



University of Essex

Sustainable Food Policy

University of Essex, Essex Food

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Introduction

The University of Essex recognises its responsibility to carry out its procurement activities in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, and the considerable influence we have in using our buying power to encourage healthy and sustainable food production and consumption. We will strive to incorporate environmental and social considerations into our product and service selection process. We recognise that it is our responsibility to encourage our suppliers and contractors to minimize negative environmental and social effects associated with the products and services they provide. We will also strive to ensure that local and smaller suppliers are not discriminated against in the procurement process.

There is no legal definition of 'sustainable food,' although some aspects, such as the terms 'organic' or 'Fairtrade', are clearly defined. Our working definition is that sustainable food should be produced, processed and traded in ways that:

- Contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries;
- Protect the diversity of both plants and animals (and the welfare of farmed and wild species), and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change
- Provide social benefits, such as good quality food, safe and healthy products.

Essex Food core principles are as follows:

- Use local, seasonally available ingredients as standard, to minimise energy used in food production, transport and storage.
- Offer meals rich in fruit, vegetables, pulses, and nuts.
- Ensure that meat, dairy products and eggs are produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards.
- Exclude fish species identified as most 'at risk' by the Marine Conservation Society, and choose fish only from sustainable sources - such as those accredited by the Marine Stewardship Council.
- Choose fairly-traded products (e.g. Rain Forest Alliance or Union Direct Trade) for foods and drinks imported from poorer countries, to ensure a fair deal for disadvantaged producers.
- Promote health and well-being by cooking with generous portions of vegetables, fruit and cutting down on salt, fats and oils, and cutting out artificial additives.
- To reduce sales of plastic bottled water and instead make tap water available in all outlets and promote the University's water fountains
- To reduce water & energy use and also food and packaging waste.

Specifically, we aim to:

- Give preference to products and services that are manufactured, and can be used and disposed of, in an environmentally and socially responsible way.
- Ensure that sustainability criteria are included in specifications to suppliers.
- Ensure that internal purchasers regularly audit their consumption of goods and materials in order to increase and maintain usage of sustainable products.
- Enhance employee awareness of relevant environmental and social effects of purchases through appropriate training, via induction programmes and in continuing professional development.
- Provide guidance and relevant product information to staff members to allow them to select sustainable products and services.
- Ensure non-discrimination against smaller suppliers and encourage them to participate in tendering opportunities.

To allow us to meet our aims we will:

- Develop clear objectives, with all our stakeholders, to minimize the environmental and social effects associated with the products and services we purchase.
- Identify the mechanisms that we intend to use to incorporate environmental and social factors into our product selection process.
- Develop performance indicators and evaluation criteria to measure our progress.
- Clearly specify the role that purchasing officers will play in the identification and selection of sustainable products and services.
- Conduct purchasing audits to identify good practice and areas for improvement.
- Identify and implement necessary changes to the procurement process and specifications to ensure non-discrimination against local and smaller suppliers.
- Examine this Sustainable Food Policy on at least an annual basis and assess whether the targets have been reached and if, therefore, they can be raised.
- Build responsibility for the management of this policy into the job description of all catering staff.

Essex Food Commitments and Targets

We apply this food policy to all of our catering outlets and food served for events. We will ensure this policy is fully reflected in our catering contracts where possible.

Communication

- We will communicate our food policy, and specific information about what we are doing to improve the sustainability of our food, to service users, visitors and staff

via staff meetings, induction procurement meetings, daily bulletins and the Essex Food webpage and social media outlets.

Training

- Recognising our responsibility as an employer, catering staff will be made aware of our food sustainability policy on induction. As a minimum our staff will be aware of the various certification systems and their relevance for food production and food products that Essex Food uses.

Sustainability as a Contract Requirement

- Before working with any suppliers we assess whether they meet our sustainability aims and principles. This includes reviewing their products against our principles of localism, health, Fairtrade, animal welfare and environmental sustainability.

Local Food

- One of our main commitments is to contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries. We aim to work with as many local suppliers from the Colchester area as possible.

Specific Commodities

Fruit and vegetables

Suppliers

- All our menus reflect the seasons - at least three served items and vegetables per menu are in the season.
- Seasonal local fruit will always be stocked in preference to out-of-season imported fruit.
- Recognising the importance of orchards to biodiversity we stock orchard fruit when in season and juice products all year.
- We will ensure that all our fresh fruit is grown to Farm Assured standards or equivalent.
- Where possible, we will build links through our suppliers to the growers of fruit and vegetables used in our catering, and promote to staff our commitment to supporting these growers and their communities.

Meat and Dairy

Suppliers

- We are committed to ensuring that 100% of our livestock produce (meat and dairy) meets the Red Tractor Assured standards as a baseline. Where we can reduce consumption of livestock produce we will improve sustainable rearing practices i.e. a 'Less but better quality' approach.

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- We will work on our menus to incorporate as many plant-based products across all our units with the view to keep fruit and vegetables as seasonal as possible.

Fish

Suppliers

- We will remove from menus any fish which are rated 5('fish to avoid' or 'improver') on the Marine Conservation Society's 'Good fish guide'.
- Marine Stewardship Council chain of custody certification for the caterer is a minimum requirement.
- All our tinned tuna will be pole and line caught or Marine Stewardship Council certified.

Fairtrade

- We will ensure ethically and sustainably sourced tea, coffee and sugar is available in all our units and through our delivered catering service, and will aim to serve more Fairtrade certified products. Further, we pledge to increase our ethically sourced offer as more products and product categories become available, adding at least one more ethically-sourced product per year, where available.

Eggs

- We ensure that all whole / liquid / dried eggs purchased are from, at minimum, a free-range production system and any products purchased containing egg state that the eggs are from a free-range production system.

Bread

- We work with our suppliers to introduce baked goods, including bread, which do not feature unnecessary ingredients and additives, and which contain lower levels of salt in line with Department of Health guidance.

Water

- We use either tap water in jugs, or purified still and sparkling tap water, bottled, using re-usable glass bottles in our hospitality services.
- We ensure tap water and reusable or recyclable drinking vessels and water fountains are freely available to all our service users, visitors and staff with fresh and ready to drink water.
- All cups that we provide are biodegradable, compostable or multi-use.

Nutrition

- We will review the nutritional quality of our food and identify products and practices that can be changed to improve its nutritional value. This will include:

- Reducing salt, fat and saturated fat levels, in line with Department of Health guidance.
- Removing hydrogenated fat and other unnecessary additives from all food and ingredients; using healthier cooking oils and cooking methods.
- Promoting dishes containing a high proportion of wholegrain foods, fruit and vegetables.
- Limiting the provision and promotion of snacks that are high in fat, salt and/or sugar, and vigorously promoting healthier alternatives.

Deliveries

- We have assessed how many food deliveries are made to Essex Food catering department per week and, working with suppliers, will reduce this number to an absolute minimum.

Waste and Recycling

- We will increase recycling of cardboard, paper, glass and metal waste generated by catering staff, with the view to extend this to restaurant users in collaboration with our Estates team within the current sustainability strategy period. We will work with suppliers and Estates to reduce packaging and use reusable packaging wherever is possible.
- We will ensure that dry waste (e.g. cardboard, paper, metal) is kept separate from wet waste (e.g. food)
- By working with suppliers, we will reduce the amount of waste from all sources going to landfill to an absolute minimum.

Signed by: Elisa Aylott, Head of Catering and Events

Due for review: July 2024

Our initiatives to reduce the University's Carbon Footprint

Biodegradable Packaging

All our disposables have been ethically sourced with the view to be biodegradable, thus eliminated the use of single use plastic.

Sustainable Essex Awards

The Sustainable Essex Awards is an environmental programme run i within the University. It brings staff and students in a department together in a team and provides them with a tangible framework to make their department more sustainable. The programme runs each academic year and is supported by the University's Sustainability Team.

Participating in the Sustainable Essex Awards gives departments the opportunity to save resources, demonstrate an environmental commitment to staff and students, and actively encourage collaborative working.

Water

Our purified drinking water system provides customers with high quality purified water from the most local source, in re-usable glass bottles bearing the University logo, thus eliminating the need for costly and polluting transportation and packaging. The water is purer than most spring and mineral waters, tastes every bit as good and even costs less than mineral water.

Also, we provide free access to drinking water to all our customers and staff. Anyone in any of our campuses can ask an Essex Food outlet to fill up their water bottle for free. Likewise, there are water fountains that provide safe and ready to drink water all around campuses.

Reusable Cups

We have a wide selection of reusable cups which are provided by the University for both hot and cold drinks. When purchasing hot drinks with their own reusable cups our customers get a 10p discount, which we hope to raise in the future.

Free-Range Eggs

Essex Food only uses free-range eggs and free-range egg products.

Recycling Old Cooking Oil

Waste oil from our catering outlets is taken to a local farm for use in the production of bio-diesel.

Preservation of World Fish Stocks

We are working to reduce the effect of overfishing, the greatest threat to marine wildlife, by only selling fish that do not appear on the Marine Conservation Society "at risk" lists. All fish on our menus are in good supply, thus maintaining stocks and ensuring sustainable levels.

Red Tractor Assured Meat

All meat bought within the department is Red Tractor assured. Red Tractor Assured food is world class. It is produced on farms that are managed by highly professional, well-qualified and caring farmers and marketed, transported and processed by skilled and expert businesses throughout the food industry.

Milk Alternatives

Plant-based milk alternatives are available in all of our catering outlets, and are an option for any internal hospitality customers to order.