Students gather at UCSC for food and justice summit

By JENNA BROGAN

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SANTA CRUZ -- With journalists like Michael Pollan and books like "Fast Food Nation" bringing national attention to nutrition and food justice, it's no wonder that 300 students from 40 California campuses gathered at UC Santa Cruz Saturday for the fifth annual Real Food Challenge.

The conference, founded in 2007 with the intention of educating students about the complex food issues that their generation is inheriting, was one of five summits happening around the country this year.

During their three days at the Stevenson College Event Center, the students learned about the impacts of pesticides, justice for food service workers, different forms of consumption and dieting, as well as leadership skills, so that they can take their new knowledge and make a difference in their own communities.

"We teach students how to take all of that information and grow a movement that will make change," said conference founder Tim Galarneau, who works for the UCSC Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Systems.

While the goal Friday night was to form relationships and get a "Taste of Santa Cruz" with dinner courtesy of India Joze and The Penny Ice Creamery, Saturday's agenda involved immersing the students in food issues. Today's schedule will focus on what the students can do with what they've learned to influence federal and institutional policy.

"We're facing the advent of interrelated problems in food access, the climate, the economy and the environment, with world food prices hitting a record high this week," Galarneau said. "We need to change how we relate to food."

While the conference worked primarily with student groups promoting fair trade when it launched, Saturday, attendees of all age groups -- including students in college, high school and a couple in junior high -- wore recycled cardboard name tags and walked around the various display tables in between workshops.

"I'm impressed by the ambition," said event organizer Kelsey Meagher, a grad student at UC Davis. "It's exciting to hear from people who've never heard about food systems and social justice and other people who've made a career out of it."

Housed in two churches on High Street, the 300 attendees were encouraged to challenge the more than $5 billion spent on dining food at colleges across the country, support alternative food suppliers, start community gardens and build together with like-minded individuals for
the betterment of the environment.

"We've taught the younger generations to be consumptive and selfish," said Salameau. "Here we give them a sense of how they can impact the world around them for the better."
California Youth "Strengthen Their Roots" in Largest Food Justice Gathering

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This past weekend, CFJC staff and coalition partners Food & Water Watch and Pesticide Watch joined over 300 students from nearly 40 universities across California in the 4th Annual "Strengthening the Roots Food and Justice Convergence" in Santa Cruz for the largest gathering yet in the west coast on the connections between youth, food sustainability, and food justice. In addition to keynote panels on youth food movement perspectives and policy considerations, meals, and drum circles, Coalition members facilitated discussions on the Farm Bill, traditional foods, and the implications of synthetic fertilizers on our food landscapes.

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As youth become more engaged in the good food movement, what principles should we keep in mind? How are you engaging young people? What youth-based organizations do you know of in California advocating for food justice?

Tags: real food challenge, cfjc, food & water watch, pesticide watch, west coast, youth, strengthening the roots, food justice, santa cruz