



Broadening the Boundaries of Climate Action: A Case Study on University Food Culture

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Context

The University of Maryland reaches beyond traditional strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from campus operations by developing opportunities for everyone who eats on campus to participate in carbon reduction as they work together to transform the campus food system. Staff, students and faculty at the University of Maryland (UMD) established carbon reduction goals in 2009 and recently met the mid-way target of a 50% net reduction in operational emissions two years ahead of schedule.

1. Cool Food Pledge

In 2019, UMD became the first university signatory of the Cool Food Pledge to slash food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2030, aligning with the UN 2016 Paris Climate Agreement. The Cool Food Pledge is an initiative of the World Resources Institute, UN Environment, Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance, Health Care Without Harm, Practice Greenhealth, Climate Focus, EAT, and the Sustainable Restaurant Association. The pledge's three-pronged approach of "Pledge-Plan-Promote" gives UMD-DS the opportunity to not only serve delicious dishes with smaller climate footprints, but educate about climate action as well. The Cool Food Pledge launched a new decade and transformation of Dining Services' engagement with students, the broader campus community, peer institutions and fellow signatories.



2. Menus of Change University Research Collaborative

In Summer 2018, Dining Services joined the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC), an extension of the Menus of Change®. MCURC is a collaboration of forward-thinking scholars, food service leaders, executive chefs, and administrators for colleges and universities who are accelerating efforts to move people toward healthier, more sustainable, and delicious foods using evidence based research, education, and innovation. At the core of this collaborative are the 24 Menus of Change Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus.



3. Terp Farm



Terp Farm is a partnership between the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Dining Services to grow sustainable produce on University land to be served on campus. Vegetables are grown with the help of students through course-work, labs, internships, and volunteer experiences. A portion of the produce is also donated to the campus community through the UMD Campus Pantry (Fig.2).

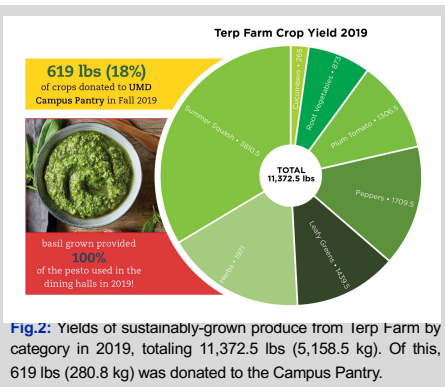


Fig.2: Yields of sustainably-grown produce from Terp Farm by category in 2019, totaling 11,372.5 lbs (5,158.5 kg). Of this, 619 lbs (280.8 kg) was donated to the Campus Pantry.

4. Student Research

Each semester, students engaged in sustainable food research and projects in partnership with Dining Services present their work at a Sustainable Food Symposium. Presentations at the Fall 2019 Sustainable Food Symposium included a Cool Food Pledge Action Plan, Ocean Friendly Campus Evaluation, Cool Food Pledge Health Co-Benefits and Understanding Decision-Making and Food Choices.



5. Ocean Friendly Campus

In 2019 Dining Services launched the Ocean Friendly Campus initiative. As part of the initiative, a free reusable bag was made available for all students on a dining plan. All plastic straws, bags, utensils, and stirrers in campus shops and cafes were replaced with compostable alternatives, eliminating 1.3 million plastic items annually. This initiative expanded upon the Anytime Dining program which eliminated all single-use disposable packaging from the dining halls, removing 6.3 million disposable items from the waste stream annually.

6. Food Recovery Network



The Food Recovery Network, a national network of student volunteers, started at UMD and recovers surplus food from dining operations to alleviate hunger and reduce food waste. Recovered food is donated in the local Washington DC area to those in need. Between 2013 and 2019, Food Recovery Network student leaders, volunteers and partner student organizations recovered 288,292 lbs (130,767 kg) of food.



The Community Learning Garden is a community space and living classroom that gives students the opportunity to engage with gardening, sustainable agriculture, and healthy local food.



UMD hosts the Farmers Market at Maryland from April through November bringing local vendors together with students, faculty and staff on campus. Weekly educational opportunities, such as cooking demonstrations, celebrate the harvest of the season and equip the campus community to prepare local foods.

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