2011 Issues and Actions

Saturday, April 16th

Hamline University

Issues in the front seat
Actions in the back seat
Gotta make my mind up!
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Agenda:

10am  Welcome and Overview: Kathy Dekrey and Natalie Tungsvik
10:05am  MPIRG Year in Review: Josh Winters
10:20am  MPIRG Three Year Statewide Campaigns

Three Year Statewide Campaign presentations will have 10 minutes to present and 10 minutes to answer questions.

1.) Fair Elections for Minnesota
2.) Environment and the Economy

11am  Small Group Discussions
11:40am  Large Group Discussion: Josh Winters
12:20pm  VOTE
12:30pm  Lunch
1:15pm  MPIRG One Year Project Proposals

One Year Project Proposal presentations will have 15 minutes to present and answer questions.

1.) Reforming Campus Food Service
2.) Garbage Incineration
3.) St. Paul Business Recycling
4.) For Profit Prisons

2:15pm  Group Discussion: Kathy Dekrey and Natalie Tungsvik
2:30pm  VOTE
2:40pm  MPIRG Campus and Community Initiatives

Campus and Community Initiatives will have 10 minutes to present and answer questions.

1.) Solidarity Forever
2.) Sustainable Agriculture

3pm  Adjourn
Three Year Statewide Campaign proposal authors will have 10 minutes to present the proposal and then 10 minutes to answer questions. Issues and Actions participants will then break into small groups to discuss each proposal and then come back together to have a large group discussion before voting on the proposals.

Fair Elections for Minnesota: Voter Rights and Election Reform

Authors: Matthew Butler, Skyler Larrimore Co-Chairs of Macalester's MPIRG
Lauren Silberman and Nic Johnson Democracy Co-Taskforce Leaders

Problem:

The bedrock institution of our Democracy--the election process--is in need of serious reform.

The first pillar of this Fair Elections campaign addresses the pressing need to reform the voting system. The current system limits our access to a wider pool of candidates and viewpoints from which to choose. The public is often forced to believe that there are only two candidates: one from the Republican Party and one from the Democratic Party. The struggle for voters is to determine who to vote for between just two candidates. The Republican Party and Democratic Party do hold primaries to determine which candidates best reflect the views of party members. However, these usually have very low participation and make voters take two trips to the polls. As a result, people feel disillusioned with the voting process and are less likely to participate. If nothing is done to fix the system, people will be less likely to participate in elections. Instant Runoff Voting is one solution to this problem.

The second pillar of this Fair Elections campaign addresses the growing problem of money in politics. The influence that powerful corporations can have on campaigns and election outcomes has gotten out of hand. With the recent Citizens United Ruling, the Supreme Court put our democracy at risk by ruling that corporations are "persons" and that their money is "free speech." This has opened the floodgates for corporations to donate millions to sway elections. Any lawmaker who stands up to the banks, oil companies, health insurers, or other interests may find themselves under attack at election time. The balance of money power and people power has been severely compromised with this Supreme Court ruling. We need to establish a precedent of campaign finance regulations in our state to counteract the effects of this decision.

The final pillar of this Fair Elections campaign is empowering young voters to participate in the political process. Minnesota had the highest youth voter turnout in the nation in the 2008 election (68%), and we must work to empower further civic participation and fight against barriers to youth voting. Recently we have seen challenges from the Minnesota legislature to disenfranchise voters in the form of Voter ID requirements and the elimination of vouching. While we do not believe that these initiatives will pass, this campaign would ensure that students can actively mobilize on future affronts to our ability to vote. Additionally, through this campaign, we can begin to plan our 2012 GOTV voter registration drive and expand opportunities for all students to lobby their legislators through the organization of more frequent, small group, constituent meetings.
Issue:

Recently in Minneapolis and St. Paul, ballot initiatives were passed to use Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) in municipal elections. This issue was sponsored and worked on by MPIRG. St. Paul’s first municipal elections using IRV are coming up this Fall, and there is a need for education and awareness about IRV to engage voters in this new voting process. With St. Paul and Minneapolis already behind this new system, now is the time to expand this model to other cities and towns with MPIRG chapters (Northfield, Duluth, and Morris).

MPIRG supported recent legislation to improve the political contribution reporting of corporations in Minnesota, but this is just a start. We need to take on additional measures to limit the influence of money in politics. Three such measures include:

- Ban Pay-to-Play: Bar government contractors from making political expenditures.
- Political Ad Regulation: Require the top corporate donors to appear in the political ads they fund.
- Amend Minnesota’s State Constitution: Support this recent proposal in the Senate aiming to curtail the idea that corporate entities have the same rights as human beings (including, but not limited to, campaign contributions, privacy, and free speech).

Throughout MPIRG’s history we have used GOTV campaigns as a way to make the youth voice heard in Minnesota’s elections. In 2008, we registered over 16,000 people to vote in the Presidential election. With 2012 looming in the distance, it is important that we continue this dedication to GOTV efforts.

Possibilities for Collaboration and Opposition:

There are several groups in the Twin Cities working to protect voters’ rights and promote electoral and campaign finance reform. The non-partisan Voting Rights Coalition is working to support early voting, which will minimize congestion at the polls and facilitate more widespread voter participation. 32 states currently have early voting processes in place. This coalition is also working on the following:

- Oppose Voter ID requirements
- Support absentee ballots without a required excuse
- Promote automatic, online voter registration.

Some organizations involved in this coalition include Common Cause Minnesota, League of Women Voters Minnesota, TakeAction Minnesota, and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN). MCN could be a large source of support for us, as their Minnesota Participation Project supports nonprofits working for nonpartisan voter engagement.

One organization focused specifically on Instant Runoff Voting is Fair Vote Minnesota. This ranked choice voting system allows people to rank their choices and if no candidate gets 50%, it starts eliminating the lowest vote getter until a candidate has 50%+1.

Common Cause is an organization that works to make the democratic process more open and easier for citizens to participate. They have a large focus on the campaign finance reform. Other state PIRGs have Campaign Finance and Fair Elections campaigns; we can use them as a resource for finding effective campaign targets and campus engagement tactics.

The Minnesota Voters Alliance is a group working in opposition. They are working against any effort to work on IRV. They have fought the St. Paul and Minneapolis initiatives and presumably will keep doing so. Other possible sources of opposition include the multitude of elected representatives who have previously received significant campaign contributions from corporations. Corporations themselves would also be in opposition to campaign finance reform. Opponents to making voting more accessible might include the elected

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representatives and organizations currently supporting Voter ID and the elimination of vouching. However, strong organized opposition has never been a good reason to abandon the good fight.

Solution:

Election after election shows us that it is difficult to get people to exercise their right to vote. Distractions, disillusionment, and disinterest are just three deterrents to getting people to the polls. To encourage civic participation among our fellow citizens, we need to make the system as easy and accessible as possible, and not create more barriers to participation within the system itself. We must make early voting more accessible and preserve same day registration, absentee voting, and vouching in Minnesota.

We need to reform the way elections are held. IRV would make it so people would be more willing to vote for candidates that “don't have a chance.” IRV would also give people who are disillusioned with the system a sense that their views have a better chance to be heard. It has been implemented in the two biggest cities in the state, so now it is time enact it on the statewide level.

Finally, we need to address the issue of money in politics and create a more transparent system of campaign contributions. Specifically, we need to limit the influence that powerful corporations currently have in elections, as their interests do not always coincide with the public interest. We believe amending the state Constitution to prohibit ‘Corporate Personhood’ is the best course of action.

Why MPIRG?

MPIRG was founded to empower students to make their voices heard on issues of environmental and social justice. As an organization, we empower students to engage with and influence the political process. Our current electoral system pits money power against people power and ultimately discourages civic participation. This campaign will ensure that elections remain open and fair through accessible ballots and registration processes and through the limitation of corporate influence on election outcomes.

Voter rights issues are at the root of all of MPIRG’s other campaigns. If our legislative system is plagued at every turn by moneyed special interests it will be nearly impossible to move forward on any of the issues we care about.

Students often complain that they do not vote in elections because none of the candidates match their beliefs or listen to their concerns. Our Fair Elections campaign addresses youth disillusionment with the political process in three main ways. First, Instant Runoff Voting would make elections more open and diversify the pool of candidates that Minnesotans can choose from. Second, campaign finance reform will limit the influence that corporations can have on our electoral process, returning power back to the average citizen. Third, this campaign will set the groundwork for another election year of record-breaking youth turnout.
**Environment and the Economy**

Authors: Lucas Felts, U of M Morris, Natalie Tungsvik, Hamline University, Kathy DeKrey, Augsburg College, Emma Wright, U of M Twin Cities

### PROBLEM

How people interact and live within their environment is the problem of our generation. It is an uncontested fact that we are consuming at an unsustainable rate. It’s to the point that there are so many environmental issues in need of our attention that one easily feels overwhelmed. With the changing political climate one is often left at a loss of what to do.

There are a ton of problems, and with a little research even more solutions. All that they need is to be implemented. With such a huge problem it is important that we take on the specific tasks that are winnable to create long term solutions no matter what political climate we face. A changing political climate requires that we approach this issue from innovative stances and allow flexibility for new campaigns amid the changing political landscape.

Creating and working toward solutions to this issue affects everyone. The natural world’s health affects our health; this project affects everyone in our communities and the state. If we can create more green jobs, use more renewable resources, reduce bottled water usage on campus, increase recycling in our communities, or stop the BWCA from being polluted by sulfide mining, we can make the future a little less bleak.

### BACKGROUND

**Issue Background**

Climate scientist conclude that our earth’s temperature will be rising 6 to 8 degrees in the next 50 years, that we missed the opportunity to become “sustainable”, and that now humans must cut back on the harm we are causing to the environment in the hopes that we don’t make it even worse. As concerned citizens we cannot afford to stand by and let the vast amounts of environmental degradation continue and as students, with the power to push Minnesota to do the right thing, it is time to act.

There is a multitude of environmental policy on the campus, local, statewide, and federal. There are also numerous opportunities for growth on all of these levels.

In order to be continue to advance innovative environmental policy we need to give MPIRG the flexibility to look at the political climate and say things like, “the political climate is not friendly for a fight against sulfide mining, but a state wide recycling policy could work so let’s put our efforts there.” The environment needs protection on all fronts and it is our job to bring awareness to any issue that will has a chance to be successful. This campaign is about the greater good of the
environment whatever that might be so that MPIRG can focus its energy on environmental policy that has traction. So let us organize our voices where they can be the most effective.

**Lay of the Land**
With the current make up of the state legislature, passing environmental policies can be difficult. MPIRG must rethink the way it is approaching environmental policy. We want to position MPIRG so that it can easily address any environmental issue quickly and efficiently to have the greatest impact on the health of Minnesota’s environment.

The fact remains that there are numerous ways for MPIRG to have an impact on environmental policy despite an ever changing political landscape. State and federal policies that protect the environment or defending existing environmental policy will always be a focus, but we are also uniquely positioned to impact environmental policy in local communities in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Northfield, and Morris. Furthermore, we have always played a critical role in pushing our campuses to be more sustainable.

**Land:** Minnesota’s unique landscape is constantly under attack. Whether it’s logging in our state parks or urban sprawl, Minnesota’s land is constantly threatened.

**Air:** Minnesota’s air is polluted from a multitude of sources including, but not limited to garbage incineration, coal-fired power plants, and automobile exhaust.

**Water:** Minnesota’s water is also polluted from a number of sources including mining, chemicals from industrial agriculture, feedlot waste, and consumer chemicals in waste water.

**Allies:**
Currently, MPIRG plays a lead role in several statewide environmental coalitions including the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, the Healthy Legacy Coalition, and Transit Partners. Collective these coalitions represent more than 100 allied organizations. Additionally, there are a number of elected officials at the local, state, and federal level that prioritize environmental issues. With the recent election of Governor Mark Dayton, a number of agency appointments have included allies of MPIRG and environmental policy. Finally, most of our communities and certainly our campuses have numerous environmental groups, offices, and faculty that regularly partner with MPIRG.

**Opponents:**
The opponents of this environmental campaign are the traditional opponents such as lobbying organizations representing agriculture, mining, energy, oil, and chemical industry interests. These opponents tend to be well funded, but usually lack credible science, public support, and integrity which are our strongest assets. Additionally, we will face the new republican majority which has already pursued vicious attacks on environmental policy in Minnesota.
Funding:
With the exception of the youth vote money that we have received, all of the grants that MPIRG has gotten in the past couple years has been from our work on environmental issues. Two of our strong grant funding sources in the past have been from our allies, Healthy Legacy and Minnesota Environmental Partnership; if we cannot show continued dedication to environmental policy they might be unable to continue choosing us for grants.
Other possible sources for grants in this area are Reamp, Carolyn Foundation, and McKnight Foundation. As well as possible income from a partnership with Xcel Energy.

There are numerous ways to attack this problem and create a more environmentally friendly campus, community, state, nation, and world. In order to maximize our success as a grassroots activism organization we need to have a multifaceted approach to solving the issues at hand. We suggest MPIRG combats this issue by virtue of: active legislative work to create and lobby on bills in the MN legislature that help protect our environment, demand side economic initiatives to reduce consumption and the way it is viewed, a well developed educational model to inform the public of environmental risks and how they can help alleviate them, and active works on our campuses and in our communities to systematically become more sustainable by doing a variety of things to improve the environmental conditions.

Possible Issues to be worked on:
- Local Foods and Sustainable Agriculture
- Community Gardens
- Farm Bill
- Organic Farming
- Food Justice
- Clean Energy
- Forming Local Co-Ops on campus
- Public Transportation
- Energy Efficiency
- Organic Recycling
- Cradle to Grave and Product Stewardship Policies
- Promoting Community Dollars
- Sulfide Mining in Northern Minnesota
- Defending existing environmental policy
- Promoting use of Complete Streets when road are repaved
- Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products
- Solid Waste Management
These issues can be solved on a campus, city, state, and federal level, and this is not a complete list, this campaign allows for further input and ideas.

:::WHY MPIRG?:::

*What can MPIRG do on this issues that can’t be done by the other organizations currently?*

Various organizations are working on environmental issues throughout the state of Minnesota, but MPIRG offers the unique student prospective and passion. As a student directed organization we have the freedom and the motivation to tackle important issues such as the Alberta Tar Sands that are not taken up as quickly by other organizations. We also are good representatives of the student voice on existing campaigns and bring a unique perspective to that. There is an enormous amount of momentum behind sustainability and the environment right now. If we are looking to make that the norm - rather than a trend, we need to show the state that as young people we are committed to long standing environmental policies and campaigns.

*How is this campaign relevant to our members in particular?*

With the current state of the legislature, many strong environmental policies such as the coal moratorium, renewable energy standard, and transit options are being repealed and having the funding cut. NOW more than ever it is imperative that we not only protect our current policies, but make sure we do everything in our power make even stronger environmental policies to protect our state’s natural resources and economy.

We have been on the defense these last couple of months, but it is important that we are working on smart campus, local and statewide projects promoting sustainability. We are savvy students and we have the ability to make smart campaigns with bipartisan appeal to protect and promote our environment.

MPIRG’s members in the community and on campus have a certain expectation that MPIRG is a strong advocate and leader on cutting edge environmental policy issues. At every campus, one of the largest and strongest task forces is always the environmental task force. We believe that this campaign will resonate well with students and community members.

*Are we working on this now, or have we worked on similar initiatives in the past?*

We are working on some environmental campaigns and have been working on issues relating to the environment since the organizations inception. MPIRG has strong historical ties to the multitude of environmental organization’s and entities in Minnesota. The organization is currently a leading member of the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, Transit Partners, and the Healthy Legacy Coalition. MPIRG has the resources and connections to continue working successfully on environmental campaigns.
How will this campaign help MPIRG grow as an organization?
This campaign will help MPIRG grow because it will provide us with a variety of opportunities on work that we are familiar with and we have lots of resources to expand campaigns. Students are very excited and passionate about environmental campaigns and this will help expand our student base by bringing more students in. By putting a statewide push behind it we have the ability to drive even more student support.

Does this campaign set us up for future work on campus or in the legislature?
This campaign sets us up for work within the legislature on a variety of bills relating to supporting sustainable agriculture, laws around purchasing, recycling and more. This would be a wonderful campaign to work on on campus as well. Most of the campuses already have strong environmental task forces.

Can we achieve concrete victories with this campaign given MPIRG’s resources and the current political climate?
We can achieve concrete victories on campus and throughout the state on this campaign despite the political climate. It is critical that as many groups as possible are defending and pushing an environmental agenda so we can show that this is what the youth in Minnesota want for our future.

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One Year Project Proposals

The One Year Project Proposal authors will have ten minutes to both present and answer questions from Issues and Actions participants. A large group discussion will follow allowing both presenters and participants to critically analyze each proposal. Students vote to prioritize the various projects so that MPIRG can properly allocate resources.

Reforming Campus Food Service
Authors: Angela Laidlaw- Fair Labor Task Force Leader
        Collin Sandoe- Fair Labor Task Force Leader
        Joseph Hartmann- Local and Sustainable Agriculture Task Force Leader
        Stacie Foell- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Cormac Strahan- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Molly Donovan- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Kristian Nyberg- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Jon Troe- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Chris Ferrin- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        KT Lindemann- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Shauna Wimmer- Fair Labor Task Force Member
        Alisha Hennen- MPIRG Board Representative
        Nick Jansen- Fair Labor Task Force Member
**Problem**

As we see it, the need to reform the food service of MPIRG campuses is three-fold.

**Environmental Impact:**

Every day, on campuses around the country millions of tons of food waste from students plates are improperly thrown into the municipal waste stream. These sources of waste are bound to landfills or incineration, creating unnecessary methane or carbon dioxide. Universities around the country are moving to a tray-less cafeteria to reduce the food waste because of its costs and its environmental impact. Additionally, there are significant impacts of conventional food before it hits student’s plates. Especially for rural campuses the costs, both fiscally and environmentally, are high for the food transport. It would be beneficial to focus on getting local foods onto campuses through the food service providers already in place on those campuses. By using more local foods, the gas costs to the company would decrease, allowing them to reallocate those funds to different budget areas. The reduction of gas use will also cut down on the provider’s carbon footprint which is a huge problem for large scale food providers.

We believe that the food service companies that supply and serve at the University of Minnesota system could be significantly more efficient; this includes not only minimizing waste in general, but also the planning and implementation of composting programs on each campus and possible plans to use local producers as suppliers. Increased efficiency in the university food service industry would mean better use of the university budget. We will also be perpetuating poor environmental practices, including excess waste and excess transportation fuel expenditures.

**International Worker’s Rights Violations:**

Based on interviews of International workers of Sodexo done in 2010, NGO TransAfrica reported several instances of “disregard of human rights and dignity of workers.” These include employment conditional on passed pregnancy tests, segregation, safety and wage inadequacies. Executives of food service companies are consistently violation workers rights.

If we do nothing, we will be supporting multinational corporations that commit a variety of human and workers’ rights violations.

**Domestic Worker’s Rights Violations:**

In the United States, Human Rights Watch issued a report based on Sodexo’s labor violations were expressed. “Despite claims of adherence to international standards on workers’ freedom of association, Sodexo launched aggressive campaigns against some of its U.S. employees’ efforts to form unions and bargain collectively.”

In response to the workers rights abuses, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) has recently ramped up a campaign “Kick-out Sodexo”. Early this year, the University of Washington’s Student Labor Action Project - a student led initiative - joined the call for recognition of Sodexo’s worker violations. Under pressure from students, on January 3, 2011 University of Washington Interim President Phyllis Wise, submitted a letter to Sodexo executives, inquiring about the alleged allegations. There has yet to be a response from the corporation. Over 200 student organizations in the US and Canada have registered to take part in the campaign.

Sodexo has been under increasing pressure from unions too, who claim that Sodexo seeks to end collective bargaining for employees. Around 18,000 of Sodexo’s 120,000 employees are unionized. Recently the SEIU
has turned to drastic action against Sodexo for its “anti-union” activity. The company filed suit against the SEIU for its tactics.

The human and workers’ rights violations committed and perpetuated by Sodexo are unacceptable to us as students of a socially-conscious interest group. These are not isolated instances and not specific to Sodexo. Campus workers are regularly being short changed, with pay check being delayed and hours not being properly computed.

In the summer of 2010, the State of New York did a investigative audit of its Public School Food Service provider - Sodexo. They found that Sodexo had been unlawfully pocketing government rebates meant to be passed on to students. New York and Sodexo have settled out of court, and Sodexo has agreed to pay $20 million in response to its practices.

The human and workers’ rights violations committed and perpetuated by Sodexo are unacceptable to us as students of a socially-conscious interest group. These are not isolated instances and not specific to Sodexo. Campus workers are regularly being short changed, with pay check being delayed and hours not being properly computed.

We should take action now because reforming the university food service industry is going to take lots of effort, research, and resources. If we wait, the human and workers’ rights violations and inefficiencies will continue.

**Solution**

Since the problem is threefold, so too is the solution. The solution will be on three fronts.

A.) Calling for more sustainable practices in your cafeteria.

Students should encourage food service corporations to embrace green initiatives on campus. These initiatives include composting, reducing dependence on excessive commodities like trays, the reducing waste, and reducing energy costs.

In addition, universities must mandate local foods to be integrated whenever possible. Because the use of locally produced food reduces the amount of transportation needed, it can significantly decrease transportation costs as well as reduce environmental impacts caused by shipping food great distances. Furthermore, purchasing local foods enriches the local economy and support. Because the use of locally produced food reduces the amount of transportation needed, it can significantly decrease transportation costs as well as reduce environmental impacts caused by shipping food great distances. Furthermore, purchasing local foods enriches the local economy and supports local small business and food producers.

The level of food waste can be lowered by having composting be a part of the companies’ game plan. Composting is a good way to reduce the food waste by making into usable fertilizer. This compost material can be sold back to local farmers who are growing the foods for the campus to use and could lower their cost of growing, which in turn could lower the costs of purchasing their food for the main food provider, saving everybody money in the long run. By keeping production local, it reduces carbon emissions and stimulates local economy.
B.) Holding food service companies accountable.

Corporations need to be held accountable for their international and domestic human rights records. International violations need to have contractual implications.

Students need to make their voices heard in the bidding process for the food service contract. The first step to this goal is research into the chapter’s food service provider. Some company’s have a better track record than others.

Second, talking to administration and finding the number of bidders in the current contract, the length of the contract, and its jurisdiction. After the thorough investigation of the company’s record, you need to ask yourself: does this warrant a contract cut? With national and multinational corporations leading most of our campuses food service, it may be hard to negotiate. When discussing with your administration, ask what needs to be done to complete an audit. When you decide you want to put pressure on the administrators to cut the contract, you can start with small steps like a petition drive, or an education campaign. Next you need to increase the pressure.

(MPIRG conducts campaigns with a reasonable chance for success; this means timeliness is important when initiating a campaign. Yes, there have been labor issues on campus. The administration has recognized that these issues should have been handled better. We all agree that it is bad to neglect paying workers on time. But the administration is less likely to take action when it comes to cutting the contract when we have 14 years left until the contract with Sodexo expires. Asking the university to walk out on a contract now will not go over well with the administration and it is likely they will not consider that option. If we pressure the administration to do what we want, it could backfire on MPIRG. We have an amicable relationship with the administration that we have built up over the last few years. By antagonizing the people with the authority to make the policy change we want, we risk alienating the administration in the future. I agree that any campaign needs to start with small steps, but I think we’re jumping to a disastrous conclusion when we decide our first course of action is to want to cut the contract. Now is not the time for this kind of action.

We need to get the administration on our side if we want change how food service functions. We wrote about strategically aligning ourselves within the student body, but students don’t have the responsibility of cutting the contract; that rests with administrators. I think that it’s wrong to assume that aligning ourselves with the administration means that we have to divorce ourselves from the workers. The staff cares about what happens to students on this campus and if we approach the administration as though they are hostile to our concerns, it’s disrespectful to them at best and it’s detrimental to us in the long run at worst because if we treat the staff poorly, they’re not going to want to help us, and it makes our campaign much harder when we have to fight our own administration to get anything done. MPIRG builds positive campaigns; this means that forge coalitions to gain political attention. The administration has the most political influence on our campus in deciding how we handle our food service contract. If we want to elect change, we should ally ourselves with the people most able to implement the change we want to see.

Before we ask to audit the company or cut the contract, we need to sit down with the administration and assess how they feel about the situation and get a sense for what has been going on at our campus over the last years. If the administration is willing to hear our concerns, then we can start by finding common ground and looking for the ways in which we agree. Administrations don’t want to negative PR, and we may be able to reach a solution that doesn’t involve firing Sodexo employees or a long and drawn out process like an audit or a
campaign to cut the contract. Throughout this process, we should be audio recording what the administration says and keep a record of the stuff we say as well. This will allow us to minimize misunderstandings if we can go back to the source of any miscommunication and have an accurate account of what was said; this way we aren’t misrepresented and the administration can be held accountable. We should let the administration know that we’re concerned about workers rights abuses on campus and look for acceptable ways to remedy this situation. If the administration becomes hostile towards us resists talking to us about the contract in a reasonable way, then we consider a different approach. But as long as the administration is willing to hear about our concerns and consider appropriate solutions, we need to treat them with respect and we need to cooperate.)

C.) Advocating for rights of campus workers.

In order to reform the university food service industry, universities must make an effort to ensure better enforcement of established workers’ rights codified in state and federal laws. We believe it is the job of the students to stand up for the workers’ rights on their campuses. As aforementioned, the problems call for localized solutions such as insisting that local food service employees are consistently paid on time.

The first step to this is exposing the violations and keeping the identity of these workers anonymous. Talking to administration and relay the campus worker violations. File a report with the appropriate government agency. Safety violation - OSHA, gender discrimination EEOC, working conditions - national labor relations board or the ACLU.

Why MPIRG?

Similar to pushing for changes in administrative policy, students on MPIRG campuses have a unique amount of leverage in the food service industry. Food Service Providers accountable to the students because in most cases, they are their biggest consumer.

MPIRG can be incredibly valuable to creating positive change for the university food service industry in a manner that other organizations would be rendered less effective. MPIRG, being a student led organization, has the benefit of focusing on student specific issues. By strategically using our position as university students, we hold a lot more power in the issue of the university food service industry than other concerned parties working to advocate for workers’ rights and the environment. Although this is a university-specific scope, the ramifications for change are vast. Through reform on environmental and labor practices in the university system state-wide in Minnesota, we would not only be significantly reducing carbon emissions and food waste as well as improving working conditions for Minnesotan workers, but we could also pave the way for other states to do the same. MPIRG has always been a leader in creating positive change and this a great way to continue that legacy.

The “Reforming University Food Service” campaign would be relevant to MPIRG members because it relates to student-specific concerns while affecting positive change overall for the environment and workplace conditions in Minnesota. MPIRG has a long history of spearheading key issues.

The University of Minnesota Morris chapter has worked on initiatives related to the environment and workers’ rights in the past and the “Reforming Campus Food Service Industry” campaign would continue to prioritize these issues. Efforts to encourage recycling in the “Greener Minneapolis” campaign relate to the green
initiatives included in the “Reforming University Food Service Industry.” Encouraging recycling and composting in the university food services state-wide could really be seen as an extension of the business recycling initiative included in the “Greener Minneapolis” campaign. Reducing energy expenditures and investing in green energy in food service buildings of Minnesota universities relates to the “Global Warming” campaign, encouraging energy conservation. The “Moving Forward Minnesota” campaign focuses on green transportation and through encouraging local foods usage, transportation costs and fuel usage would greatly be reduced, while simultaneously stimulating local businesses. Efforts to reduce tuition costs could be furthered by the “Reforming University Food Service Industry” campaign by eliminating wasteful practices resulting in higher food costs to the students. MPIRG’s expressed concern for workers’ rights can be seen in our prioritization of sweat-free campus apparel and coalition-building with local unions. By supporting workers in the university food service industry, we would show our appreciation for unions and laborers within our campuses.

The “Reforming Campus Food Service Industry” campaign has potential for expanding the influence of MPIRG. We will expand on previous green initiatives as well as solidify relationships with campus workers, or in some cases, beginning to create these alliances. MPIRG would also be paving the way for other student organizations nation-wide to create positive change in the university food service industry. Any win achieved through our campaign could create a domino effect with other universities and send a clear message to university food service providers that they will be held accountable for their environmental and labor practices. This could all begin with MPIRG.

Conclusion

The “Reforming Campus Food Service Industry” campaign will have incredible potential for future work in the campus setting. During this time of fiscal belt-tightening, it is now more than ever time to look at how our food service providers are spending our money. If an audit is done and found to be in violation of the contract, hold them accountable.

It is the students who have the power to levy against the misguided food service providers of their schools. We are their biggest consumer, and they need to know that we are not going to stand by while they violate human rights, local workers rights, and do nothing about wasteful spending and environmental practices. This is why we need the state of Minnesota working toward a more efficient, justified and fair food service industry.

MPIRG Doesn’t Burn Garbage: Creating a Critical Mass to Support Sustainable Waste Management Now and a Zero Waste Future
Authors: Lara Norkus-Crampton, Concerned Citizen and MPIRG Alumna, and Joshua Winters, Executive Director

Problem
Our current political debate regarding solid waste seems to focus on burning versus landfilleding. There are many fallacies inherent in the choices presented to the public. As the NYPIRG website states\(^1\) – burning garbage does not make it disappear. Burning creates dioxins that are spewed into the air from the stack and toxic ash that must ultimately be landfilled! How is this a "green" solution? Garbage incineration is not a solutions to our waste management problems. In fact, garbage incineration can actually prevent the adoption of more sustainable waste management practices.
Background
In 2009, the Minneapolis Planning Commission denied a Conditional Use Permit that would have allowed Covanta to increase their burning capacity from 1000 tons to 1212 tons per day. Currently, Covanta burns mixed household waste – including a one percent ratio (which means 10 tons) of household hazardous waste per day. Covanta is officially appealing this decision but, as of this writing, has not turned in the necessary data for the MPCA required Environmental Assessment Worksheet. There is also discussion of increasing the burning capacity even further – a doubling has recently been proposed which would move the tons of garbage burned to approximately 2000 tons.

As a result, Covanta is operating without a permit – their last permit expired in 2003. In the meantime, the last Environmental Impact Statement predicting heavy metal contaminant "hot spots" all over the city/region was done in 1986. No comprehensive regional plume study or EIS has been done since then to see if the predictions were correct and who could be actually affected by 25 years of operation. As the MPCA states in their own backyard burning brochure: *Burning Garbage Makes Poison*. Burning creates dioxins and there is no technology that can completely remove dioxins from emissions.

Currently, half of what Covanta burns is recyclable/compostable. Per the Hennepin County contract, Covanta is entitled to burn to capacity – regardless of local recycling/waste diversion rates. Their contract allows them to simply truck in waste from other areas to make up the difference. The negative effect on local air quality, soil and water contamination, and public and environmental health is the same. This also kills any incentive to increase recycling/composting rates. We can do better!

Lay of the Land
There are currently no other organizations seriously pursuing the issue of garbage incineration in Minneapolis. In St. Paul, a group of concerned citizens formed a group called Neighbors Against the Burner. Some of those members have been active in Minneapolis, but by most accounts these efforts are disparate and are coming from various concerned constituencies throughout Minneapolis. To reiterate, no concerted effort has been brought to bear on this issue.

Solution
There needs to be a robust and comprehensive discussion regarding our real choices for waste management and, ultimately, waste source reduction. As Paul Connett says, if in the end we are trying to decide whether to burn or bury a toothbrush, it is time to start talking about designing a better toothbrush that will solve its own life cycle problems. People need to understand what their real choices can be in a zero waste scenario. The health of our environment and our citizens depends on it!

Proposed Public Education Campaign:

- Managing a Facebook type webpage with regular updates, articles, news from around the country, etc. Maybe call it Trash Talk or something like that.
- Keeping an updated data base of the latest science/precedents for rapid response when necessary.
- Sending regular letters to editors, agencies, etc, against incineration.
- Promoting/celebrating recycling, composting. Publicizing demonstration projects that support zero waste.
- Promoting/demanding environmental justice in terms of cumulative contaminants in underserved areas.
- Do our own testing of suspicious areas if the County/City won’t cooperate and publicizing the results if we find anything.
- Videos on Youtube publicizing the issue and any scary soil testing results.
- Try to support communities trying to figure out what is going on so they can understand who/what is working in their interests or not.
• Lobbying the legislature, MPCA, Dayton re: policies supporting diversion strategies for solid waste—
  including prevention/zero waste strategies.
• Making sure that deliberations regarding these policies becomes very public through written and
  social media. Fight smokescreens and greenwashing.
• Try to build working coalitions with other groups, boards, unions, communities. Other cities have
  done this.
• Petition drive for an EIS/Plume Study.
• Help sponsor Zero Waste day activities—like challenging various design departments (engineering,
  industrial engineering, etc) to develop designs for sustainable life cycle products. Develop products
  that won’t end up needing to be burned or buried (or both).

Resource Needs
This would largely be a chapter driven campaign based on interest in the Augsburg College and University of
Minnesota – Twin Cities MPIRG chapters. As such, it would require some of the organizer’s time be
dedicated to supporting the chapters efforts in this campaign. To a lesser extent, this may involve the
Organizing Director (through his involvement on the Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee) and the
Executive Director to monitor the campaign, coordinate pressure on elected officials, and supervise the
strategic direction of the campaign.

Why MPIRG?
We are uniquely poised to continue our work in Minneapolis in the wake of our efforts to establish a
mandatory business recycling ordinance. We have developed key relationships and partnerships that will be
critical as we move forward to educate and advocate for sustainable waste management practices. Perhaps
most importantly, many of our efforts to encourage recycling, composting, or propose waste reduction
strategies are made more difficult when the city has no incentive to move away from the garbage burning
approach to waste management. In addition, garbage burners have impacts on local community garden
initiatives due to the deposition of heavy metals ejected from the burner. As a result, many of the issues
MPIRG works on are made more difficult by the presence of a garbage burner, and we are positioned well to
educate, advocate, and ultimately eliminate an approach to waste management whose time has come and
gone.

1 http://www.nypirg.org/enviro/waste/incineration.html
1 http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/component/option,com_docman/task.doc_view/gid,11355

Business Recycling policy for St. Paul

By: MPIRG’s Field Canvass      Written by: Chris Phoel, Field Manager

Objective: To introduce and pass thru the St. Paul city council a requirement for businesses in St. Paul to
recycle

History of MPIRG and Business Recycling: MPIRG has taken the lead in introducing and working on passing a
business recycling requirement for the city of Minneapolis. The campaign started at last years’ issues and
actions conference, when Adam Luesse, an MPIRG student, introduced a proposal for a Minneapolis business
recycling mandate. He had noticed that a local bar and restaurant around the University of Minnesota Twin
Cities campus and just been throwing away their cans and bottles. After some research, he found that
businesses in Minneapolis were not required to recycle, and that many other businesses were doing the
same as this restaurant was. The proposal was approved by MPIRG’s students and work was started on the policy.

MPIRG has done much research on the issue, from best ways to implement this policy to cost analysis for recycling for businesses, and made a framework for the legislation. Working closely with Minneapolis City Councilman Cam Gordon and his office, we have introduced this initiative with the city council. MPIRG’s Field Canvass has organized door to door in Minneapolis, and the reaction from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. Frankly, the majority of folks were actually shocked to find out that businesses aren’t required to recycle. We have shown this popular support to the city council members, and expect this measure to pass in Minneapolis within the next couple of months.

**Details of the Policy for St. Paul:** This, for now, will be left open for debate as to which route makes most sense for St. Paul. For the Minneapolis policy, the bill requires businesses to set up the infrastructure for recycling (space for bins, etc.) and to contract with a recycling hauler to take away their recyclable material. To check that businesses are complying, the Minneapolis Fire Department will make sure a space is set up for recycling and that it’s being done when they do their building safety inspections. This way, there will be no increased cost to the city or taxpayers. This might be the best option for a policy like this is St. Paul as well, but of course any ideas or alterations that work better for St. Paul are welcome.

In conclusion, we see this as a great policy for MPIRG to work on. We have three great chapters in St. Paul, and this policy can really benefit the city. It is also a policy that we believe we can win on within the next year, as the Minneapolis policy has shown much success thus far. It is also a great tie in with the community; in Minneapolis, community members were so happy that we were working on such a local, beneficial policy for their city. Between our great campus organizing team, field canvass community outreach and a lot of AWESOME student hard work and activism, it should be a victory MPIRG can win on to better our state.

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**MPIRG Stands Against For-Profit Incarceration:**

*Stopping Private Prison Corporations in Minnesota*

Bob Libal, Grassroots Leadership’s Texas Campaigns Coordinator, and Joshua Winters, Executive Director

**Problem**
The U.S.’s over-reliance on incarceration has built a system of for-profit private prisons that have skewed the justice system away from rehabilitation and provided incentives for an ever-increasing prison population. Private prison corporations like Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group (formerly Wackenhut Corrections) spend millions of dollars every year to ensure that private prison interests are met. Minnesota currently has one privately operated prison – the Prairie Correctional Center in Appleton which currently sits empty – but the idea of privatizing Minnesota state prisons has gained steam in this legislative session. Furthermore, the state of California has recently expressed interest in sending California prisoners to the Appleton facility, far from incarcerated people’s loved ones and networks of support.

**Background**
With more than 2.3 million people in prison, the United States has more incarcerated people than any country in the world. The U.S. has about 5% of world’s population, but 25% of the world’s incarcerated population. The incarceration rate has more than quadrupled since 1970. Of those incarcerated, nearly 500,000 are convicted solely of drug crimes. People of color, particularly African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are drastically over-represented in the prison system.
The private prison industry spends millions of dollars each year lobbying federal, state, and local legislative and executive bodies to insure that a steady stream of prisoners and detainees fill its beds. According to an NPR story last year, CCA has used its membership in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to help write harsh anti-immigrant laws like Arizona’s SB 1070 that increase the number of immigrants in private detention centers. The company had previously chaired a criminal justice committee within ALEC that wrote tough-on-crime sentencing legislation.

Private prison corporations have a troubled track record that includes mismanagement, abuse, and higher rates of violence than corresponding public facilities. A study authored by criminologist James Austin showed that, in comparable medium and minimum-security facilities, private prisons had 49% higher rates of prisoner assaults on staff and 65% higher rates of prisoner assaults on other prisoners. For-profit incarceration has received steady criticism from civil rights and faith organizations. The United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, and the Southern Catholic Bishops have all issued statements calling for the abolition of for-profit private prisons.

According to the National Institute of Corrections, Minnesota currently has one of the lowest incarceration rates (and lowest violent crime rates) in the country. Let’s keep it that way! The threat of either privatization of existing state prison facilities or re-opening CCA’s Appleton prison is more real now than it has ever been.

Lay of the Land
The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the trade union that represents correctional officers in Minnesota has strongly opposed privatization of the Minnesota state prison system. However, based on media reports, there are currently no other organizations pursuing an effort to block the re-opening of Appleton facility to house out-of-state prisoners. Nationally, groups like Grassroots Leadership and the Private Corrections Institute can provide resources on private prison industry developments.

Solution
Educating the public on the dangers of correctional privatization can ensure that Minnesota does not follow other states that have turned over their correctional systems to for-profit corporations. Furthermore, highlighting common-sense alternatives to incarceration can encourage lawmakers to keep people out of prison and save taxpayers money.

Proposed Public Education Campaign:

- At key times, authorizing letters to editors, op-eds, etc. against re-opening the Appleton prison or privatization of the state correctional system.
- Managing a Facebook page with regular updates on the private prison industry, and
- Promoting alternatives to incarceration that have contributed to Minnesota’s low incarceration rate and low violent crime rate.
- “Education not Incarceration” materials development to highlight the positive impact that investment in higher education can make as an alternative to increased spending on prisons.
- Lobbying the legislature and corrections department to ensure that the state does not turn over state prisons to private prison corporations.
- Working with California organizations to ensure that California prisoners are not transferred out of state to the Appleton facility.

Resource Needs
This is largely a chapter driven campaign. Of necessity, this may involve a small portion of the organizer’s time to support task forces whose choose to work on this issue. However, since this is generally a public
education campaign, this would not require a significant investment of the organizer’s time. To a lesser extent, the Executive Director may work with students to coordinate testimony on this issue.

**Why MPIRG?**

MPIRG has a long history of social justice, and criminal justice is a key aspect of what constitutes a just society. As such, it fits into the current framework of social justice issues we work on. Furthermore, we have community members in districts across the state who can be activated to be voices in their local newspapers and add media attention to the issue. Our task forces can be a driving force to educate students and their local communities on the issue. Students and community members can be the backbone of a public education campaign to highlight awareness and ultimately prevent the entrance of for-profit prisons in Minnesota.

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**Campus and Community Initiatives**

Campus and Community Initiative authors will have 10 minutes to both present and answer questions. Campus and Community Initiatives are not voted on.

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**Solidarity Forever**

Author: Matt Abbott, Saint Paul Campus Organizer

**Problem**

What’s disgusting? Union busting! What’s outrageous? Sweatshop wages!

People have been exploited since hierarchical divisions of labor came into being in the course of human history. American history is certainly no exception. While there have undoubtedly been advancements in workers’ rights in the United States, there is no shortage of work to be done on this front. Workers rights also has countless intersections with sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, immigrant status, ability, religion, and an array of other issues pertaining to workers’ identities.

**Background**

With recent national attention on the union-busting legislation in Wisconsin, we have to ask ourselves: is this just a flash in the pan or are folks in this for the long haul? Is fighting for workers rights something we go to Madison to do for a weekend, or are we committed to building collective power in solidarity with working people in our communities, in our country, and worldwide?

**Issue**

MPIRG has historically been involved in workers’ rights issues, including working with the Minnesota AFL-CIO in the 1972 to ban asbestos in building materials, establishing a Code of Conduct in 2002 to combat sweatshop conditions in the production collegiate apparel, bringing Fair Trade coffee to our campus dining
facilities, cutting university contracts with workers rights abuser Russell Athletic in 2009, and working with campus community union members on contract disputes.

There are currently Economic Justice and Social Justice Task Forces at MPIRG campuses that are taking on these issues in a number of ways. There are both staff and student workers at every MPIRG campus, in addition to other workers in every campus community and in the factories that produce materials used and sold at our schools. Additionally, policy addressed by local, state and national governments can have an enormous affect on workers’ rights, in the form of trade agreements, pay equity requirements based on gender, treatment of LGBTQI working people, immigration and customs enforcement, and labor and unionizing laws.

**Lay of the Land**

There are numerous community groups that MPIRG could partner with on this issue. Unions, worker centers, trade policy coalitions, and apparel watchdog organizations are but some of them. The work ranges from fighting for better union contracts to fighting specific examples of exploitation, from changing federal trade dynamics to combating sweatshop conditions in the global garment industry. Many of these groups happily ally with MPIRG on these issues. There are occasionally other student groups that take on such issues, though this varies campus-to-campus. Likely opponents to such efforts include free trade advocates, chambers of commerce, don’t-rock-the-boat campus administrators and Scott-Walker-minded politicians.

**Solution**

There are many groups to partner with on this front: unions and workers on our campuses, in our communities, and in the factories producing items bought and sold on campus. There are also many policy level factors that could improve workers’ lives. One important thing to keep in mind with this work is that we should be taking our cues and solution goals from the working people affected by conditions and policy; adapting an attitude that better working conditions are something for us to envision and prescribe separate from those affected is not the same thing as working in with folks to create change. This is solidarity work, not charity work. That said, many of us are affected by workers rights policies, whether though employment at a campus dining center, working in-and-out of state, being subject to gendered-pay discrepancies and treatment on the job, or being denied other work-related rights due to identity.

**Resource needs**

The most basic need for this work is partnering with worker-led organizations that are actively organizing around these issues. This requires students to make time and travel arrangements to attend union meetings or meetings of community labor groups (e.g, CTUL). The scope of such projects varies by campaign, ranging from a semester (contract negotiation, etc) to several years (trade policy, DSP-esque campus policy, etc). More broadly, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a fantastic resource for this work. They have national conferences where student organizations from around the county do issue briefings and skills trainings. These conferences require a registration fee and travel costs. In the past, union allies have partially funded MPIRG students attending USAS conferences.
Why MPIRG

Colleges and universities are large economic entities that employ hundreds of people, do millions of dollars worth of business, and train the aspects of tomorrow’s workforce. They are also uniquely subject to student pressure to do the right thing, and set new standards for labor. MPIRG exists to build collective power and a strong voice among students and young people, and MPIRG students have both the efficacy and agency to change the status quo in these university policies. Our track record in this arena speaks for itself, and there is excitement and passion to advance this work today and in the years to come.

Sustainable Agriculture in Rice County

Author: Ben Hellerstein, Carleton MPIRG co-chair

Problem

More land is used for agriculture than for anything else in the United States. The way that our food is produced has a profound impact on the natural environment, the health of consumers and farm workers, and the economic well-being of small farmers and rural communities.

Pesticides used in food production contaminate our water supply and increase the risk of many types of cancer. Fertilizer runoff pollutes Minnesota’s lakes and streams, making them unsuitable for fishing and swimming. Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are a major contributor to global climate change.

Farmers are squeezed by a system in which they receive only 20 cents of every dollar spent on food, the rest going to large seed and chemical corporations and other middlemen. Farmland has become concentrated in ever fewer hands, resulting in the depopulation and economic decline of many small rural communities. In Rice County, the number of farms has decreased by more than 20% over the last twenty years, and the number of farmers under the age of 45 has fallen by nearly half.

We must find a way to feed ourselves that is conducive to the long-term well-being of our planet and the people who live on it. Here in Rice County, farming is still an integral part of the local economy, but suburban and exurban development is rapidly eating away at the cornfields that surround our small towns. If we act now, we can build a better agricultural system that protects the environment and human health and provides a fair and sustainable living to local farmers.

Background

Many of the policy decisions that affect the way our food is grown and distributed are made on a federal level. The Farm Bill, renewed by Congress every five to seven years, provides funding for a wide range of nutrition, rural development, research, and conservation programs. It also allocates billions of dollars a year to subsidies for farmers who grow commodity crops like corn, soybeans, and cotton. Although many observers blame the Farm Bill for encouraging overproduction, pushing out small farmers, and fostering
unsustainable growing methods, each provision in the Farm Bill is fiercely defended by industry groups. Substantial change on the federal level seems unlikely, at least in the near future.

The slow pace of progress on federal farm policy has led many advocates to ask whether policies on the state or local level could also support the growth of a more sustainable and fair food system. A number of city governments and school districts have adopted local food purchasing policies that require government institutions that serve food to source some of their purchases from local farmers. In 2009, the State of Illinois passed a law to require institutions to purchase 20% of their food from in-state farmers by the year 2020. It is important to note that while local food purchasing policies help to keep money circulating within the community and support local farmers, these policies typically do not require farmers to use sustainable growing techniques or fair labor practices.

Another approach is to encourage farmers to switch to organic production methods. In 2005, the Woodbury County, IA, Board of Supervisors created an Organic Conversion Policy to help farmers make this transition. The policy provides five years of county property tax rebates to farmers who agree to obtain organic certification. Organic farming is typically more profitable in the long term, but the transition period often places a large financial burden on the farmer. Reducing the burden associated with the organic transition can encourage more farmers to adopt organic methods of production, strengthening the local economy and promoting the health of humans and the natural environment. In 2009, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture created a similar program to provide financial support to farmers transitioning to organic methods.

We are fortunate to have a strong community of sustainable farmers and sustainable food advocates in Rice County. There is a chapter of the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, a natural foods co-op, and a food activist organization in Northfield. Nearly two dozen organic farms, featuring a wide diversity of crops at scales ranging from a few acres to a few hundred acres, are scattered throughout the county. We are the only group currently working on food policy in Rice County, but we believe that given the widespread interest in this issue, our campaign has the potential to generate a high level of community support.

Solution

We are working to pass an Organic Conversion Policy in Rice County, modeled after the program created in Woodbury County, IA. This policy will provide a five-year county property tax rebate to qualified Rice County farmers who transition their land from conventional to certified-organic production. Current Rice County farmers, as well as new farmers looking to settle in Rice County, would be eligible.

The Organic Conversion Policy will defray some of the costs associated with the organic transition, and encourage more farmers to make the switch to methods that are better for our economy and our health. It will empower Rice County farmers to build their own thriving sustainable businesses from the ground up, and it will reduce the negative environmental and health impacts of agricultural practices in our community.

Why MPIRG?

The sustainability and fairness of our food system is an issue that has grown tremendously in prominence over the past few years. College students are an important part of this movement. On the Carleton campus, a number of student groups work on food and agriculture issues, but their work is focused mostly on campus: maintaining and expanding a campus farm, or encouraging our food service provider to improve its
purchasing practices. While students acknowledge that state and federal policy play an important role in shaping our food system, most are unsure about how to engage in changing policy or whether we, as students, can really make a difference in legislation.

Similarly, in and around Northfield, many residents are interested in sustainable agriculture, but their work has so far lacked a policy dimension. By moving forward with a compelling campaign to accomplish concrete and significant policy changes, we can tap into this base of campus and community support, and raise MPIRG’s profile as an organization that makes a real difference in public policy.