November 16, 2015

Mr. Eugene I. Lee Jr.
President & Chief Executive Officer
Darden Restaurants
1000 Darden Center Drive
Orlando, FL 32837

Dear Mr. Lee,

The undersigned environmental, health, animal welfare, consumer, food and worker organizations urge Darden Restaurants to ensure its food purchasing and management practices are sustainable and healthy by shifting what it means to serve Good Food. Good Food supports the well-being of Darden customers, its workers, farmers, animals and our environment.

Good Food embraces more plant-based foods and fewer animal products, while improving the environmental, animal welfare, and social conditions under which food is produced. Good Food must also improve the conditions and ensure dignity for the workers who grow, pick, cook and serve our food, as defined by the vision of ROC-UNITED and Darden employees as part of the "Dignity at Darden" campaign.

Specifically, we ask Darden to ensure at least 20% of its food purchases adhere to the following guidelines by 2020, based on the Good Food Purchasing Policy[1]:

1. **Local Economies**: Purchase food at fair prices from local and regional small and medium-sized food producers;
2. **Environmental Sustainability**: Reduce meat and dairy purchases by 20 percent, including serving smaller portion sizes and adding meat/dairy-free entree options; sourcing from organically certified food producers (including, no factory farms/CAFOs);
3. **Animal Welfare**: Source meat from producers that adhere to verifiable high-welfare standards: Animal Welfare Approved, Global Animal Partnership (at least step 2) and/or Certified Humane Raised and Handled;
4. **Good Nutrition:** Include generous portions of fruits and vegetables, legumes, whole grains; reduce salt, added sugar, fat, and red and processed meat; and
5. **A Valued Workforce:** Ensure living wage and sustainable working conditions, both in your supply chain and for all the employees in your restaurants.

We also ask Darden to commit to ensuring that 100 percent of meat and poultry served is raised without the routine use of antibiotics.

By making these changes, Darden can help Americans eat healthier while encouraging better food production practices and building a thriving business that can reduce costs and mitigate risk. By shifting its menu toward Good Food principles, Darden can also meet meeting growing consumer demand for more sustainable food and address increasing concerns about the food safety, animal welfare, health and environmental impacts associated with meat consumption.

Americans consume significantly more meat than recommended by USDA guidelines and far more than the rest of the world.[i] Restaurants like Darden can contribute to this overconsumption by offering meals

[1] The Good Food Purchasing Policy was approved by the LA City Council and LA Unified School District in 2012 to govern those entities' purchasing practices (including 127 million meals at LAUSD).

with portion sizes larger than the USDA recommended serving sizes (e.g. the 2010 Guidelines recommend no more than 1.8 ounce servings a day of red meat).[ii] High consumption of meat, especially red and processed meat, is associated with increased risks of heart disease,[iii] diabetes[iv] and cancer[v]. Both meat and dairy production use significant energy-intensive chemical inputs and large amounts of water, and are responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions, air and water pollution and a stunning 70 to 80 percent of all antibiotics use. This misuse of antibiotics contributes to the rise of antibiotic resistant infections in humans.

By taking steps to reduce overall meat and dairy purchases by serving smaller portions sizes and offering more vegan options, Darden can help improve public health, lower greenhouse gas emissions, reduce pressure on scarce water resources and reduce food waste, all while reducing volatility in its supply chain and improving the company's bottom line.

Purchasing and serving less and meat and cheese and more plant-based foods will free resources up for Darden to respond to growing consumer demand for *better* meat and dairy products that do not rely on the routine use of antibiotics, hormones, chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides. Meat and dairy raised in sustainable, organic, humane and well managed pasture-based systems can better protect natural resources and biodiversity and enhance soil and water quality[vi,vii,viii] while also improving public health and providing safer conditions for workers.

By increasing purchases of food from local and regional, small and mid-scale producers and paying fair prices, Darden will increase opportunities for farmers, strengthen the local economy, provide fresher food, attract more customers, protect precious farmland and support a more resilient food system.

We also urge Darden to treat its workers with dignity, including paying a living wage so that they too can afford a healthier diet and a lifestyle that sustains their well being. As a leader in fast casual dining, Darden has a unique opportunity and responsibility to use its considerable purchasing power to shift how food is produced, including the conditions for those who produce and serve it.

Ensuring that 20 percent of your food meets the Good Food Principles will be good for the health of Darden's customers, employees, and the planet. Darden will also be rewarded by the millions of eaters who increasingly care about how their food was produced.

As a leader in fast casual dining, Darden can and should be a leader in shifting how food is produced, including the conditions for those who produce and serve it. Ensuring that 20 percent of your food meets the Good Food Principles will benefit the health of Darden's customers, the planet and employees — the people who are the face of your company and vital to its success. Darden will also be rewarded by the millions of eaters who increasingly care about how their food was produced.

Please contact Kari Hamerschlag, Senior Program Manager, Food and Technology Program at Friends of the Earth (khamerschlag@foe.org or 510-207-7257) by December 10th to schedule a time to meet with a smaller group of our organizations to discuss these issues.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response and hope to be able to highlight your company as an industry leader.

Sincerely,

Cathy Liss, Animal Welfare Institute
Nelson Carasquillo, CATA (The Farmworker Support Committee)
Robert Gronski, Catholic Rural Life

Stephanie Feldstein, Center for Biological Diversity
Charles Margolis, Center for Environmental Health
Andrew Kimbrell, Center for Food Safety
Caroline Farrell, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
Michael Jacobson, Center for Science in the Public Interest
Sriram Madhusoodanan, Corporate Accountability International
Barbara Shipman, Cottage House
Michele Simon, Eat Drink Politics
Nicola Milgrom, Ecology Center
Katie Cantrell, Factory Farming Awareness Coalition/Green Monday
Kerstin Lindgren, Fair World Project
Jim Slama, FamilyFarmed
Ellen Bravo, Family Values @ Work
Andrew deCoriolis, Farm Forward
Tirso Moreno, Farmworker Association of Florida
Patty Lovera, Food and Water Watch
Jose Oliva, Food Chain Workers Alliance
Dave Murphy, Food Democracy Now!
Ocean Robbins, Food Revolution Network
Danielle Nierenberg, Food Tank
Vani Hari, FoodBabe.com
Kalpana Krishnamurthy, Forward Together
Kari Hamerschlag, Friends of the Earth
Patti Wood, Grassroots Environmental Education
Alisa Gravitz, Green America
Gary Cohen, Health Care Without Harm
Pete Huff, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Judy Gearheart, International Labor Rights Forum
Robert Lawrence, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Lynn Utesch, Kewanee Citizens Advocating for Responsible Environmental Stewardship
Pam Koch, Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Columbia University
Ben Burkett, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives
Amy Little, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Katherine Paul, Organic Consumers Association
Ashley Schaeffer Yildiz, Rainforest Action Network
Anim Steel, Real Food Challenge
Anna Lappe, Real Food Media
Saru Jayaraman, ROC-United
Matthew Dimock, Roots of Change
Lorette Picciano, Rural Coalition
Mary Kay Henry, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Richard McCarthy, Slow Food USA
Kendra Kimbirauskas, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project
Will Fantle, The Cornucopia Institute
Bruce Friedrich, The Good Food Institute
Philip Hamilton, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
John Oberg, Vegan Outreach
Patricia Orlinski, West Valley Neighborhoods Coalition

cc:

Jeffrey C. Smith, Chairman of the Board
David George, President, Olive Garden
Todd Burrowes, President, LongHorn Steakhouse
Rick Cardenas, SVP, Chief Strategy Officer
Doug Milanes, SVP, Chief Supply Chain Officer
Rich Jeffers, Director, Media Relations & External Communications
Kristine Young, Sustainability Manager
Jessica Dinon, Manager, PR & Communications

---

[i] Speedy, AW. (2003). Global Production and Consumption of Animal Source Foods. *Journal of Nutrition*
[ii] USDA and HHS (2010), Dietary Guidelines for Americans
[iii] Pan A1, Sun Q, Bernstein AM, Schulze MB, Manson JE, Stampfer MJ, Willett WC, Hu FB. (2012) Red Meat Consumption and Mortality: Results from 2 Perspective Cohort Studies
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22412075
[iv] Pan A., Sun Q., Bernstein A. M., Schulze M. B., Manson J. E., Willett W. C., et al. (2011). Red meat consumption and risk of type 2 diabetes: 3 cohorts of US adults and an updated meta-analysis. *Am. J. Clin. Nutr.*
[v] Cross AJ, Leitzmann MF, Gail MH, Hollenbeck AR, Schatzkin A, et al. (2007) A Prospective Study of Red and Processed Meat Intake in Relation to Cancer Risk. *PLoS Med.*
[vi] Poudel DD, Horwath WR, Lanini WT, Temple SR, van Bruggen AHC. (2002). Comparison of soil N availability and leaching potential, crop yields and weeds in organic, low-input and conventional farming systems in northern California. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment.*
[vii] Dalgaard T, Halberg N, Kristensen IS. (1998). Can organic farming help to reduce N-losses? *Nutrient Cycling in Agroecosystems.*
[viii] Bulluck LR, Brosius M, Evanylo GK, Ristaino JB. (2002). Organic and synthetic fertility amendments influence soil microbial, physical and chemical properties on organic and conventional farms. *Applied Soil Ecology.*