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GROWING ORGANIC: Steven McLaskey rids a Chinese cabbage patch of weeds inside a greenhouse north of Fairfield. The one-acre enclosed garden helps supply organic vegetables for Maharishi University of Management. The school also has extensive outdoor gardens. Maharishi leads universities across the nation in an effort to offer students organic food.

Organic, vegetarian

Maharishi University meals transcend mundane cafeteria food

By ERIN JORDAN
REGISTER IOWA CITY BUREAU

Fairfield, Ia. — There's no mystery meat in this cafeteria. In fact, there's no meat at all.

Food served in the dining hall of the new \$7.5 million Argiro Student Center of the Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield is 100 percent vegetarian, and almost exclusively organic.

Some of the vegetables served to students, staff and the public come from campus farms and greenhouses.

Students eating wheat-crust pizza, homemade herb bread and potato and artichoke salad during a lunch last week said



DINING TOGETHER: From left, Nisha Nahal, 24, and Binita Kachhepati, 25, both freshmen from Nepal, join Vedic science professor Patricia Oates for lunch at Maharishi University of Management's new Argiro Student Center. The 563 on-campus students come from 68 nations.



NO MEAT ON THESE PIZZAS: Hector Sanchez, a cook at the Argiro Student Center, slices vegetarian pizzas for lunch. All the food served here is vegetarian and much of it is organic. University officials believe vegetarian and organic foods promote student health and learning.

the vegetarian food makes them feel good.

"It's amazing," said Amber Price, 21, of Lincoln, Neb. "We have this quality of food, and we can share it together."

Price, who became a vegetarian at age 15, jokes that half the reason she transferred to Maharishi from the University of Nebraska was the food in Fairfield.

The school cafeteria is also open to the public. A fee of \$6 per person is charged for breakfast, and it's \$8 each for lunch and dinner.

Bonita Carol, 44, a massage therapist from Fairfield, stopped in for lunch last week with a friend.

"I think the food is really delicious," Carol said. "I'm interested in maintaining a healthy physiology. I feel good after I eat here."

The dining hall is on the top floor of the 50,000-square-foot center, built with the principles of Vedic architecture, which requires natural materials and an east-facing entrance. The center will be the school's student hub - with lounges, auditorium, student government offices, meeting rooms and the World Peace Cafe. Students will be able to order pizzas, paninis and other grab-and-go food here.

The student center is palatial with marble floors, chandeliers and a stained glass window. As a reminder that the building was intended for mass use, there is a sign at the door that says "due to damage," cleats and ice traction devices are not allowed inside.

Maharishi University of Management, established in 1974 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation, has long provided vegetarian fare for students and staff. The university doesn't serve caffeine on campus, so there aren't any Starbucks kiosks or pop machines.

The Pepsi machine located in the basement of the student center is for the construction workers who are still putting finishing touches on the building, administrators said this week.

"The faculty has made it a point to consider every aspect of a student's experience here," said Craig Pearson, the university's executive vice president. "What you eat plays an important role in how you feel and even how you learn."

During the past eight or nine years, the school has replaced food grown with pesticides or herbicides with organic food. The new dining center is 90 percent to 95 percent organic, and much of the food comes from local producers, such as Radiance Dairy in Fairfield.

Maharishi farm manager Steve McLaskey provides the dining hall with vegetables and fruit from the campus farm during the summer and grows greens and cherry tomatoes in the greenhouse during the winter.

Head chef Don Bowman, who came to the school in August 2006, learned about vegetarian cooking while working in food service at the University of California in Berkeley from 1984 to 1999. He was the lead chef at Berkeley for almost five years, cooking for uni-



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INSIDE: Students eat lunch in the new building built to Vedic architectural principles, which require natural materials to be used. For a small fee, members of the public are invited to stop in for meals. No coffee is served.

Much of the food is produced locally

iversity leaders, regents and visitors, including movie actors Jane Fonda and Mel Gibson.

Berkeley's dining halls shifted toward organic food in the mid-1990s and the university now has about 25 percent organic food, Bowman said.

Demand for vegetarian and organic food in college dining halls is growing nationwide, said Carol Petersen, vice president for the National Association of College and University Food Services Midwest region and associate director of dining at Iowa State University.

"People want to know where their food is coming from," Petersen said. Some urban colleges have all-organic convenience stores and even large universities like (Iowa State University) are working to find more locally-grown food, she said.

Maharishi can lead the trend toward vegetarian and organic eating because of its small size, Bowman said. "There is no other campus that is organic like the Maharishi University," he said.

Bowman helped design the new student center kitchen, which includes top-of-the-line commercial ovens, water-saving dishwashers and no-slip flooring materials. His Baxter oven can bake 100 loaves of bread at once, allowing the chef to inject steam to make the crisp crusts found on artisan breads.

The kitchen was abuzz on a recent morning with staff doing last-minute lunch preparation and readying for dinner.

A married couple who used to operate a Chinese restaurant in Fairfield stir tomatoes into a vat of fried rice. Nearby, a food processor filled with graham crackers and a bin of

finely ground crumbs hints at the evening dessert: cheesecake with graham cracker crust.

Upstairs, students, staff and a few visitors begin lining up for lunch. Today's menu includes pizza, fried rice, pasta with red sauce, chickpeas, sauteed vegetables, a full salad

bar and two types of cake for dessert. There is also fresh bread and beverages, which include water, tea and milk.

"They try to mix it up," said Jeremy Jones, 22, a student from Fairfield. "Today, it's Italian. I'm usually able to find something I like every day."

A few students grumbled about the lack of variety and said they wouldn't mind some meat options.

"I wish they could have some non-vegetarian food once in a while," said Biruk Juka, 26, of Ethiopia. He and his friends occasionally leave campus to grab a burger or chicken sandwich, Juka said.

But students appreciate that Bowman asks for recipes and tries to have an international menu.

The university's 563 on-campus students are from 68 countries, and the dining hall reflects this diversity.

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OPEN HOUSE:

The Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield will have an open house for its new \$7.5 million Argiro Student Center at 1:30 p.m. Sunday. Guests can tour the building, see student performances and sample vegetarian, organic food served in the center's dining hall.



ARGIRO STUDENT CENTER: Maharishi University of Management's Argiro Student Center is a 50,000 square-foot facility on the Fairfield campus. It houses student lounges, an auditorium, student government, meeting rooms, the dining hall and the World Peace Cafe.