

Vote with your fork: a call to food awareness

Modern food system carries unseen costs

Francisca Kang and Elizabeth Welliver

One standard McDonald's cheeseburger = 26 ounces of petroleum.

Explain that equation.

The simple answer to this question is, "It takes 26 oz of petroleum to produce one quarter pounder with cheese." But in order to fully explain this equation, we must understand the context of our food culture. This equation is one that our generation must challenge.

In the past century, technology has revolutionized farming and has become a mechanical industry. Food production is undoubtedly more efficient; compared to pre-World War II statistics, it is estimated that modern farmers produce up to 7 times more per capita, and Americans have decreased their food budget to a mere 10% of total income.

However, the modern food system carries unseen costs. Bioengineering and artificial chemicals have increased efficiency while contaminating our land and engineering disease-prone crops.

Industrial food holds long-term consequences for the human race, from the environment to healthcare. According to food analyst Michael Pollan, we spend 20% of fossil fuels on our food system, which contributed to global climate change. Further, the American diet burdens our healthcare system; we spend 500 billion dollars annually to treat chronic diseases linked to diet. Thus, "cheap food" is a product of exploitation: the exploitation of our natural resources and of our own health.

Food culture also carries global implications. Transnational corporations have monopolized land use in developing nations, which displaces family farms with corporate systems internationally. The American demand for cheap food has devastated local agricultural economies and ways of life.

In response to global change, an alternative movement is growing on local farms. Showcased in farmers' markets and backyard gardens, growers are harvesting the sun's energy and reclaiming farming from the industrial framework. This method of farming relies on diversity between plant and animal species, and human energy, to power plant growth.

The growing consumer demand for naturally grown, local, and whole foods has captured farmers' attention, and started a revolution. While critics may view "local" and "natural" foods as overpriced and unnecessary for one's health, Davidson Farmers' Market manager Courtney Spear claims that local food is worth its cost. "The fruits and vegetables are picked fresh off the vine," Spear says, "which

significantly improves nutritional content." The food also "tastes better" according to Spear because it is grown while in season.

Most importantly, at the farmers' market, customers are given the opportunity to know where and how their food is grown. Consumers can choose to support farmers who protect our soil and water sources, lessen fossil fuel consumption, and develop the local economy. In a small step, global climate and economic issues can be addressed by the foods on your plate.

Three years ago, Davidson joined the food revolution as students and faculty became aware of food issues. For example, the Food Club was founded to bring local, fresh, and sustainable food to campus. "It's more than the title says it is," says Ashley Finger, president of the Food Club. On October 20, the Food Club and the EAC will host Power, People, Pork, a celebratory festival of local food on the Commons courtyard.

Within Commons and the Davis Café, Nutritional Services is working hard to reduce our impact by making more "homemade" products, including spice mixes, salad dressings baked goods, soups, and Greek yogurt. Commons offers a labeled food menu (ML for "meatless" dishes and V for "vegan") while encouraging "Meatless Monday." They also recycle all plastic and compost all food waste, which reduces the number of filled dumpsters from four to one per week in the past four years.

The greatest challenge facing Commons in buying local and sustainable food is our voluminous rate of consumption; for example, we eat as many as sixty dozen eggs per weekend! To meet our demand, Dining Services has partnered with Fresh Point produce to source produce from a network of local farmers. The most exciting development, however, is the new Davidson Farm: a 109-acre plot dedicated to providing naturally grown food to campus dining facilities.

There are multiple other ways that each of us can change our food system. First and foremost, remember to "vote with your fork." As a consumer, you hold the power to challenge our corporate food system and support local growers. You can also join in campus initiatives, like the Food Club, to engage in dialogue on food issues.

Our food culture is a crucial issue that affects each one of us, and our collective future. It is never too late to join the revolution. It is time to vote with our forks.

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Fighting America's Poverty Crisis

A New Tool on the Horizon

Alex Beckmann

We often don't think of America as a nation that has a poverty crisis. How can a nation with so much wealth and technology have so many people struggling to meet their basic needs? A new report from the Census Bureau however, paints a shocking and very grim picture of American society. 15% or 46.2 million Americans are classified as having incomes under the poverty level. An additional 51 million Americans have incomes less than 50% above the poverty line. All told, one in three Americans is living paycheck to paycheck and at risk of poverty if a crisis occurs (like a medical emergency). Perhaps even more worrisome is that America seems to be losing ground in its fight against poverty. Median income for families has declined for 4 straight years and is now 8% lower than in 2007 (before the Great Recession). In fact, median income has reached

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its lowest point (when adjusted for inflation) since 1996.

One of the main problems in trying to reduce poverty is that historically, generally only governments and NGO's have tried to reduce poverty. The private sector has no inherent incentive to focus on improving the income levels and standard of living of the poor because there is no immediate profit in doing so. Fortunately, a recent innovation called social impact bonds has the potential to change that. Under this new approach, private investors put up money to pay for a program to help low-income people get jobs, stay out of prison or remain in school, for example. A government agency evaluates the results. If the program is succeeding, the agency reimburses the investors and gives them a bonus (basically the bonus acts like a return on their investment). If the program doesn't achieve its goal, the investors get no reimbursement.

A recent example of social impact bonds is Goldman Sachs' announcement that it would invest 9.6 million dollars in a New York City jail program that will produce profits for the investment firm if recidivism rates drop. Under the proposed investment, the firm will get back the \$9.6 million if recidivism dips by 10 percent and as much as \$2.1 million in profit if the reoffending rate declines more. If recidivism doesn't fall by at least 10 percent, Goldman will lose as much as \$2.4 million.

Certainly social impact bonds should not be viewed as a catch-all for solving America's poverty problem. The level of interest among private firms is yet to be determined and it's not clear that social impact bonds will even succeed. However, after 50 years of trying and failing to make a dent in the poverty rate using conventional government programs, I think it's time we give this new innovation a chance. As Albert Einstein famously said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

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One Year Later: Celebrating the Repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy

Reflections on the first anniversary of the passage of Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy

Alex Beckmann

About one year ago on September 20th 2011, the Department of Defense formally certified the end to the policy known as "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) that barred openly LGBT persons from military service. Many opponents of repeal predicted that our military would be decimated by the repeal because recruits wouldn't want to join the military if openly gay soldiers were allowed. Oliver North, the central figure in the Iran-Contra scandal and noted opponent of repeal put it bluntly, "I have never met a single senior non-commissioned officer in any service who said to me anything like: 'we need some homosexuals and lesbians out here to help us accomplish our mission.'" Unfortunately, even some of our current leaders opposed repeal. James Amos, the current commandment of the Marine Corps warned the Senate Armed Services

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committee in December of 2010 that "If the law is changed, successfully implementing repeal and assimilating openly homosexual Marines into the tightly woven fabric of our combat units has strong potential for disruption at the small unit level." Fortunately, Congress did the right thing and ultimately passed a bill repealing DADT.

One year later, our military is as strong as ever. A recent study by the Palm center found that there "has been no overall negative impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, recruitment, retention, or morale" since the repeal. More importantly, LGBT soldiers can serve our country honorably and not be forced to choose between serving and being openly gay. The repeal certainly doesn't make up for the injustice of the 18 years that the policy was in place. Today, however, on the one year anniversary of the repeal, we can look back with confidence and say that that era is behind us, and our country is stronger and more just because of the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

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