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Faculty Union & Vermont Fair Food Campaign Note UVM's Obligation to Approve Changes to Food Workers' Benefits, Call on UVM to Require Fair Benefits for Sodexo Employees

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Sodexo, the contractor engaged by the University of Vermont and Vermont State Colleges to provide campus food services, has plans to make significant changes to its employee benefits policies and working conditions.

Article 7.2 of the contract between UVM and Sodexo, obtained from the University by United Academics, UVM's faculty union, states that "Sodexo [sic] shall not, without [the] University's prior approval, make any substantial change in wages, fringe benefits, or working conditions of non-management Food Service employees, unless required by applicable law." (see following page)

Sodexo's proposed changes in full-time status of its Vermont employees constitute a very "substantial change in fringe benefits," including the loss of employer-paid health-care coverage.

Sodexo has withdrawn its earlier claim that these changes in health-care coverage are being made in order to comply with the Affordable Care Act, saying now that the changes are to "maintain competitiveness" (Burlington Free Press, "Obamacare cited as reason for benefits cut," 10/3/13).

Additionally, a recent change in Sodexo's sick-leave policy (dated February 2012) provides that an employee calling in sick more than six days in one year will be terminated, a policy which we believe constitutes a "substantial change in working conditions."

United Academics and the Vermont Fair Food Campaign therefore call on UVM to exercise its ethical and contractual responsibility by requiring that Sodexo maintain current employee benefits and institute a humane and prudent sick-leave policy that will protect both its workers and customers.

We urge UVM President Sullivan to make a statement to the campus community that any future contract for food services at the University of Vermont will ensure benefitted livable wage employment, including fully-funded health coverage and paid sick leave, for workers.

If Sodexo's responses do not bring it into compliance with these fundamental conditions of fairness, we call on UVM to seek a vendor that treats workers fairly when Sodexo's contract expires in July 2014, with provisions for a fair and just transition for current Sodexo employees including opportunities for them to retain their positions.

7.2 Sodexo Non-Management Employees. All non-management Food Service employees shall be Sodexo Employees. Sodexo shall consider University's employee policies and practices when establishing policies and practices for Sodexo employees, particularly as University policies relate to hiring, compensation, benefits, termination and disciplinary actions. Sodexo shall not, without University's prior approval, make any substantial change in wages, fringe benefits or working conditions of non-management Food Service employees, unless required by applicable law, regulation, ordinance or court order. It shall be Sodexo's responsibility to inform all of its employees that they are clearly Sodexo employees, and not employees of University. Each party shall assume its legally mandated responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1970, any regulations or standards promulgated there under, and any equivalent Vermont law.