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Environmental State of the College Report  
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## **Dining Services and Food Waste**

### **Introduction**

Have you ever wondered where that banana you are eating comes from? Or where the banana peel goes when you throw it in the trash? Food, of course, is very important to all of us because it provides us with nourishment and keeps us alive, yet negative impacts on the environment our college dining services might have are often not considered. We as Macalester students have a right and a duty to understand where the food that we eat every day is coming from. Local and organic foods have many benefits over large agribusinesses. Locally grown food supports the local economy, reduces costs of transportation, and is usually small scale. Organic food is grown with no artificial herbicides or pesticides and is often better for you and is considered by many to be better tasting. Thus, is the food we are eating healthy and good for us? Has it been produced in a way that is harmful to the environment? Were farmers and workers treated unfairly in the production of the food that we eat? Was food waste disposed of properly and in an environmentally sustainable way? This analysis of Macalester's dining services, Bon Appétit, will attempt to answer some of these questions.

### **Successes at Macalester**

In one of the biggest steps by Macalester's dining services, Lori Hartzell, general manager of Bon Appétit, has confirmed that beginning Spring 2004, Macalester will have fully implemented Bon Appétit's "Circle of Responsibility" program. Under this new socially responsible theory, Bon Appétit is committed to promoting the well being of its guests by:

- Using food that is fresh and prepared in a way that is healthy and nutritious

- Purchasing produce that is locally grown, seasonal, and minimally processed
- Creating menus that include an abundance of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and grains
- Training their staff in techniques that insure they are serving a safe product

The main ingredient in Bon Appétit's new plan is its "Farm to Fork" program. Bon Appétit has come to understand that the purchases they make have a profound impact on our community. Therefore, the new "Farm to Fork" program is Bon Appétit's commitment to investing in the health of our community and a company-wide initiative to buy locally. Bon Appétit's first choice will now be to purchase seasonal and regional produce from local farmers within a 150 mile radius. This enables these foods to be prepared and served within 48 hours of harvest, resulting in more flavorful and nutritional foods. "A tomato grown without pesticides and ripened on the vine tastes unbelievably better than one sprayed with chemicals, picked while still green, truck thousands of miles and force-ripened in a warehouse," according to one of their pamphlets.

Also, by buying directly from farmers, Bon Appétit will have much more control over what types of agri-businesses they will be supporting. They can now be more supportive of family farms and farm collectives. They can support sustainable farming practices, those that don't strip the land, but rather nourish and replenish it. They can move away from farmers that use antibiotics, pesticides, and hormones. Finally, they can be sure that profits are kept with local growers, not distant importers, and therefore reinvested into the community.

However, it is not feasible to buy 100% locally. This holds especially true at Macalester where so many months of the year are unsuitable for growing. According to Lori Hartzell, Macalester will focus its local and organic purchasing on seasonal (fall and spring) vegetables and fruits. They have also made a commitment to buy only seafood that is deemed acceptable

under the Monterey Bay guidelines which protect fish that are over-fished or farmed in ways that harm the environment. Bon Appétit's commitment to this program is one that should be praised and used as an example by other departments and administration at Macalester.

Bon Appétit management has also had preliminary discussions with the Midwest Food Alliance, a co-operative of farmers, to bring even more local foods to Café Mac, as well as MULCH, the on-campus organization that runs the campus garden, about producing vegetables for Café Mac. They have also discussed with MULCH possible expansion of their garden.

In 2001, Peace Coffee, a fair trade, shade-grown, organic coffee was introduced at the Grille, along with the standard coffee Bon Appétit receives from local businesses, like Dunn Brothers. Peace Coffee is now better advertised than in years past. Today, fair trade, shade grown coffee from Wisconsin, known as Whole World coffee, is being served within Café Mac as well. At the Grille, "Phoenix Cups" are used which are made from recycled scrap cups.

In the former dining hall in Kagin Hall, there were huge amounts of waste, by cooks, staff, and students, according to Lori Hartzell. In general, by moving to the more modern facility of Café Mac, food waste was said to have been cut dramatically because of the new design of the cooking and prep areas, more storage space, and new serving stations. Cooks were able to make all of the day's meals right before and during meal time, so food was fresh and waste was limited. It was said that the new stations produced a new behavior in students because they didn't have to get all their food at once since now there were more options. Also, during winter and spring break, food waste is limited by organizing food drives for places like Merriam Park Food Shelf and the Dorothy Day Center.

## **Data Gaps**

Bon Appétit reports that it currently purchases approximately 80% of its food from US Foods. Their contract and price list with US Foods is confidential, however, which makes it difficult to do any cost comparisons between local/non-local and organic/non-organic. Were this information available one could see how much extra money it would cost to decrease the amount of food purchased from US Foods, while increasing the purchasing of organic food.

It is currently unknown how much food waste is disposed of each day, only that it is well over 100 pounds per day. Were this information available one could examine how much food we waste and do a monetary analysis on the information attained. All of the money that goes into disposing of food waste would be better used if it could be put towards buying more organics.

It is also unclear whether food being purchased “locally” is being purchased from local large corporate farms or local small-scale farms. It makes little sense to include food purchased from local large corporate farms as a positive thing because it is merely “from the area.” It defeats the purpose of supporting small, local farms.

## **Problems/Weaknesses**

Unfortunately, there are still limits to Bon Appétit’s “Farm to Fork” program. It is virtually impossible to purchase only local foods because of Minnesota’s short growing season and cold climate. Also, Bon Appétit will have to focus its “Farm to Fork” program on mainly seasonal fruits and vegetables because organic dairy and grains are believed to be too expensive to be purchased in mass quantities.

Fruit and vegetable peelings and wasted student food was dealt with somewhat effectively in 2000, as it was arranged to be picked up by a farmer from the Stratton Pig Farm. However, there

were problems with this arrangement because often the farmer wasn't able to pick up the waste for what ever reasons. It was just an unreliable situation. With the move to Café Mac in 2001, Bon Appétit implemented "the Pulper." Bon Appétit was able to switch from giving waste to a pig farmer to disposing of it in the new "Pulper" which pulps the waste and makes it easier to dispose. However, now the waste is being thrown away instead of being reused, which is rather disappointing.

Much of Macalester's food waste comes from the students themselves. Taking too much food and throwing away the leftovers has become the leading cause of food waste at Café Mac.

Other disturbing trends are as follows. Composting is not considered as an option for Macalester for various reasons. The most often cited reasons are that Macalester does not have room for on-campus composting and that it is too costly to transport it to an off-campus location. Overuse of napkins is also a problem, as many students take large clumps at a time instead of just one or two. Finally, "To Go" containers at the Grille are made from plastic and are thrown away.

### **Outstanding Campuses/Best Practices**

Examples of environmentally friendly changes from dining services on other college campuses abound. Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington has been a leader in this area. Bon Appétit runs their dining services, but all of their food is vegan, vegetarian, or organic that comes from their own on-campus garden or local growers. Evergreen State is also planning on building its own on campus composting facility. St. Bonaventure received a grant which was used to provide the school with fresh local produce from local farmers. Bastyr College in Kenmore College was able to get chlorine free napkins in its cafeteria. Stetson University in Florida issued reusable 22 oz mugs free to all faculty, students, and staff. They also offer grill

items in reusable baskets to try to eliminate take out plates. Harvard students designed a “lug a mug” campaign where one would get a discount for coffee and drinks. Also they were able to get off-campus small businesses, like local cafes, to give discounts as well. At Brown, students suggested purchasing post consumer 100 percent recycled napkins or mixing grease waste with pig-bucketed organic waste. UMASS-Amherst has an in-vessel composting unit in its own physical plant.

### **Environmental State of the Campus**

As stated earlier, dining services can be potentially very damaging to the environment in numerous direct and indirect ways. Luckily at Macalester, Bon Appétit is very conscious of this and makes a concerted effort to limit their impacts. The “Farm to Fork” program is a giant step in the right direction. Dealing with food waste is not easy, but Bon Appétit has done fairly well in this area as well, through the new style of serving stations and donating leftover food. Bon Appétit’s performance should be rated as a “B,” but there is, of course, room for improvements.

### **Recommendations**

There are several ways for Macalester’s dining services to improve their current performance:

1. Placing napkin dispensers on individual tables, creating a “just take two” sign at the napkin stations, or placing napkin recycling receptacles at the tray return are all possible ways of limiting napkin use.
2. A longer, more serious look at composting is needed. Vermiculture has been tried in the past in language houses and achieved success.
3. An on-campus greenhouse could be implemented, where vegetables and herbs are grown for cafeteria use. The greenhouse, in effect, would extend the growing season.

4. Establishing a reusable mug campaign sounds like a good idea; think of all the extra cups we would be saving.
5. An assessment of the amount of food coming from industrial farms is needed, especially those which are considered as “local” producers. Not only is more precise information needed on our food sources, but an assessment in overall trends in amount of food waste is necessary as well. Data of how much food waste is disposed of per day, week, and year could be gathered. Then, a monetary analysis could be done to see how much money can be saved if food waste is reduced.
6. Lori Hartzell’s idea for a “Clean Plate Club” should be supported. Students at Café Mac waste entirely too much food by asking for more food than they can eat. According to her plan, if you have a clean plate when you leave, you could earn a reward of something like free flex dollars at the Grille. This would help to curb food waste, as well as raise awareness on the issue.
7. Finally, create a week in the spring, maybe Earth Week or even just a day, maybe Earth Day, where Café Mac buys only locally grown, organic foods, to raise awareness that these foods are better tasting, better for you, and better for the environment.

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