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Full Story

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Communication Values: impact, human interest, proximity

A basket of resources

The food industry in the United States has dramatically increased over the past 50 years. Fast food establishments specifically have doubled since 1970, reaching over 240,000 across the nation in 2018 (Statista and Obesity Action Coalition). The ‘fast life’ has created a dependency on cheap, fast food having detrimental effects on human health and the health of the environment. Approximately 33 percent of Americans have obesity. Consequently, 300,000 people die a year from obesity (American Journal of Health Promotion). Limited access to healthy food sources inhibits people from their right to a healthy lifestyle.

Slow Food UW (SFUW) works to combat the fast life through their mission of providing good, clean and fair food to students and community members on and around campus.

“In the name of productivity, the ‘fast-life’ has changed our lifestyle and now threatens our environment and our land (and city) scapes. Slow Food is the alternative, the avant-garde’s riposte,” says the founder of the Slow Food Movement Carlo Petrini in the official Slow Food International Manifesto.

SFUW is just one ‘convivium,’ or chapter, within the Slow Food International (SFI) movement. They use the SFI Manifesto as a foundation to promote the people, culture and environment involved in food production (SFI Statute). A snail symbolizes the resistance against fast food; reestablishing the importance of sustainability within our food industry. SFUW equips people tangible resources and beneficial skills to propagate their values further.

“I think across all different types of communities and demographics, I think it [Slow Food] solely benefits...people in different ways,” says SFUW Co-Executive Director Isabel Murkowski.

SFUW is a democratic, all-volunteer student organization. It is the largest collegiate chapter in America serving about 500 individual, locally sourced meals a week. The campus convivium started in 2007 by graduate student and Slow Food Madison member Genya Erling. The campus organization now has over 40 interns, a board of directors and four core projects working to break the barrier between access and healthy food.

“...one thing that our chapter does a really great job of...is really being in line with our mission... I think foodie culture can be associated with expensive products, high barriers, it’s kind of unique for a certain group of people, a certain demographic... we want to stay true to that ‘for all’ aspect,” says SFUW Co-Executive Director Camille Kelleher.

Consumers, participants and external organizations reap benefits from their interaction with SFUW. During the academic year 2014-15, the organization served about 10,000 locally sourced meals and purchased \$36,000 from local farmers and merchants (Zepeda & Reznickova 2016). The meals benefit consumers’ consumption habits as well as the farmers, producers and chefs who get publicity and business.

Various local restaurants are able to build their image throughout the city in a unique way. Madison chefs bring awareness to the strength of eating locally and supporting the community through sustainable decisions. SFUW and featured chefs honor similar values that are especially emphasized when the organizations collaborate.

“...when you buy local, [you’re] building your community. If you don’t have farms, if you don’t have people that can build something that is beneficial for the community and how they are participating in it, it becomes this void that is filled with greed and the worst possible parts of capitalism.” says Madison chef Jonny Hunter.

Interns and directors learn skills in cooking, logistics, finance, communications, outreach, education and leadership (Zepeda & Reznickova 2016). Participants interact with the organizational structure getting hands-on experience they can apply in future careers. Working

alongside professional chefs refines students' skills and builds confidence. Student members learn from taking on the 10 hour per week responsibility on top of being full time students.

“I think the strongest impact of it is the people who learn how to cook, the friendships they make, and... what they learn. And then also the amount of responsibility. Being in college and having to plan meals for a couple hundred people. You know, that's not easy work. And then also building an organization and having the capacity...I think those are pretty incredible,” says Hunter.

The core projects create an inclusive space for conversation open to various perspectives. This ‘conviviality’ promotes awareness, sharing food with others and the possibilities of sustainable food. Conviviality combats the anonymity within the fast food industry. It surfaces the identity of all those involved along the chain of consumption, prioritizing the importance of recognizing each member.

Interaction between consumers and producers strengthens each convivia's contribution to a better food system. Consumers witness exactly what they are eating, where it came from and who made their food. SFUW hopes to educate and disseminate skills for people to become active participants in our food system rather than passive consumers ([SFI's Central Role of Food](#)).

Whether a member or a consumer, SFUW creates a platform for people to learn about their role within the food industry. They can learn how to participate with a better understanding of their individual impact.

“Everyone can contribute to Good, Clean and Fair quality through their individual choices and individual behavior,” says the [SFI Good, Clean and Fair: the Slow Food Manifesto for Quality](#).

SFUW provides access to good, clean and fair food for all across campus through a variety of initiatives celebrating the importance of sustainable food. SFUW initiates a positive rapport between consumers and the food industry ultimately contributing to a better future.

“We just really want to get across that good food is for everyone, and it’s a right, and we support that right,” says Murkowski.