

## A Brief How-To for Using the Real Food Challenge Calculator

Starting and executing a Real Food Calculator Assessment is a complex and rewarding process, and this guide lays out step-by-step guidance to help make the process as efficient as possible. Although every Assessment is unique—there’s no one procedure that works for every school—we’ve outlined some important steps for getting the data you’ll need to do your research. We narrowed down these steps through pilot assessments at over 10 schools across the country, each developing its own method to complete the assessment. As more schools complete Calculator assessments, we hope to further develop and solidify these steps.

### GETTING STARTED

Before starting your assessment, you’ll need to get in touch—and get to know—key people who will be essential for your assessment.

#### Step 1: **Contact** Real Food Challenge

- Interested in figuring out how much real food is on your campus? Great! Let us (RFC) know so we can share all the necessary materials with you and train you on how to use them. You can either contact Devon Ahearn, who coordinates the Real Food Calculator ([devon@realfoodchallenge.org](mailto:devon@realfoodchallenge.org)) or your local Regional Field Organizer (visit <http://realfoodchallenge.org/RFOs>) for her/his contact information.

#### Step 2: **Contact** your campus foodservice operator

- **Having a good working relationship with campus foodservice operators is SUPER important for your assessment.** Your foodservice operators are the people who will give you access to the financial information you need to do the calculator, and who will give you guidance on deciphering the information contained in the invoices and receipts you’ll receive.
- Make sure to start engaging with foodservice early. Set up an initial meeting to introduce yourself, your student group, and to start building a relationship.
- Important contacts include your foodservice director, manager, or head chef.
- When you feel you’ve had an appropriate number of meetings, move to the next step.

#### Step 3: Fill out the Campus Food Baseline Assessment

- The Baseline Assessment is designed to help you start thinking about how you’re going to pilot the Real Food Calculator.
- It’s also a great way to start making connections with campus dining services by getting a conversation going about tracking your campus’ food purchases.
- You can fill out the form online by visiting <http://realfoodchallenge.org/calculator>.

#### Step 4: Determine the **scope of your project**

- Come up with a **research plan** for your assessment.

**Important:** To maintain consistency across pilots, we now require that all Calculator Assessments track either an entire year's worth of purchasing OR at least 2 months' worth: one month (approximately 4 weeks) in the fall and one month (approximately 4 weeks) in the spring.

- Consider:
  - How many dining halls and/or other food facilities do you want to study?
  - How long do you want to track food purchases for? 2 months or a year? You need to determine which project length works best for you.
    - Some questions to consider with the length of your project:
      - Does your school experience big changes in its purchasing depending on the seasons?
      - Do the menus in your dining hall cycle on a regular basis?
      - When do you need to complete your assessment by?
  - What does your schedule look like?
    - How much time do you have to devote to this project (hours/week)?
    - Are you getting paid to do this work (e.g. paid internship)?
    - Are you receiving some sort of academic credit for your work (e.g. thesis, independent research, etc.)?
    - Will other students assist you?

#### Step 4: **Agree to your project**

- Once you've determined what your project will look like, make sure everyone is on the same page. Talk to foodservice to determine a schedule for researching (e.g. a time to meet weekly); check in with your contact at RFC to let her/him know your plans. Once you, foodservice, and RFC are on the same page about your project, you can start researching.

### **RESEARCH RESEARCH RESEARCH**

This phase of the assessment process differs from school to school and depends on the research process you laid out with your research team, foodservice, and RFC. Below are some general recommendations for researching.

#### Step 5: **Track real food**

You can determine how you want to track real food. Here are 3 suggestions to give you an idea of how others have done so:

- Tracking in real time
  - With this method, you track food purchases as they come in week-by-week. You could set up a weekly meeting with your foodservice contact to retrieve invoices from purchases made that week, then work

to enter the data into a spreadsheet that organizes your information. Then, you'll need to do follow up research to determine what items count as real. You can:

- Ask your foodservice contact to identify items s/he knows fit within the real food guide
- Follow up by phone with producers and suppliers to determine if their products meet real food standards
- Go into the dining hall's kitchen to look at labels on food items to see if they meet real food standards
- Make site visits to producers
- Come up with other research methods that fit your needs
- Tracking from purchasing print-outs
  - This method involves reading a print-out of invoices and receipts for your study period (usually a year in this case).
    - Using the same methods outlined above, you'll need to determine which items from the print-out count as real food. This method requires familiarity with reading invoices and receipts and/or guidance from your foodservice contact.
- Surveying suppliers
  - Some students have tracked real food by asking the companies supplying their school whether they handle real food.
    - Using this method, you would identify all suppliers working with your school, create a survey asking them about their purchasing methods, and ask your suppliers to fill out the survey. You should be prepared to do follow up field research to ensure the answers you're getting from your suppliers are

**Note:** These research methods aren't mutually exclusive—you can mix and match to come up with a process that works for you. If you have a new approach that's not outlined here, let us know!

accurate.

## PUBLICIZE

You're done with your research. Now what? The next two steps outline how you can get the word out about your work.

**Step 6: Share your data** with Devon

- Throughout the process, you should share your progress with Devon and your foodservice contact, who will review your calculations for accuracy.
- When you've completed your research, be sure to send your raw data and your completed Real Food Calculator Template to Devon and your foodservice contact.

**Step 7: Let your campus know!**

- Your work will be pivotal in increasing real food purchasing on your campus, so make sure people know about it. You could:

- Write an op-ed in your school's newspaper
- Convene a meeting with students, foodservice reps, faculty, other staff administrators, etc. to discuss your findings and the implications on your school's food procurement
- Make a plan to make the assessment an annual process