

Food & Dining Services

The purchasing, preparation, consumption, and disposal of food have an effect on the environment, the health of students, and the economic strength of the College. Therefore, food is inherently tied to the College's commitment to sustainability. The College's sourcing of foods affects environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity, toxicity, and animal welfare; the transportation and preparation of foods affects energy and water consumption; and the disposal of food contributes to economic and physical waste. The Sustainability Committee therefore aims to identify and execute ways to minimize the College's negative impact on these issues and implement methods that will be both environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable.

Dining at Wellesley

Wellesley College contracts with AVI, locally known as Wellesley Fresh, to operate most of its dining services. With the exception of the College Club restaurant and two student-run co-operatives (El Table and Café Hoop), Wellesley Fresh handles all aspects of dining at Wellesley. Wellesley Fresh has already begun addressing the sustainability of its practices and is open to implementing more sustainable practices in the future.

All 2,500 Wellesley College students, with the exception of a small number of those who live off campus or live in co-operatives, are on the College's dining plan. The dining plan requires students to pay an equal, uniform cost and gives students access to a buffet-style selection of foods. Students are not limited in the number of times they may enter the dining hall or how much food they can take.

There are five dining halls located in Pomeroy, Bates, Tower, Stone Davis, and the Bae Pao Lu Campus Center. Pomeroy strictly serves vegetarian and kosher items, and the Campus Center is the only facility where students have to swipe their One-cards. These facilities are open and accessible from 7:30am to 7:00pm on weekdays, with extended hours at the Stone Davis and Bae Pau Lu Chow Campus Center. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner hot-entrees are served during specific time intervals. A salad bar and cold items are accessible all day long. Four out of the five dining halls are open on weekends. It is against school policy for food to be taken out of the dining halls, but this is currently a common practice, and to-go containers are not available. Students receive eight guest passes per semester for these dining halls.

Prepared foods and packaged items are offered at three other facilities operated by Wellesley Fresh: the Collins Café, the Leaky Beaker, and the Emporium. These facilities are not included in the dining plan, require payment for their products, and have more limited hours than the dining halls.

The Committee's ultimate vision for sustainable dining is to work with Dining Services to maximize the amount of food purchased that are in-season from local or regional farms that minimize pesticide use or are from sustainable fisheries, to serve healthy and nutritious meals that have low energy and water footprints, and to produce little to no food and non-food waste.

Main Issues/Primary Goals

Reduce the College's footprint by:

1. creating a multi-stakeholder Food Committee to implement the goals of this Sustainability Plan,
2. creating a better system for collecting more food related data and information,
3. increasing sustainable food and utensil purchases, and
4. decreasing overall food and utensil purchases and waste generation.

How We're Doing

Much of the work done by the Food and Dining Services sector of the Sustainability Committee has been focused on identifying what information is necessary to understand current policies and practice on campus. This is the first and vital step in evaluating our strengths and weaknesses with regard to sustainability, and beginning to target areas for improvement. Current policies are discussed in four sections below, which include summaries of how food is categorized currently, where we are with respect to sustainable purchasing, where we are with respect to decreasing overall purchasing, and current and potential waste disposal procedures. Raw data about purchases and waste disposal costs are being processed to provide a more comprehensive picture of current sustainability practices. A new and ongoing Food Committee will need to carry on the charge of developing short and long term goals, specific strategies for reaching those goals, and methods for monitoring progress and adapting targets as needed.

How are we categorizing food right now?

Through a collaboration between Dining Services, the Office of Sustainability, and the Sustainability Committee, Wellesley College has begun to collect data on the 'sustainability' of its food purchases. The Sustainability Committee contributed by creating a definition for what types of food can be considered 'sustainable.' It pulled largely from the nationwide movement on college campuses called Real Food Challenge, and then appropriately modified the definitions to fit Wellesley College.

As defined by this committee, the College defines sustainable food as food items that meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- Local
 - Produce: grown within 250 miles from Wellesley College.
 - All other foods: processed/prepared within 250 miles from Wellesley College AND/OR (b) contains only ingredients grown/produced within 250 miles from Wellesley College
- Fair
 - Fair Trade Certified
 - Domestic Fair Trade Certified
 - Rainforest Alliance Certified
- Humane
 - AGA grass-fed
 - Pasture raised

- 100% grass-fed
 - Certified Humane Raised and Handled
 - Cage-free
- Sustainable Seafood
 - Marine Stewardship Council Certified
 - Aquaculture Certification Council Certified
 - Seafood Watch Guide "Best Choices" or "Good Alternatives"
- Protected Harvest Certified
- Food Alliance Certified
- USDA Certified Organic

Additionally, food items will not be considered sustainable if: (1) information is available that indicates that confinement/battery cages, child labor, slave labor, or indentured servitude are used in the production/processing of the items, (2) information is available that indicates that food items qualified as sustainable under a certain characteristic are not actually in keeping with the intention of that characteristic (e.g. a locally grown produce item transported to campus via a distribution center that is not local), or (3) they contain harmful additives.

Dining Services has contributed to the College's effort to quantify the sustainability of our food purchases by providing line item food purchasing data that are currently being analyzed by student interns working for the Office of Sustainability. This joint effort will help the College identify the baseline level of sustainable food purchasing so that it can set reasonable goals for future purchasing.

How are we doing with respect to increasing sustainable food and utensil purchases?

For the past few weeks, we have been compiling data from line item listings provided by Wellesley Fresh to establish the percentages of sustainable food and utensil purchases across categories. Once this process has been completed (by mid-October), we will be in a position to evaluate how well we are doing currently. That will give us a baseline to establish specific goals, by category, for increasing sustainable purchases.

We currently have working definitions for sustainability, as well as general policy statements from food providers on campus. Those definitions and policies for purchasing are included below (AVI Fresh, 2015):

Purchasing

- *Meat:*
 - A majority of beef and pork used in Wellesley Fresh operations come from Niman Ranch and is therefore free of hormones, antibiotics, and nitrates.
 - Niman Ranch also ensures that the cattle and pigs are raised humanely and emphasizes sustainable practices.
- *Seafood:*

- A majority of seafood purchased for the campus is either harvested locally or certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, and is evaluated by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute for sustainable harvesting practices.
- Wellesley Fresh also participates in the Red's Best Seafood Program to bring sustainably harvested local fish to the College.
- *Coffee:*
 - All coffee in the dining halls on campus provided through Wellesley Fresh is certified fairtrade and organic (with the exception of Starbucks and Peet's coffee).
- *Sugar:*
 - Wellesley Fresh now uses cane sugar almost exclusively in dining halls and in baking recipes. The sugar supplier is able to use the cane fiber to generate electricity to power their operations.

In addition, Wellesley Fresh has committed to purchase a number of items from local suppliers as available, including seafood, milk, ice cream, bread, and seasonal produce.

How are we doing with decreasing overall food and utensil purchases?

We have not had information about previous baseline levels, nor over time data to use to measure whether overall food and utensil purchases have decreased in recent years. With the baseline data mentioned above, however, it will be possible to set specific targets and develop strategies for specific decreases. Doing so will involve ongoing work by a standing Food Committee that will evaluate the feasibility and implications of possible changes designed to decrease purchases within different categories.

How are we doing with respect to waste management?

An overarching infrastructural feature of dining services on campus is that there are five separate dining halls. Each dining hall must prepare a range of meal options at each location without knowing exactly how many students will choose to go where. This situation influences the sustainability of our food system on campus in a number of ways, but particularly affects the amount of waste produced by the system. A committee charged with evaluating several aspects of Dining Services, including a possible consolidation of some dining halls, has formed recently.

Another important feature of our food system on campus is that in most dining locations, students are not required to swipe their OneCards to enter and eat a meal. This means that Dining Services does not have data on how many students (or others) eat where, which is valuable information when planning meals with waste reduction in mind.

A 2013 student report estimates that Wellesley College wastes 220 metric tons of food annually (Environmental Studies 300 Capstone Course, 2013). Due to a recent Massachusetts ban on organic waste disposal for institutions producing over one ton of food waste weekly, the College is mandated to compost its food waste (Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, 2014). To

comply with this ban, Wellesley College composts pre- and post-consumer food waste as well as biodegradable, greenware products like paper plates and compostable utensils from dining operations on campus (Willoughby & Bort, 2014). Organic and biodegradable waste is collected weekly and sent to an industrial composting facility in Marlborough, MA, WeCareEnvironmental, about forty miles away (Environmental Studies 300 Capstone Course, 2013). In the Fall 2014 semester alone, roughly 27,000 pounds of pre- and post-consumer waste was sent for composting (C. Tyger, Resident Director of Food Service, personal communication 2015). Separate from, but related to composting, Dining Services recycles cooking oil used by dining services by selling it for conversion to biodiesel.

To minimize waste entering the composting stream, Dining Services intentionally prepares and cooks food in small batch sizes across the dining hall system. To help consumers reduce waste, trays must be requested in dining halls rather than being readily available, which encourages people to take only what they think they will eat and reduces water since there is less to go through the dishwasher.

Dining Services also recycles office supplies, such as paper and ink cartridges as well as other typically recycled items on campus like bottles, cans, and cardboard. Silverware, plates, cups and napkins used in the dining halls are mostly greenware, which can be composted. Finally, though patrons rarely take advantage of it, discounts are offered at the Collins Cafe, the Leaky Beaker and the Emporium if patrons bring their reusable mugs.

As mentioned earlier, the College Club does not contract with Wellesley Fresh, but they too have implemented a few waste reduction measures. They donate their organic waste, between 200 and 250 pounds per week, to Weatherbury Farm in Natick, MA, and their leftover food, around 25 pounds per week, to the Metrowest Harvest Shelter (Office of Sustainability, 2015).

As we process the currently available data, it is clear that developing a comprehensive Sustainability Plan for Dining Services is both a high priority and a long-term endeavor. Below we describe recommended strategies across three phases of plan development and implementation.

Recommended Strategies

Phase 1 = Within 2 years of plan being adopted

Phase 2 = Within 5 years of plan being adopted

Phase 3 = Within 10 years of plan being adopted

*SUST = Sustainability Committee

1. Create a multi-stakeholder Food Committee to implement the goals of this Sustainability Plan

Issue	Strategy	Responsible Party	Status	Phase
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FD1.1	Create a multi-stakeholder Food Committee to implement the goals of the Sustainability Plan and engage with a variety of sustainability-related issues.	Dining Services, Office of Sustainability, SUST	Planned	1
FD1.2	Create a comprehensive Sustainable Food Policy.	Dining Services, Office of Sustainability, Sustainability Committee	Planned	1

2. Create a better system for increased food related data and information.

Issue	Strategy	Responsible Party	Status	Phase
FD2.1	Collect data annually on food purchases.	Dining Services, Office of Sustainability	In Progress	1
FD2.2	Create baseline of current food purchases based on categories such as local, organic, and Fair Trade.	Dining Services, Office of Sustainability	Planned	1
FD2.3	Evaluate the sustainability of food purchases, waste, and practices through regular audits of Dining Services data.	Office of Sustainability	In Progress	1
FD2.4	Revise ongoing strategies based on regular audits.	Food Committee	Planned	2

3. Increasing sustainable food and utensil purchases.

Issue	Strategy	Responsible Party	Status	Phase
FD3.1	Include sustainability goals, benchmarks, and timetables in the Dining Contract for campus food services.	Office of Finance and Administration, Dining Services, Office of Sustainability	Planned	1

Information in the contract, particularly sustainability goals, benchmarks, and timetables should be made available to the campus community while sensitive financial information is still kept confidential.

FD3.2	Set clear and achievable percentage increases in sustainable purchases to be met by 2020, 2025 and beyond	Office of Finance and Administration, Dining Services, Office of Sustainability, Food Committee	Planned	3
FD3.3	Promote vegetarian diet/reduced meat products consumption through educational outreach programs.	Office of Sustainability, Interested Student Groups	In Progress	1
FD3.4	Advertise local and sustainable main dishes in dining halls and online menu.	Dining Services	In Progress	2

4. Reduce the College's footprint by decreasing overall food and utensil purchases and waste generation.

Issue	Strategy	Responsible Party	Status	Phase
FD4.1	Consider reducing the number of dining halls in order to decrease energy use, increase food preparation efficiency, and reduce food waste.	Office of Student Life, Office of Finance and Administration	In Progress	1

As noted above, a committee has been created to further explore this issue and the feasibility of changing the number of dining halls. If this strategy was to be pursued, community engagement must be sought out and included in the decision.

FD4.2	Educate students during orientation week about proper food disposal in dining halls.	Office of Sustainability, Dining Services	In Progress	1
FD4.3	Encourage less food waste through student-oriented competitions.	Dining Services	Planned	1
FD4.4	Purchase and utilize environmentally friendly cleaners and detergents throughout all food service operations.	Dining Services	Planned	2
FD4.5	Increase advertising and/or discount for reusable mug program.	Dining Services	Planned	1

FD4.6	Enforce current rules and regulations surrounding dishes and utensils leaving the dining halls.	Dining Services, student body	In Progress	1
FD4.7	Explore to-go containers to reduce the loss of dishes and utensils as well as the use of paper cups.	Office of Sustainability, Dining Services, Food Committee	Planned	2

Financial Implications

It is difficult to be specific about the financial implications of meeting the goals outlined above, largely because many of the details have yet to be decided. In general, environmentally sound and sustainable food purchases often carry a 15-20% price premium, although this is not always the case (Committee on Sustainability, 2010). Reducing consumption of meat and some dairy products would also lower purchasing costs, but whether those cost reductions would offset the increased price of sustainable food across the board is currently unclear.

Food waste reduction efforts, in contrast, are likely to save money both in terms of lower overall food expenditures, and reductions in the cost of waste disposal (because there would less disposal required). Consolidation of the dining halls would lower energy, water usage and labor costs, and would be likely to further lower waste disposal cost because it would be easier to estimate the number of diners per meal and gauge amounts accordingly. Any efforts to reduce dish loss would lower costs since Wellesley Fresh currently spends roughly \$50,000 a year to replace lost dishware and silverware. Research is ongoing into the relative costs of reusable containers and the feasibility of changing student behavior in this domain. Further cost efficiencies might be expected to the extent that food waste from dining services can contribute to compost programs on campus.

Waste reduction efforts primarily require time, commitment and persistence on the part of those working to motivate and educate students about sustainability, as opposed to substantial financial costs. Those efforts, however, will require ongoing support for the Office of Sustainability overall.

Climate Implications

The food system impacts climate change in a number of ways: through food production, packaging and processing, transportation, and consumption as well as the waste products from each stage. Each of these stages results in greenhouse gas emissions either directly through fossil fuel use and livestock or indirectly through land use changes and degradation of organic waste. Wellesley College can reduce our climate impact by sourcing food from local and sustainable vendors, minimizing waste in the preparation and consumption of food, offering vegetarian and vegan options at meals, and educating students and others about the climate impacts of their food system.

Potential Student Involvement

Food on campus intimately affects students' quality of life. There are many avenues for students to help create a more sustainable food system at Wellesley:

- Food Reps in each residence hall connect House Council to Dining Services. Reps can better inform residence halls about new sustainable achievements as well as lead tutorials on how to compost correctly and reduce food waste.
- Relevant student groups can also help educate the student body by screening food-related documentaries, having poster campaigns to educate students about food-related sustainability issues, and collaborating with Dining Services to create sustainable change.
- Student interns at the Office of Sustainability provide a crucial bridge between the administrative side of on-campus sustainability and the student body.
- When the future Food Committee is up and running, there should be room for a couple of student representatives to ensure student input is incorporated into the decision making process for campus dining services.
- Independent research opportunities are available for students who wish to analyze the College's food system and new sustainable dining practices.

Sources

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