

Sharing Series

Influencing Sustainable Food Choices

Catering sustainably can make a huge difference to an institution's impact on the environment and society. The positive implications of procuring and providing sustainable food not only include supporting conscious suppliers and providing healthy and sustainable meals to staff and students, but also the potential to educate. Influencing sustainable food choices is possible when institutions collaborate widely and engage customers in the changes they make. Linking to UN SDG goals 3, 4, 12, 13, 14 and 15, the potential impact of work in this area is far-reaching.



A Sustainable Food Policy

Use academic departments within your institution to create an evidence-based sustainable food policy. Departments such as Zoology, Geography, Health and Nutrition or Agriculture will be able to offer valuable insights. This will provide legitimacy to your policy, whilst taking more stakeholders on the journey. Ensure there is an action plan created in conjunction with the policy that is achievable. Collaborating on this plan with internal and external catering staff, procurement and any relevant student societies will ensure that the actions can be achieved.

Promotion and Influence

Alongside offering sustainable food, the way in which an institution promotes this food must be carefully considered and tailored to your audience, to encourage uptake and ideally change wider behaviours. Some ideas:

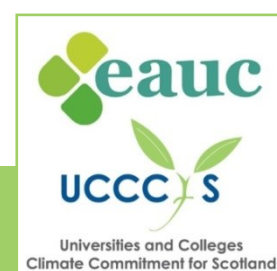
- Increase the proportion of plant-based meals offered and ensure they are well balanced, nutritious and interesting
- Give more prominence to plant-based options by either putting these first in the catering stations or listing the menu as mostly plant based with meat options marked with M (reversing the current practice of marking Vegetarian or Vegan)
- An option for transition could be offering 100% plant based meals, with no promotion, over a period of time. This influences customers to eat sustainable food without a 'big deal' being made of it, assisting the acceptance that sustainable food is the norm rather than a one-off campaign. The University of Cambridge won a Green Gown Award for a project taking on this method in 2017 (view it [here](#)).

Related areas to influence sustainable behaviours

Engagement around food choice can be delivered holistically with initiatives to limit damage from other areas of catering operations, such as:

- **Food waste** can be discussed, with both limiting and disposal of waste in mind, with both consumers and catering staff
- A lot of institutions host **Community Gardens** or **Growing Projects** and getting individuals involved with these projects could mean a partnership in creating meals from produce grown on campus
- The **reduction of single-use items** is a huge area of behaviour change with catering departments being the main contributors to this type of waste

Information from Influencing Sustainable Food Choices Sharing Series, including a presentation from the University of Cambridge



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