UC Santa Cruz Makes the Farm-to-College Connection

Perched in the hills above Monterey Bay, the UC Santa Cruz campus looks out on the rich farmland of the Pajaro and Salinas Valleys, home to some of the most successful and productive organic farming operations in the country. UCSC’s own 25-acre farm, managed by the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, has been training organic farmers for nearly four decades. Yet until a year ago, students eating in the campus dining halls seldom had a choice of organically grown food.

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 UCSC’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. Thanks to these efforts, UCSC is now positioned to be a national model for a growing movement called “farm-to-college,” which, like the K-12 farm-to-school movement, is bringing fresh, local produce to student dining halls through direct relationships between farmers and educational institutions. Farm-to-school or farm-to-college arrangements help farmers get more of the food dollar, benefit local economies, and give students access to locally produced, fresh food.

Several features distinguish UCSC’s Farm-to-College project: a consortium of organic growers was formed to supply produce to the campus dining halls; sustainable food purchasing guidelines were developed; and education (both academic and experiential) is incorporated from the campus farm fields to the dining halls.

In this article we’ll discuss the history of the farm-to-college work at UCSC, describe some of the strategies and obstacles involved in changing the University’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 Sodexho—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.

Sodexho was at the same time dealing with its own challenges. UCSC’s Students for Labor Solidarity—unhappy with the company’s labor practices—had organized to “dump Sodexho” in conjunction with campus labor unions. After a six-month student campaign the UCSC administration ended its 30-year contract with the company in June 2004, enabling Dining Services to contract directly with suppliers for the first time. This transition to an “in-house” service structure opened a crucial avenue to work with the university administration in designing a more sustainable food system.

Early in this process, conversations between members of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (the Center) and Dining Services director Alma Sifuentes brought staff of Dining Services to the Center’s Farm, an important step in introducing the concept of sustainability to the campus food system. Sifuentes also helped catalyze the effort to bring organic, Fair Trade coffee to campus through the Community Agroecology Network (CAN).

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:

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.

CRAFTING THE PURCHASING GUIDELINES

Several months of meetings followed the 2004 Earth Summit as members of campus and community organizations came together as the Food Systems Working Group (FSWG) to craft the details of a purchasing guidelines proposal. Included were representatives from the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Comercio Justo, (a student group working to bring Fair Trade-certified products to UCSC), the Community Agroecology Network (CAN), Students for Organic Solutions, and the Education for Sustainable Living Program (ESLP)—all of whom brought expertise in various aspects of sustainable agriculture and food systems.

Spearheaded by graduate student Linda Wallace, the FSWG developed the following guidelines to assist Dining Services in selecting both a primary food vendor that would provide a broad range of food items, and a local organic produce vendor:

**Purchasing Requirements**: All vendors supplying food product to UCSC Dining Services 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.

**Purchasing 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, preference is given to price-competitive bids from the primary food vendor that meets the greatest number of criteria. For the local organic contract, all produce must be grown within 250 miles of Santa Cruz and be certified organic. In selecting a local organic produce vendor, preference is given to price competitive bids that are “worker supportive” as defined in the guidelines.

Participants in the Center’s 6-month Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture training program market the produce they grow at the Farm and Chadwick Garden through a 100-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project focused on the campus community, and at 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 the UCSC Farm became one of the grower members of the Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium, marketing produce to the campus dining halls. This year the Farm will also sell produce 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, collaborating 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 (along with its continued support of our Community Supported Agriculture training and demonstration program). Nancy Vail works half time on both Farm-to-College projects, such as College Eight’s “Harvest for Health,” and the CSA program.

Under these guidelines, preference is given to price-competitive bids from the primary food vendor that meets the greatest number of criteria. For the local organic contract, all produce must be grown within 250 miles of Santa Cruz and be certified organic. In selecting a local organic produce vendor, preference is given to price competitive bids that are “worker supportive” as defined in the guidelines.

In May 2004, the Food Systems Working Group formally presented these guidelines to UCSC’s Dining Services. Students for Organic Solutions also 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. Timed to coincide with the presentation of the guidelines, a campaign spearheaded by Comercio Justo and CAN generated over 2,000 postcards from students to Dining Services in support of the guidelines’ adoption.

Honoring the guidelines, Dining Services selected the local distributing company Ledyard as the prime food vendor in 2004. The sole source organic produce contract with the Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium (MBOFC) began in late summer 2005 after a year-long struggle to find a way to include “worker supportive” as a criterion in selecting a vendor. During the process, FSWG found that “worker supportive” could not be used as a criterion under UC purchasing regulations because, unlike organic and local, employment practices are not regarded as a characteristic of food.

In order to qualify for a sole source contract, local organic farmers formed a consortium and agreed to make their farms available for organic farming and food system research conducted under the auspices of the Center. The consortium operates under the umbrella of ALBA, a worker-supportive operation. This arrangement meets UC insurance, ordering, delivery, and invoicing requirements.

ORGANIC PRODUCE CONTRACT: NUTS AND BOLTS

At the start of the contract year, each of the 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, which currently include ALBA, Coke Farm, Phil Foster Ranches, Happy Boy Farms, New Natives/Greensward Nurseries, Swanton Berry...
Farms, and the UCSC Farm, jointly price the produce (this includes the farmer’s price plus ALBA’s overhead for pooling and delivering orders). The Purchasing Department negotiates prices with the 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. The UCSC Farm delivers its own produce due to its proximity to campus dining facilities.

Campus chefs and growers are now working together to plan for the campus’s needs. Says Executive Chef Dwight Collins, “The MBOFC farmers are planning their plantings based on what Dining Services can use.”

**THE GROWERS’ PERSPECTIVE**

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, a greater share of organic produce going to the campus would be a nice thing for us,” says Welch. 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.

For farmers considering a similar marketing effort, Welch notes, “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, is upbeat about the consortium’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.”

**What Made the Effort to Get Organic Food in the Dining Halls Successful?**

**Opportunity**
- The termination of UCSC’s 30-year contract with Sodexho.
- 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. These requirements were addressed by the formation of the grower consortium and the contract with the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Center (ALBA) to pool and deliver produce from various local, organic farms.
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

Dennis Wake, manager of UCSC’s College 8 Dining Hall, enthusiastically supports the new purchasing program. “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,” says Wake.

He’s also pleased with the impact that local, organic produce has had on choices for both chefs and students. “With the variety of seasonal product available our menu can reflect different ‘specials of the day’. This not only keeps the chefs stimulated but the students as well,” says Wake, adding, “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.”

Wake notes 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 providing 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 Dining Services, echoes Berlin’s and Wake’s enthusiasm. “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 the younger audiences who visit UCSC will also experience the option of fresh, organic food. “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.”

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 (www.umass.edu/diningservices/index.php).

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 (www.cias.wisc.edu). Six Wisconsin campuses are now buying food directly from farmer cooperatives within their counties.

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. The program has successfully incorporated undergraduate research and class curricula, farm tours, web site information, and special events to raise awareness around sustainable food consumption (www.middlebury.edu/campuslife/dining/).

See www.farmtocollege.org for information on individual farm-to-college programs across the country.
ENGAGING STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Although farmers and chefs are critical to changes in the campus food system, demand from student meal plan holders is the key to its ongoing success. Recognizing this, the FSWG provides educational opportunities and outreach to students to help foster student interest in and demand for local organic food and a sustainable food system at UCSC.

Over the past year, 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)

The effort to give students a better understanding of their food system has created unique academic opportunities for UCSC undergraduates. In the fall of 2005, the FSWG helped launch a Sustainability Service program within the College Eight Core Course (a class taken by all first year students at UCSC’s College Eight) that focused on the campus food system. A new course initiated this spring brings first year students together in a “Freshman Interest Group” based at the UCSC Farm that focuses on agroecology and farming (see sidebar at right for details).

The Program in Community and Agroecology (PICA, http://ucscpica.org) has for several years provided opportunities for UCSC undergraduates to learn practical skills in agroecology and organic gardening through courses and workshops on horticulture and organic agriculture. The program is based in a campus residential “Village” located in an old limestone quarry, where students grow as much of their own food as possible and create a viable, creative, conscious “eco” community on campus. PICA students also serve as interns and conduct independent research projects in both local and international agricultural communities.

TAKING THE EFFORT BEYOND UCSC

As dining service departments around the country begin to address sustainability (see sidebar, page 17), UC Santa Cruz has served as a springboard for a student-initiated effort that would affect the University of California’s entire 10-campus system.

In the 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 2004 to launch
the UC Sustainable Foods Campaign of the California Student Sustainability Coalition (CSSC). The campaign seeks the UC Regents’ commitment to sustainable campus food systems by implementing guidelines that prioritize local, organic, and socially responsible purchasing, as well as waste reduction and green dining facility standards.

Tim Galarneau, Food Systems Working Group coordinator at UCSC, is the campaign advisor for the statewide movement. His work includes leading student efforts to collect 5,000 postcards from all of the UC campuses that urge the UC Regents to adopt sustainable purchasing guidelines (see below), as well as communicating with the UC Office of the President and building Food Systems Working Groups on other UC campuses. The campaign’s rapid growth has been based in part on the ability to share UCSC’s successful track record and models of requests for proposals, purchasing documents, outreach materials, event design templates, and strategic advice.

Food Systems Working Group members have also been sharing information with national audiences. 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 gave a talk at the National Association for College and University Food Services conference at Stanford in 2005, gaining recognition for FSWG’s work with UCSC’s administration to make the campus’s food system more sustainable.

EXPANDING THE PROGRAM AND CREATING A MODEL

Each year UCSC’s 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 2003-2006, 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 2006-2007 is to increase the value of produce purchased by another 5%, 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. Next year the FSWG would like to see Dining Services contract with a vendor(s) to provide other sustainable animal products (in addition to dairy) to UCSC dining halls.

As UCSC’s Farm-to-College program expands, the “ripple effect” grows as well, with impacts not only on local organic food producers, food system workers, and campus chefs, but on thousands of students throughout the UC systems who are more aware of their food: where it comes from, who grows it, and how their choices affect the larger food system. With its emphasis on farmer collaboratives, student involvement, social justice issues, and educational opportunities, UCSC’s program offers unique lessons for others working to improve the sustainability of their campus food system.

–LINDA WALLACE, TIM GALARNEAU, AND NANCY VAIL

UCSC students, staff and faculty interested in the campus’s Food Systems Working Group can contact Tim Galarneau at 831.459-1714, solseeker3@aol.com; or Linda Wallace, lindalwallace@earthlink.net.

Students interested in getting involved at the UCSC Farm and learning more about sustainable agriculture can contact Nancy Vail of the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at 831.459-4661, navail@ucsc.edu.

For more information on groups involved in the Food Systems Working Group and other campus environmental organizations, please see:

Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems: www.ucsc.edu/casfs
Community Agroecology Network (CAN): www.communityagroecology.net
Education for Sustainable Living Program (ESLP): www.eslp.net
Program in Community and Agroecology (PICA): ucsctica.org

Today food is grown in an industrial system in which produce travels an average of 1,500 miles from farm to plate disproportionately the distance between Chicago and the California coast, an abundance of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers are contaminating our food and environment and intense agriculture is degrading our soil.

We can MAKE A CHANGE by supporting sustainable purchasing in the UC system for...

LOCAL: supports local economy and small family farms, reduces transportation costs and pollicates fresh, tasty, and nutritious produce

ORGANIC: grown under USDA organic standards which include no chemical inputs such as synthetic pesticides, GMO's, irrigation of sewage sludge

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE: worker supportive fair trade

As well as the development and implementation of...

• Improved waste management programs
• Green dining facility certification standards

I support sustainable food purchasing practices on my campus and in the UC System

University ___________________________ Meal Plan Holder? _______ Yes _______ No

Name ___________________________ Signature ___________________________

A postcard campaign is underway to encourage the UC Regents to adopt a systemwide set of sustainable purchasing guidelines similar to those now in place at UC Santa Cruz.