



Fall 9-28-2005

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Recommended Citation

Aubry, Ann, "Organic Food, Biodegradable Products Introduced at IWU Food Service" (2005). *News and Events*. 3511.

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Organic Food, Biodegradable Products Introduced at IWU Food Service

September 28, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.- Student environmental groups at Illinois Wesleyan University are singing the praises of the campus food service for the quality of its food offerings this year – not just in terms of the menu’s tantalizing appeal, in this case, but for certain ingredients now missing – as organic options are being added at campus eateries.

Organic food is produced without chemicals such as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, making it safer for human health while reducing contamination harmful to wildlife in the environment, said Given Harper, biology professor and associate director of Environmental Studies.

Organic food also tastes better, believes Jeff Scott '06, who helped with the student campaign for organic options, organizing student petitions and meetings with Sodexo Campus Services and campus administrators.

Organic beverages, salads, dressing and seasonal fruits now are available in the DugOut at the Memorial Center and an all-organic fruit bar was offered recently in the main campus dining hall, with hopes of making this a recurring feature. In addition, biodegradable serving products — from straws to cups and plates — are now an option for catered campus events. Mike Welsh, general manager for Sodexo, said he believes the University eventually will offer biodegradable catering items as the primary choice.

Harper said, “I’m delighted that Sodexo and Mike Welsh pursued this. He had to overcome a number of barriers in making this happen,” in particular because an organic distribution network to Central Illinois through Sodexo had not been established.

Currently, organic food is being transported to the University from Minnesota. Welsh is working for more convenient access to organic supplies and more economical options for both organic food and biodegradable products – and he doesn’t intend to stop.

“I think it’s a very positive direction that all of us need to look at,” Welsh said. “Students, faculty and staff are concerned with the environment, and I think it’s important to be in tune with those wishes.”

Scott, who grew up in Decorah, Iowa, and spent summers working on organic farms, also hopes the campus cafeteria someday can link to local organic farmers.

“One of my big concerns is getting people to eat food that’s better than (processed convenience foods),” Scott said. “(Organic) food tastes good and is healthy for you, and at the same time it’s supporting a local agriculture economy.”

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