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# Real Food Challenge is opportunity for change

**By:**

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**To the Editor:**

It is an enduring truism of American culture that we vote with our dollars. Unlike our occasional tryst with the ballot box, we speak with our dollars daily. The University, in crafting a budget, makes a loud political statement about what it values, what it believes in and what it would like to see manifest in the world.

The Real Food Challenge is a critical opportunity for Brown University and its students to make a resounding political statement about what we believe in.

Does Brown University believe in a healthy natural environment and ecological sustainability? Does Brown University believe in the value and dignity of labor, the rights of workers to fair wages, the humane treatment of animals?

The Real Food Challenge is a student led initiative, aimed at stimulating Brown to allocate 20 percent of Dining Services' budget to the purchase of 'real food'. The national campaign's website ([realfoodchallenge.org](http://realfoodchallenge.org)) defines its central term as "food that is ethically produced, with fair treatment of workers, equitable relationships with farmers (locally and abroad), and humanely treated animals. It's food that is environmentally sustainable - grown without large-scale mono-cropping, or huge carbon footprints."

Every year, American colleges and universities cast around 4 billion dollar-votes about how they think food should be produced, distributed and consumed. Let's vote to make an outstanding example of this university, and to put it in a leadership position around a movement whose time has come! The academy is brimming with new literature and buzz around the subject of food. A growing chorus pronounces the failures of our industrial food system: its waste, its pollution, its connection to this country's obesity and diabetes epidemics, and especially its failure to sustain a culture of small and family farms. Isn't 80 percent of the budget plenty to spend on that sort of food?

Brown Dining Services does a tremendous job, and like all departments, does the job it is funded to do. If we want food that tastes better, makes us healthier, supports small farms, and saves the environment, we must demand funding for it. The moment to do that is right now.

On September 30, the vice president of campus life and student services, Margaret Klawunn, will finalize her budget request to the University Resources Committee. This is Ms. Klawunn's first year on the job, and students should be excited to see what kind of changes she is poised to make at Brown, exemplified by her proposed budget. If eating real food is important to you, if you believe in a fair and healthy food system, then please give Ms. Klawunn the support she needs to make this bold request. Contact her office, write her an e-mail, show up, make noise, tell her it's important and do it by Sept. 30!

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Sept. 21

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