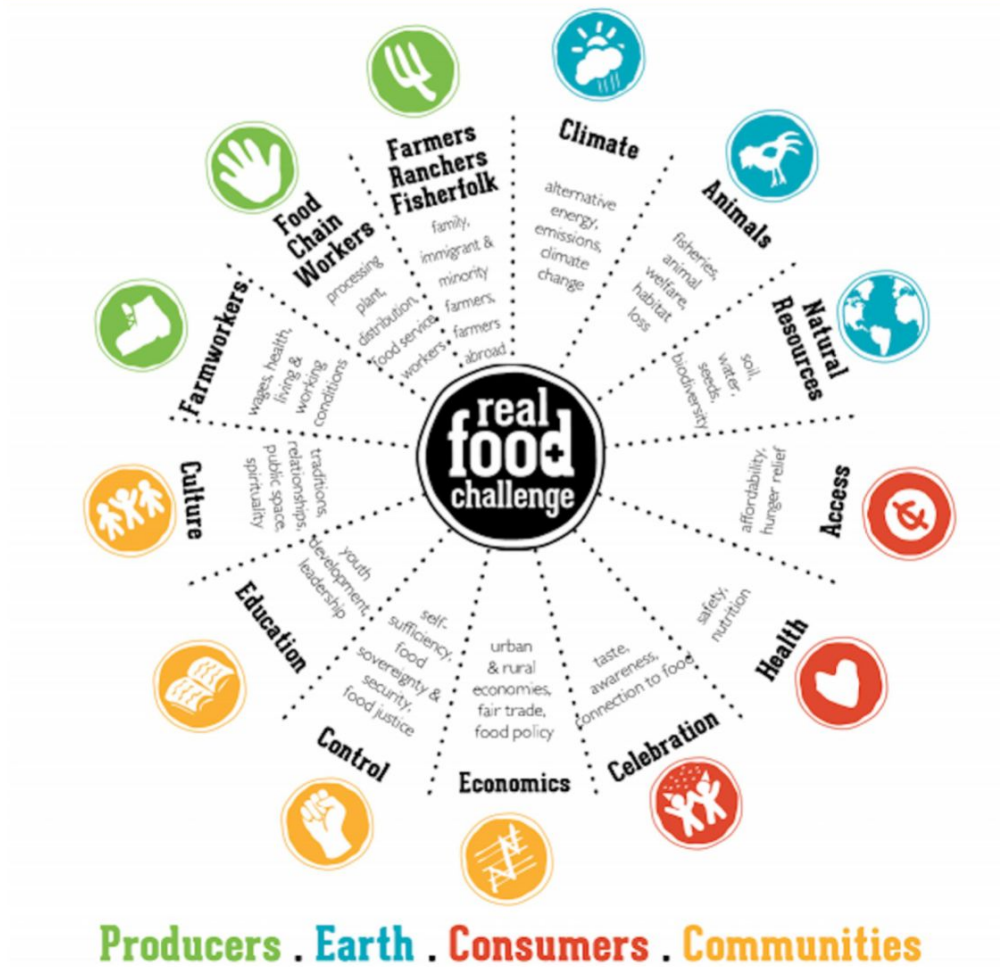


Bringing Real Food to WWU's Dining Halls



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Executive Summary

Problem Statement: The main problem which we are addressing is how Western should continue to incorporate the Real Food Challenge (RFC) in the future. 2020 was the benchmark year for all the schools that signed the RFC. Our goal was to allocate 25% of our budget towards real food as defined by the RFC, WWU reached 16% Real Food (Appendix B). WWU hopes to continue incorporating and increasing the amount of Real Food offered, and our goal is to create a list of educated recommendations for how to proceed throughout 2020 and beyond. The Food Systems Working Group, a committee composed of faculty and student leaders, displays on their website the progress of the RFC as well as a list of product shifts and other basic information of their work, but there is no information on what will happen after 2020. The Food Systems Working Group has not set any goals/plans for what is next. This could be because of the strangeness of 2020 in regards to the Covid-19 pandemic which effectively shut down the dining system until the campus opens back up. Additionally, there is a broad uncertainty at WWU around the dining system, with push from Shred The Contract campaign and the end of WWU's contract with Aramark in 2021. WWU is in the middle of a decision of whether or not to renew this contract or self-operated. If Western chooses to have an autonomous dining system, there would be much more freedom in choosing vendors. This could have a profound effect on the ability to increase the amount of Real Food offered.

Description of Project:

In 2015 Western Washington University signed up to be a part of the Real Food Challenge and pledged to have 25% of the dining budget allocated to Real Food on campus by 2020. It is now 2020 and it is time to evaluate our progress. Western ended up being able to spend 16% of the dining budget on Real Food. Our goal is to understand what challenges we may have faced during this process and develop some strategies for how to improve moving forward. We have collected information through interviews with other schools as well as Western, and we want to use the information we have gathered to make recommendations for Western so we can try and meet and maybe exceed our goal by 2025.

The long term goal of this project is for Western to meet our pledge of 25% Real food. Real food is food that is fair, ecologically sound, local, and humane. We worked with Tina White of the Real Food Challenge to get into contact with representatives from () other schools. We asked a standard set of interview questions about their food systems, the representatives' role at their school, and some other questions regarding their success stories and any problems they ran into. We also interviewed representatives from Western that work with the food system or directly with the Real Food Challenge.

They were asked a similar set of questions, with some more specific to our school and why we failed to meet our goal. Once we had compiled some information on the successes and failures for different circumstances, we used this information to make some suggestions on how Western continues to bring more Real Food into the dining system.

A brief summary of our recommendations:

Our main recommendations based on the data collected are increasing student involvement, creating a training program for new members of the Food Systems Working Group, and making a change in our central dining organization such as switching to a new dining service or becoming self-operated. These recommendations are in response to what the most common challenges were both at Western and other universities when implementing Real Food in the dining halls.

Introduction

Statement of Need: The Real Food Challenge is needed because Universities have a profound effect on the environment. The food movement and food systems within it are complex issues that encompasses health, environmental, economic, and human rights. In order for WWU to keep its identity as a 'school of the environment' it is imperative that we recognize the impact of our food choices. WWU recognized the importance of making choices which take the environment and health into account when they signed the RFC in 2015. Now that it is 2020, it is important that we understand how we can continue and improve these choices by learning from both our experience and other schools. Additionally, the contract with Aramark is expiring in 2021, and in the event that the dining system shifts to being self operated, there could be an opportunity to incorporate even more real food if we plan for it. Offering Real Food on campus provides healthy and fresh options for students. Eating healthy food can help with the overall well-being of students. The more healthy options there are, the more likely students will choose them, especially if they become involved in the buying process. Furthermore, since universities buy in bulk quantities, we have the opportunity to make a significant impact on our vendors' success. When we can we should choose to buy from and in turn economically support vendors/farms which prioritize safe working conditions, environmentally sustainable practices, and fair wages. The RFC provides structure and tools to research and measure the impact of our food choices.

Project Goals: Our goal is to understand what makes the RFC most successful in schools, and provide recommendations for how we can implement the most successful practices at WWU. We also hope to find solutions to the most common challenges when

attempting to make product and vendor shifts. The more we can choose RFC approved vendors and products, the higher impact WWU can make as a school on the environment.

Background and Research:

The Real Food Challenge was created in 2008 with the intention of shifting campus food to more sustainably sourced food products. The Real Food Standards booklet (appendix), outlines four main categories that qualify food as “real”: 1) Local and Community Based, 2) Fair, 3) Ecologically Sound, and 4) Humane. The Fair, Ecologically Sound, and Humane categories are mostly defined by third-party certifications that identify products ‘where production practices meet higher standards than the industry norms’. These certifications are obtained through passing inspection from an auditor. The Local and Community Based category is obtained by meeting specific criteria that can be researched by students. This is helpful in qualifying food as Real because third party certifications can be expensive for smaller producers. RFC also outlines a difference between Real Food A and Real Food B. A is a ranking indicating the food meets all 4 main categories outlined above, B requires only one category to be met. To track and research and identify Real Food, many schools use the Real Food Calculator. This tool makes it easy to track the amount of Real Food that is on campus and set realistic goals for the dining budget.

In 2015 Western Washington University signed on to be a part of the Real Food Challenge and meet a goal of 25% real food on campus by 2020. It is now 2020 and we have failed to meet that goal. This report serves as a way to evaluate our progress and make suggestions based on information we have gathered through other schools participating in this challenge.

Methodology

The Real Food Challenge created the Real Food Calculator as a tool for schools to use to measure the percentage of real food that they are buying for their school. The Real Food Calculator compares input invoices from the dining hall, against the standards that the RFC has set and determines the schools buying patterns. There is a large amount of work that goes into collecting and inputting information from all of the invoices that come through the dining hall, so many schools choose two representative months for the year and use the percentages for those months to act as their whole years average. Each school keeps track of their own progress and reports it back to the Real Food Challenge representatives. The RFC Representatives use the data the schools collect to keep track of the schools progress.

To collect information about the Real Food Challenge and its impact both here and at other schools, we conducted a series of interviews. We chose to use an interview process because interviews provide much more context on how the school reached the percentage of real food that they did. We can learn from successes and challenges that both WWU and other schools experience, while we do not get nearly this amount of insight and information by simply comparing the percentages of other schools. Western was unable to reach our goal of 25% real food by 2020, we want to imitate the successes and learn from the failures of other universities so we can continue moving forward to reach our goal.

We contacted a total of 9 schools to set up interviews and received 5 responses (Appendix A). We assume that under the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, not all of the representatives we contacted were available to participate in interviews.

Below is a pared down example of the questions we asked during the interviews. Some interviews differed, depending on who was being interviewed and the nature of the conversation for both WWU interviews and outside school interviews.

General Interview Script

How is the food system at your school structured?

How did you work the real food into the “normal” food system?

What is your role in the food system at your school or as a participant in the real food challenge?

How have you been keeping track of your progress? Are you using the Real Food Calculator or have you been using some other method?

Do you have any other commitment or pledges around food purchasing?

How did you go about marketing or sharing this challenge with the students and faculty?

What are some success stories or challenges that you have come across while participating in this challenge?

WWU Specific Questions

Is Aramark the one providing this Real Food?

Is Western continuing to work toward our goal?

What changes have we made to reach our goal?

What Real Food opportunities are we not taking advantage of?

What structural limitations inhibit our Real Food percentage?

Results

What did we learn from other schools?

- Did the other schools have any other food goal based contracts?

The University of Pittsburgh is involved in two other pledges involving food. The Cool Food Pledge, with the goal of cutting food based greenhouse gas emissions, and works to design menus that revolve around this principle. They are also a part of the Zero Waste Initiative, with the goal to recycle, reuse, or compost as much as possible. Their goal is to have a dining hall with zero waste in the near future.

While they are not 'contracts' like the RFC but University of Vermont has many other food based initiatives such as partnering with Black River Produce, Vermont Fresh Network, Cage-Free Egg Program, Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainable Seafood, Trayless Dining, Weigh the Waste and more. All of their milk is sourced and distributed from within Vermont as well as the maple syrup. Additionally UVM has their own herd of dairy cows which is used to make all the ice cream sold on campus.

- How are they making people aware of the challenge?

A common trend we found through interviews with successful universities committed to the RFC was a strong student based support team. It is important to have both administration and the student population promoting the RFC, keeping the university accountable to the commitment, and conducting student outreach.

- How was the RFC incorporated into the school food structure?

Most school representatives attributed their success to working with their food provider. It is important to have a food provider that values sustainability and the school's commitment to the Real Food Challenge.

Alexandra Miller, Sustainable Program Coordinator at Carleton College, informed me that they used the food provider Bon Appetit. She explained that Bon Appetit's values line up with the values of the RFC, so it was an easier accomplishment for them to raise their Real Food spending percentages with the support of their food provider. She also explained that the RFC student team meets with campus chefs monthly to discuss items on the menu that can be switched out for local products. For example, if there are 5 evenings in the month that the chef is serving chicken breasts, the students calculate how substituting that chicken with local chicken, either all 5 meals or 3 out of 5, will affect their Real Food percentage. If the option is viable and benefits their numbers, they can be authorized to use the local vendor. Alexandra also found that a great way to involve students who aren't on the RFC team is to have a "local day" in the dining hall. She says this connects the student population with the vendors they regularly purchase products from and helps increase Real Food spending.

At the University of Pittsburgh, they attribute a majority of their success to the chef they had employed in the dining hall at the time. He was very interested in the Real Food Challenge and made choices that reflected his interest and beliefs about the program. They also have changed providers since starting the challenge and this has helped lead to their success 2 years earlier than the 2020 goal.

At Gonzaga University, the main food provider is Sodexo, which became active and involved with the RFC commitment and worked with UVM faculty and students in purchasing products from vendors who qualify for the RFC.

- What were some of the main challenges that came up when trying to incorporate more Real Food?

At University of Vermont, the main challenge was the strict guidelines set by the RFC and how they changed in 2016. For example, a common challenge was UVM would find a larger local vendor that was overall very sustainable but the mere fact that it was a large corporation disqualified the products from being Real Food. This aspect was difficult because even as a smaller University, UVM needs to buy very large quantities of food, and so purchasing from small local vendors as opposed to large local vendors is not always realistic or economically viable. Marissa, the representative from UVM who was interviewed also stated that in the beginning of the RFC commitment, there were many students who were interested but as the years passed, student interest

decreased. She stated that she and the other faculty were willing to continue putting in the work to increase Real Food on campus, but only if the students wanted it.

Jim Simon, a representative from Gonzaga University, stated that a common problem was student involvement. He said the success largely depended on the students who were involved. It is mostly students who run the committee in charge of finding new vendors, monitoring the calculator, and doing more student outreach. Students are always graduating or studying abroad etc. creating a fast turnover which makes progress slower.

What did we learn from Western?

- Does Western have any other food goal based contracts?

According to Steven Wadsworth, the Resident District Manager for Aramark, Western is committed to the Real Food challenge, as well as other partnerships, including Puget Sound Food Hub, The Northwest Agriculture Business Center, Sustainable Connections, Cloud Mountain Farms, and Western's own student led Food Systems Working Group. In Wadsworth's words, "We continue to increase our local partnerships. A great example is that we recently entered into a partnership with the Puget Sound Food hub which represents farmers from both Whatcom and Skagit counties. We have many local and regional partnerships in place and continue to look for opportunities to create additional partnerships with our local community members". Continuing to increase local partnerships will directly benefit our Real Food Calculator results. The dining system should be held accountable for these statements, referencing the Real Food Calculator to track progress in Wadsworth's commitments.

- How is Western continuing to work toward our goal?

In 2015, Western committed to spending 25% of our dining budget on Real Food by 2020. Now that it is 2020, it is important to reflect on our progress and effort to maximize Real Food in our dining system. Sadly, we have not met our goal of 25% spending on Real Food and are only spending 16% of our budget on Real Food, less than we were when we accepted the challenge. This data alone shows that the RFC at Western needs more support. Western is continuing to work toward our goal. We have hit somewhat of a standstill in our progress this quarter because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kurt Willis, the co-chair for the Food Systems Working Group, and client representative for Western with Aramark remains hopeful however. He says' "2020 isn't

over yet, and we hope to have conversations about this goal when we get our feet back on the ground in Fall.”

- What changes have we made to reach our goal?

Western is continuing to move toward our goal, but so far we haven't made any changes to get us there. The challenge has all but come to a standstill here at Western this quarter because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The dining halls are closed on campus so we currently are not making any progress. We have switched to other brands and companies, along with trying to make better choices from our providers and choosing the Real Food Option over the alternative.

That being said, on the Food Systems Working Group website (appendix), there is a list of Real Food product shifts such as Organic Bagelry Bagels, Hemplers Bacon, Muir Glen Organic Tomatoes, Coleman Chicken and more.

- How are the RFC goals aligned with the Aramark Contract/Shred the contract business?

I spoke to Avry Richter, a student spokesperson for Shred the Contract at Western, which is a student led group advocating an end to our use of Aramark. I asked Avry if her work with Shred the Contract has involved the Real Food Challenge and if so, how. In her words, “Our contract with Aramark limits our ability to fully participate in the RFC through the kickbacks that Aramark gets. Aramark has total control over our food on campus and there is really not an incentive for them to comply with the RFC which is just one of the reasons why we just need to Shred the Contract”. Avry also said that although she is involved in Shred the Contract and would expect to know more about the Real Food Challenge, it is not normally talked about in STC settings.

- What are some main challenges Western faced when working towards our RFC goal?

At Western, there has been a lack of consistency surrounding the RFC. As students graduate, the RFC is not effectively passed down to younger students, causing low awareness of our commitment to the Real Food Challenge in general. To increase our spending on Real Food it is imperative to involve a student team that can work with local vendors, campus chefs, campus farms, administration, etc.

For the past 10 years, we have been involved with Aramark, a food provider that values cheap, easily distributed food over Real Food. Aramark purchases food from a national

food broker like Sysco or Food Systems of America and choose from those options the foods that most line up with the values of the Real Food Challenge. They also have some agreements with local producers to obtain food for the campus but these are outnumbered by larger procurements from bigger providers.

Speaking with a former student involved in the Food Systems working group at Western, she told me that Aramark workers have leverage on the university's spending, and decisions that are made are correlated with how powerful of a position you hold. I reached out to Steven Wadsworth, the Resident District Manager at Aramark, in hopes he would agree to an interview. Wadsworth assured me that the Real Food Challenge is a priority of Aramark's and they are always seeking new opportunities to "increase local partnerships". Despite many of the opinions we have gathered throughout this process, Wadsworth assured resigning a contract with Aramark would be in the best interest of the community.

Recommendations

One of the biggest problems we face here at Western is a lack of awareness of our participation in this challenge. A lot of people, even those that work closely with the environmental studies department, don't even know that Western is involved in the RFC. We have been attending Western for four years now, in the Huxley Department of the Environment, and we had never even heard of this challenge or Western's involvement in it. Most other colleges attribute a large portion of their success to the support from students and student leadership both in the challenge and getting the university on board with signing up for the challenge. Western needs strong student support and participation to be able hold the university accountable. A related challenge we found both at Western and other participating universities was the fast turn over of students involved in coordinating the RFC. So, while prioritizing student awareness and promotion of the RFC, there should also be a training program for the students who express interest in joining the food systems working group. Promotion of the RFC could be a survey sent to students asking about how satisfied they feel with current dining options offered. Alternatively, the food systems working group could partner with Shred the Contract group on campus as many of the goals are similar. A training program could be as expansive or simple as desired. Even simply keeping a detailed log of the progress of projects and goals could have a substantial impact.

At the University of Pittsburgh, they rely mostly on students and student representatives to spread awareness for the challenge. Nick Goodfellow, the Sustainability Coordinator

at the University of Pittsburgh explained that they mostly rely on students to spread the word because if faculty or administration are pushing the challenge, students get wary. Western representatives we have talked to tell us that information about Westerns participation in the Real Food Challenge can be found on posters in the dining halls that give students information about their choices, social media, like the WWU Dining Services Instagram Page, and the Food Systems Working Group website. All of these things are good ways to get the information out there, but there is room for improvement. The majority of students that are eating in the dining hall are first year students. Making new incoming students aware of this challenge is critical to maintaining a good student leadership and a consistent dedication to this challenge. However, just proclaiming the healthy options on a poster in the dining hall isn't increasing students' awareness or understanding of the challenge. The same goes for social media. We can tell students about their options all we want but unless we are also educating them on the why and how, it doesn't really mean anything. Using social media to increase student awareness is a great idea, but we have to make sure we are reaching all of these students and spreading the right information. There is a lack of awareness on campus, both due to inconsistency in support and Aramark as our food provider. There have been structural limitations in our buying power due to the Aramark contract, and Tina suggests to leverage university purchasing power to be successful.

Western has been unable to use the Outback Farm as a source of Real Food due to our Aramark contract. Having access to this farm and being able to utilize the produce that it grows would raise our Real Food spending percentage significantly. At Carleton college, their food provider, Bon Appetit, is in control of what is grown on the Farm. Once it reaches harvest time, they buy the produce from the university at market price and it is directly incorporated into the menus and calculated into their spending numbers. If clean growing practices are used, all of these products from the campus farm can be categorized as Real Food A, which Western only spends 4% of their budget on.

Some of the other schools who had a higher percentage of Real Food were supported by their contracted food provider. Although we do not know the details of Westerns' contract with Aramark, it has been stated in multiple interviews that Aramark had strong leverage on what Western could purchase. Aramark keeps a tight budget and values a good deal for feeding thousands of students over sustainability. While Aramark did sign for the RFC and has allowed for some changes. In an interview with ___ it was stated that most of the changes that were proposed by the food systems working group was denied by Aramark for being too expensive. We can not know for sure, but it is possible that working with another food services provider that places higher value on

environmentalism and health, would make it more feasible to make changes and increase our percentage of real food offered. University of Vermont and Gonzaga both use the provider Sodexo and have felt that there was little push back from them whenever a change was proposed. Since the contract with Aramark is ending in 2021, WWU is in the middle of deciding whether to renew the contract, begin a contract with another provider, or moving to a self operated dining system. In terms of having the autonomy to make the most sustainable choices, being self operated would be the easiest as WWU would be completely in charge of choosing vendors and buying products. That being said, it would also increase the workload for the staff in charge of dining, including learning to budget and having the contacts to get all the products necessary for the dining halls. With this consideration, finding another dining service which better aligns with WWU's values in sustainability may be a more realistic and beneficial transition.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The most straightforward method to monitor success of the Real Food Challenge moving forward is by utilizing the Real Food Calculator. With more widespread awareness of the Real Food Challenge on campus, it is important that students and faculty hold our food provider and dining services accountable for making progress with the RFC. The Real Food Calculator is a useful tool provided through the Real Food Challenge website that allows students to audit their university's food spending practices. This tool allows any community member concerned or involved with the Real Food Challenge to see the exact percentage of Real Food Western is buying. Moving forward, The Real Food Calculator will be an imperative resource to tracking Western's success in the Real Food Challenge.

For most schools obtaining and entering all of these purchase orders and invoices takes lots of voluntary time and effort, but RFC has tried to make it a little bit easier by allowing schools to pick two months to be representative of the whole year's percentage. This means that the school can choose two months out of the year. Let's say October and April, and the percentage of Real Food they buy in these two months is counted as the yearly percentage for the school. This puts a little less pressure on the school to spend more time making students aware of the challenge and finding better ways to bring real food to the campus.

Budget

Real Food is more expensive than the alternative. It takes time, money, and effort to make the choice to grow or make sustainable food, pay workers a livable wage, and also be local and accessible. The long term goal of the Real Food Challenge is to redirect 20% or about \$1 billion of the current university food budgets to real food. Here at Western we are only spending 16% of our food budget on Real Food. This isn't necessarily about needing more money to spend on real food, it's about reallocating the budget we already have and using more of it to purchase real food. We are privileged enough to have access to all of these opportunities and options for good real food. It is our duty to support local businesses and producers. Universities have large budgets and can have a big influence on food in our area. We have the opportunity to “vote with our dollar” and be an example and voice of change to show others, whether they are producers or consumers, that this is the kind of food we want, local, fair and sustainable.

Conclusion

At Western, we strive to prioritize and act on sustainable values. Huxley College of the Environment is one of the United State's oldest environmental colleges. It is important that our spending habits and regional support reflects our standards and is emblematic to other institutions committing to sustainable practices. A direct way to impact Western's carbon footprint and support local vendors is by incorporating local, fair, ecologically sound, and humane food in our dining systems. After researching Real Food Challenge principles, conducting interviews with other signatory schools, and analyzing Western's Real Food Challenge commitment, we have formulated effective leverage points to increase Western's spending on Real Food. First, it is apparent that there needs to be more support and awareness of the Real Food Challenge at Western. Without the involvement of students, dining workers, and administration, there is little to no advocacy for being successful. Our interviews with other signatory schools made it apparent that a strong, consistent student support team will generate more success with Real Food spending. Western has an existing Food Systems Working Group that could absorb a new Real Food Challenge group or at least work closely together towards a better food system for Western. Next, is it imperative to sign a new contract with a food provider that has sustainable values and will not limit university purchasing power to the point where it is impossible to increase our spending percentage on Real Food. Shred the Contract, a campus group who activates for cutting ties with Aramark, and their success, will be critical for Western's future with the Real Food Challenge. Signing a new contract with a food provider that values student input, sustainability, and the Real

Food Challenge will offer an array of new opportunities to increase our Real Food spending percentage. This could include increasing awareness, access to more local vendors, utilization of campus farms, creation of campus farms, etc.

Looking ahead, it is critical that Western strives for better success with the Real Food Challenge. Since our signing date in 2015, our Real Food spending percentage has dropped, due to lack of awareness and structural limitations. Our hopes for this report is to provide helpful recommendations to create a foundation for future success with the Real Food Challenge in Western's dining system.

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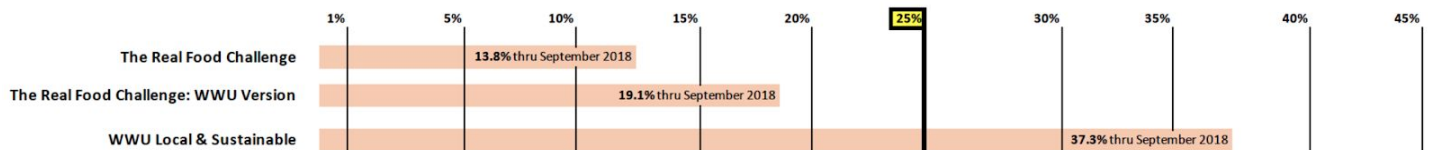
Appendices:

Appendix A:

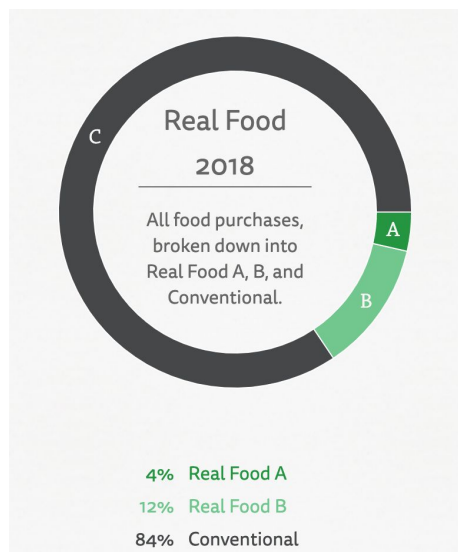
We interviewed a combination of representatives from other universities and WWU. All people interviewed from other universities were faculty involved in implementing the RFC into the campus dining system, but their exact roles varied. The WWU interviews were a mix of faculty and students (some former students), most of which were on the food systems working group which was in charge of managing the RFC changes. To see our notes from the interviews go to

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wxmEv4dO3ixKN9ybYTrhkwoRrHWyyRp3-T1h12HtoHI/edit?usp=sharing>. Here you will see the full names of the people we interviewed, the questions that were asked. The questions stated within this paper were general guiding questions, while we did ask those exact questions sometimes, often the interview questions would be more specific depending on who was being interviewed. Also, sometimes the planned questions were skipped or changed if it became obvious the question was not applicable to the individual.

Appendix B:



This graph was taken from the Food Systems Working Group website (<https://wp.wvu.edu/foodsystemsworkinggroup/our-work/>) which shows the progress through 2018. It seems they stopped updating their website after 2018 possibly due to lack of student co-chairs.



This graph is taken from the Real Food Calculator Website and shows WWU's general breakdown of purchases, also in 2018.

(<https://calculator.realfoodchallenge.org/institutions/74/profile>)