



Green Gown Awards 2017



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Finalist's case study



University of Cambridge Food & Drink

'Making the right choice easy' –
tasty food with a lower
environmental impact



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Profile

- Higher Education
- 18,000 students
- 10,000 staff
- Urban

About the project

Summary

The University of Cambridge Catering Service has initiated a ground-breaking Sustainable Food Policy which aims not just to adopt good practices from across the catering industry, but also to lead the way in 'making the right choice easy' – providing and promoting tasty food that is better for the environment. The bold policy includes a conscious decision to remove ruminant meat from menus and to actively promote vegetarian and vegan options. It has been put in place using a Living Lab approach, following advice and input by academics and research at the University. The impact of the policy is being closely monitored, with very positive initial results. A key focus is on collaboration and sharing results with other local catering providers, suppliers and Universities.

Project partners

The University Catering Service (UCS), working with the University's Environment and Energy section, approached academics at the University, seeking guidance on the most impactful approach the UCS could take to have the biggest environmental benefits, locally and globally. Expertise was drawn in from the University's Departments of Zoology and Geography, and the Behaviour and Health Research Unit. This advice was used to develop the University's Sustainable Food Policy.

The results

The problem

The University of Cambridge Catering Service (UCS) has a long-standing commitment to good sustainability practices; a number of initiatives have been introduced in recent years to improve environmental performance, from Fairtrade accreditation to the roll-out of 'Vegware' compostable packaging and disposables, to the introduction of 'KeepCup' discounts, and the recycling of cooking oil. While these initiatives have created significant positive impact, it was recognised that much more could be done. 'Sustainable food' relates to a huge range of sometimes competing issues, standards and initiatives, so the real challenge was determining which approach to take to have the biggest impact whilst recognising limited resources.

The approach

The UCS and the Environment and Energy section approached academics at the University, asking for evidence on the most impactful approach the UCS could take which would have the biggest environmental



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benefits, locally and globally. Expertise was drawn in from across the University, which highlighted the following four key issues:

- Reducing ruminant meat (e.g. beef, lamb)
- Improving, increasing and actively promoting plant-based options
- Removing unsustainable fish from the menu
- Reducing food waste

With a clear direction set out, the UCS took this advice on board and drafted a policy to formally commit the University to these aims and set out an action plan to tackle them. The UCS receives no subsidy from the University so it must operate a profit. This meant they had to make a clear case that the changes would be both environmentally and financially sustainable, undertaking a series of trials to prove the success of this potentially controversial approach.

Our goals

Reduce the consumption of meat, in particular ruminant meat (e.g. beef and lamb).

Promote the consumption of more vegetarian and vegan foods.

Ensure that no fish from the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) 'Fish to Avoid' list is served in the University and seek Marine Stewardship Council certification.

Reduce the amount of food that is wasted in the University.

Source food and other products locally where possible in order to sustain the local economy and reduce environmental impacts.

Use Fairtrade products where applicable, and promote products which actively support Fairtrade initiatives.

Ensure that animal welfare standards are adhered to for any animal produce purchased and to insist on Red Tractor Assured standards as minimum, where applicable.

Communicate to customers, staff and suppliers our commitment to serving sustainable food.

Obstacles and solutions

The number of initiatives there are on sustainable food and what to focus on for maximum impact	We took a Living Lab approach, drawing on academic expertise, in order to work out where to put our emphasis. The top four bullet points above (under 'Our goals') are the priorities.
Appearing to impose changes on customers	We tried to focus on providing healthy and tasty food with a lower impact, creating a positive framing. We also did not promote the fact that we cut ruminant meat from menus, and nobody complained.
Broadening the impact beyond the University's directly owned impacts	We have not taken a prescriptive approach and instead have spelt out the benefits of the approach we have taken.

Performance and results

Ruminant meat purchases have reduced by 54% between 2015 and 2016. This has resulted in:

- Lower greenhouse gas emissions: In 2015, the average amount of carbon emitted from each KG of meat purchased* was 7.83 kilograms of CO₂-equivalent per kilogram of meat (kg-CO₂e/kg-meat). In 2016, this had reduced to 5.64 kg-CO₂e/kg-meat. This equates to a 28% reduction in CO₂ emissions equivalent per kilogram of meat purchased/ served, thanks to the shift away from ruminants. In absolute terms, this means an equivalent reduction in supply chain emissions of 109 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year.



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- Lower water use: research suggests beef results in a water footprint of 15,415 litres per kilogram compared to 4,325 litres per kilogram for chicken (Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2010, referenced here); therefore assuming all beef removed from menus has been replaced by chicken, this has led to a saving of 25.9 million litres of water, or 10.5 Olympic swimming pools.
 - Health benefits: halving meat and dairy consumption lowers saturated fat intake to the maximum recommended level by the World Health Organisation (Westhoek et al, 2014), reducing instances of cardiovascular disease. The World Cancer Research Fund has also recommended limiting red meat consumption and avoiding processed meat consumption (reference).
 - Cost savings: 16% reduction in the cost of meat per kilogram purchased.
 - Increased sales: there has been a positive correlation between sales and reduced ruminant meat (though we have no explicit evidence of a causal link).
- *Carbon emissions equivalent values used from Weiss and Leip (2012), referenced by Bellerby et al (2013)

CO2 savings

Please record the annual carbon savings* you have/will achieve with your initiative**.	
CO2t savings 2016/2017:	109 tonnes (Estimated)
CO2t savings 2017/2018:	TBC
CO2t savings over the life cycle of the project:	109 tonnes (Estimated, per year); the project is set to continue for the foreseeable future

The future

Lessons learned

Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

- 1 Collaborate with others, including academics and suppliers, to find the best solution.
- 2 Communication is great for delivering action, but should be secondary to making change that is easy and intuitive for users.
- 3 Don't be complacent after the successful roll out of a new initiative. Keep reviewing to make sure it's having the desired impact.

Sharing your project

To link with the launch of the Sustainable Food Policy in February 2017, the University held a 'Spotlight on Sustainable Food month'. This month of events and activities encouraged staff and students to get involved. Events included insect tasting sessions, panel discussions, awareness stands in cafés, sustainable coffee mornings, sustainability-themed café menus, green student formals, a film screening, a foodbank collection, a workshop with charity Cambridge Sustainable Food, and a sustainable recipe competition with the winner's recipe cooked by University chefs. These events were communicated to staff and students across the University via newsletter articles, email bulletins, social media posts, and posters. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive; to give some examples, the panel discussion held at the Department of Geography saw a full lecture theatre with what was deemed a 'really interesting line up' and debate, and the insect tasting



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session saw widely-circulated videos of staff in the Department of Sociology trying the fare! This, along with ongoing engagement activities in the cafes themselves, has helped to spread the message of the Sustainable Food Policy. We have also engaged with the Cambridge Colleges, and hosted an EAUC Sustainable Food knowledge-sharing event in May 2017.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

We are delighted to be a Green Gown Award finalist. This is fantastic recognition for the hard work that has gone into developing and implementing our Sustainable Food Policy. The Policy was developed with inputs from across the University, including drawing on academic expertise, and builds on excellent work by the University's Catering Service over recent years. Our Environmental Sustainability Vision is that the University is committed to making a positive impact through outstanding environmental sustainability performance, and this is just one area where we are making great strides to be a leading organisation within the sector.

Further information

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