

## **Time to Get Real: A Food Assessment of Dining at Pomona College** *Executive Summary and Recommendations for Pomona College Community*

**Azodicarbonamide** Few eaters notice this ingredient listed on the packaging of several bread products served in Pomona's dining halls. Even fewer know what it actually is. *Azodicarbonamide* is an additive used primarily in the production of foamed plastics, but is also a bleaching agent used in breads. The safety of *azodicarbonamide* is questionable; the use of this unnecessary additive is banned in Europe, Australia and Singapore, where its use can result in up to 15 years imprisonment and a fine of \$450,000.

This little known additive is just one of many lurking – unbeknownst to students and other campus diners – in the food served at Pomona's dining halls. Thorough ingredient labeling is rare, securing accurate nutritional information is difficult, and sometimes even basic signage is absent. Information about where foods are grown or produced is not provided or is unattainable, along with details about environmental impacts, worker conditions, and animal welfare.

**The Study** To address some of these issues, I completed a food assessment of dining at Pomona College for my senior thesis in Environmental Analysis. During the month of October 2009, I tracked all food purchased by Frary Dining Hall using the Real Food Calculator, a metric designed to evaluate food purchasing at academic institutions. Each food item was assessed based on the potential health concerns of its ingredients and whether the item was locally produced, ecologically sound and/or humane to determine whether it should be considered Real. In order to be considered Real a food item must meet standards in one of these three categories. The assessment metric also lists ingredients with potential health concerns (including trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, MSG, and others), which if present in the food item mean it cannot be considered Real.

To obtain this range of information for each of the over 500 items that entered Frary during October 2009, I conducted extensive research regarding the companies producing the food items purchased by the Dining Hall. Much of this information was difficult to obtain, and occasionally companies themselves were unable to tell me where a food came from or how it was made. The fact that this information is difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain is a testament to the failure of the current global food system.

**A Note on Dining Services** Pomona contracts out Dining Services operations and management to Sodexo, which manages all three campus dining halls and a catering service. In addition to Pomona, Scripps and Harvey Mudd also contract with Sodexo, while Pitzer and CMC work with Bon Appétit. Sodexo is an international food-and-facilities management corporation that serves 10 million people in 6,000 locations every day. In 2008 alone, Sodexo had revenue of \$7.7 billion. There are six Sodexo employees working at Pomona: Dave Janosky (General Manager), Stein Amland (District Executive Chef), Amy McKaig (Head of Catering) and Ruben Chavez, Hector Castillo, and Ana Ahumada (Unit Managers). All other Dining Services employees are Pomona employees. Margie McKenna, Assistant Director of Facilities and Campus Services – Operations, oversees Dining Services.

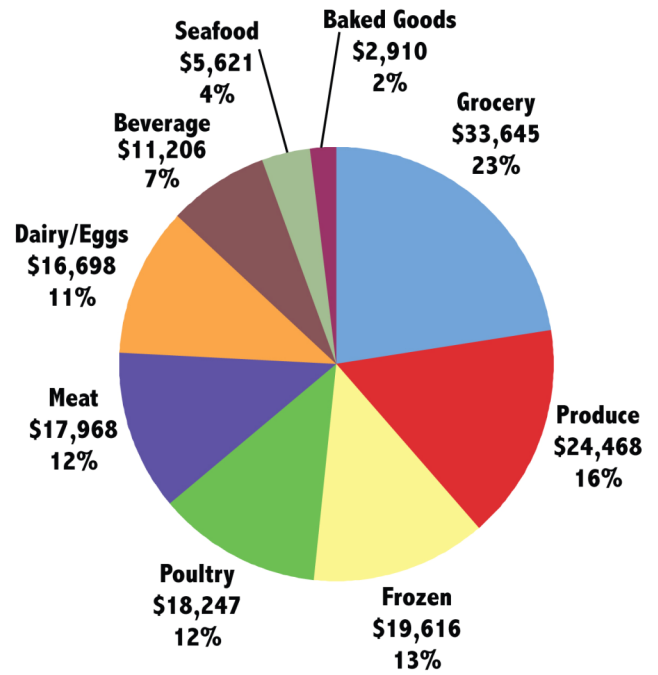
Most of the food in the dining halls is sourced from Sysco, an international corporation that sells, markets, and distributes food products. In 2008, Sysco had record sales of \$37.5 billion, making the company the global leader in the foodservice industry. Contracts between Sodexo and Sysco are complex, and through my research I have gathered that Sodexo has signed contracts that obligate them to buy certain amounts and items from Sysco to prevent them from buying elsewhere and to secure certain prices. It is important to note that Sysco does not actually produce any food items – it only distributes them – and although its brand name is often the only one on many of our food products, they are often unable to provide desired production information.

## The Results

>> During the month of October, over \$150,000 worth of food purchases were examined.

>> Of all purchases, only 8.9% qualified as Real Food. Each food that qualified as Real Food met the standards for at least one of the attributes (local, ecologically sound, or humane). Some food items qualified for two attributes, making them Real Food A.

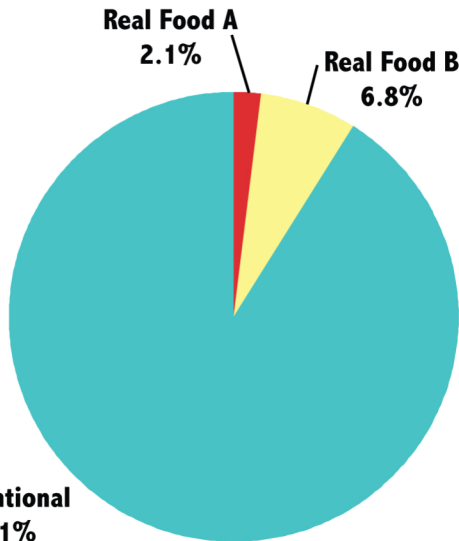
A total of 2.1% of all food purchases qualified as Real Food A, comprising 24% of those items considered Real Food. The remaining 6.8% of foods that qualified as Real are considered Real Food B and met only one standard.



Total food expenditures during Oct. 2009

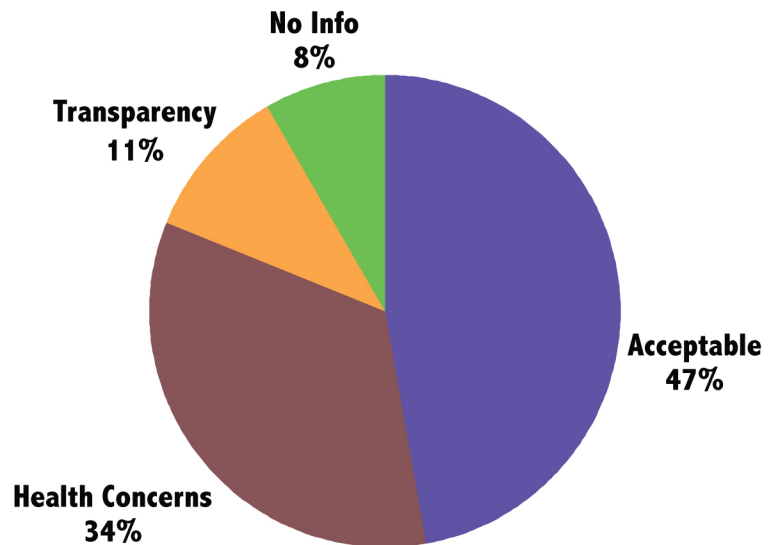
>> Of the foods that qualified as Real Food (either A or B), nearly half were produce. Over one-third were seafood, 10% were beverages and 4% baked goods.

>> Over two-thirds of the foods that qualified as Real Food were local. Slightly over half were ecologically sound. Nearly one quarter of Real Foods were both local and ecologically sound. No items examined during the study period qualified as humane.



Percent Real Food by classification

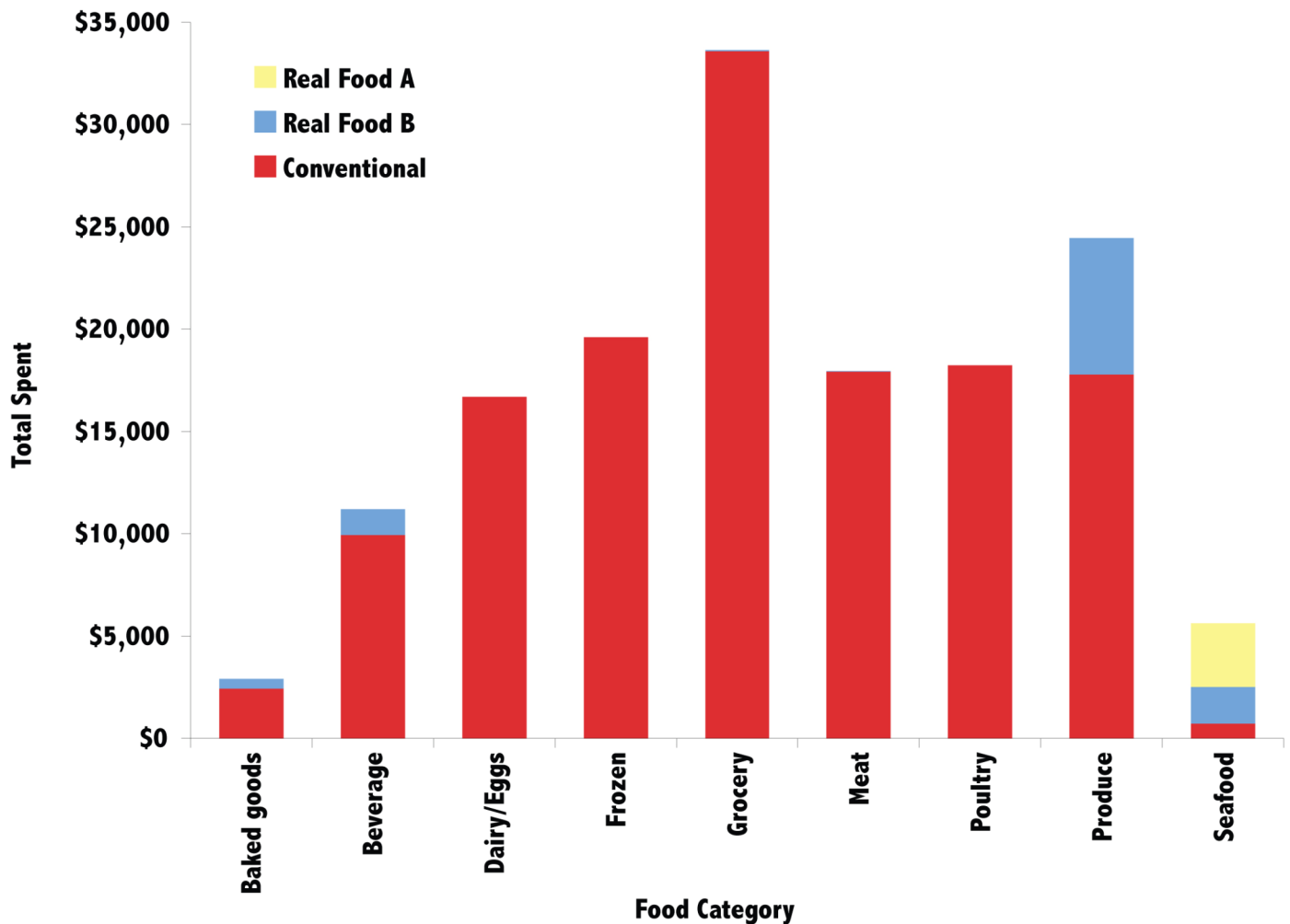
>> Of the foods assessed, over one third contained ingredients considered harmful to human health. Ingredient listings were unavailable for 11% of the items, and 8% of the items were already disqualified for other reasons, so ingredients were not reviewed. Less than half of food items were acceptable based on ingredients.



Ingredient concerns of all food examined

### What qualified as Real Food?

- 87% of seafood purchases were local, 55% of which were ecologically sound
- 27% of produce: 16% of which was local and 11% which was ecologically sound (including only bananas and spring mix, although neither is labeled and only through calling the company did I obtain this information)
- Soy milk because it is organic
- Coffee because it is Rain Forest Alliance Certified
- Western bagels, including plain, onion, cinnamon raisin, egg and sesame, because they are made by a local company (note: hearty grain and blueberry varieties did not qualify due to additives)
- Sesame/soy sauce because it is made by a local company
- One type of sausage (link, Italian, mild) because it is made by a local company



While these results are by no means a conclusive assessment, they do provide a strong indication of how Pomona is spending its food purchasing dollars. The fact that Pomona directed just under nine percent of Frary's purchasing dollars to Real Food during the study period is astonishing, given the low standards set by the calculator for what constitutes Real Food. Though Pomona is making some significant purchases of Real Food, it does not seem to be a concerted effort. It is time for the College to seriously consider the impacts of the food we are purchasing on the environment, the health of students, and the people and animals involved in production.

***Time to Get Real*** We deserve better and can do better. It is time that students make it clear to the administration that these issues must be addressed now. As a college deeply committed to the health of its students, to sustainability and to social justice, Pomona College needs to apply these ethics to the institution's food choices. Currently, there are serious inconsistencies between Pomona College's stated purpose and its food choices.

By opting to support corporate-dominated, mainstream food culture, Pomona is supporting a system that is failing on almost every front. Most food offers little more than short-term sustenance with the added expense of a plethora of problems. Growing food, once one of the most natural and organic experiences a person could undertake, is now one of the biggest detriments to the Earth. The people and animals involved in food production fare no better. Small farmers have been put out of business as global agribusiness increasingly dominates the picture. Animals are reduced to mere production units and treated as such. The only entities that profit from this system are the wealthy corporations whose coffers continue to swell.

By excluding campus food from the high standards Pomona holds for the health of students, sustainability and social justice, Pomona is supporting a food system wrought with problems. Over the last 30 years, and especially recently, a movement of people who have chosen to reject the fruits of industrialized agriculture and seek out something new has been growing. Combined with farmers seeking a more natural connection to the Earth, a movement for ethically- and responsibly-produced food has been gaining momentum.

It is time for Pomona to join in this movement. As Mel Weiss '10 has wisely remarked, eating is an academic act. As an academic institution, Pomona cannot continue to ignore this fact. Many of us spend our time at Pomona studying these issues and now it is time for us to demand that Pomona apply the principles we are taught to the food we are eating every day. Below are some recommendations I have after concluding this study:

- Write specific standards into Pomona's contact with Sodexo that would require better food tracking and higher food standards
- Create a position within Dining Services to coordinate sustainable food and nutrition initiatives
- Allocate more staff to cooking items from scratch (e.g. baked items, soups, sauces)
- Improve labeling practices in the dining hall to include consistent labels, accurate nutrition information and full ingredient disclosure
- Target certain areas for cost cutting (i.e. less meat, generic cereals, fewer sodas) and redirecting saved money towards higher quality food
- Increase purchases of local, organic foods from small farms, as well as animal products that meet humane standards
- Incorporate and improve more vegetarian and vegan options
- Ban certain ingredients/additives, such as trans fats

The community at Pomona College has never passively accepted that which is fed to us, but rather has questioned, engaged and ultimately improved the situation with which we are presented. Pomona should embrace the challenge before us to help create a new food system in which everyone and everything is respected and cared for. Pomona has the power to shape a new food culture on campus and beyond and now is the time to begin. Let's face it Pomona, it's time to get Real!

*If you are interested in being part of the student coalition working to bring better food to Pomona's campus, please email [samanthameyer47@gmail.com](mailto:samanthameyer47@gmail.com).*