and build healthy working relationships
 - Research and planning—research what already exists, what steps have been taken, what other campuses are doing, and what purchasing regulations and University policies must be followed
 - Develop a written document with guidelines for sustainable food as well as goals for annual increased procurement levels.
 - Education and outreach—embed sustainable food system topics (i.e. local, organic, humane treatment of animals, social justice) in existing campus program activities, host tactile and engaging events around food, plan a postcard campaign initiative to educate students and demonstrate demand for sustainable food procurement, and speak in supportive faculty classes,
 - Food & Fun—most important make sure that those involved make time to eat tasty food together and to enjoy the good work they're doing!

UCSC students, staff and faculty interested in the campus's Food Systems Working Group can contact Tim Galarneau at 831-459-1714 or email solseeker3@aol.com
 Students interested in getting involved at the UCSC Farm can contact Nancy Vail, 459-4661, navail@ucsc.edu.