

# Green Plate Club



BY GINA M. GUIDUCCI, MS, RD, LDN

Dietitians continue to have an increased role in sustainability, not just through promotion of locally or organically grown produce, but also a more central role in promoting the health of others by promoting the health of their environment. It's becoming a more common scope of responsibility for dietitians and nutritionists, and in college and university food service in particular.

In food service when we talk about sustainable health, we talk about operational and budgetary health too, because as we all know, the shift and transition to a more sustainable practice often accompanies a higher price tag. At the end of the day it's a commitment and not always an easy decision to make; however, the role of a dietitian or nutritionist in foodservice operations can prove to be impactful with even the smallest commitment to change, and that is what this movement or shift or transition is all about.

It's 2010 and terms like "sustainable" and "green" are all the buzz. By now, your college or university foodservice operation is likely to have adopted several sustainable strategies; some may be looking for next steps to increase their ecologically friendly impact; and others may be straight up wondering what is feasible for their operation. Here are some strategies and ideas to promote a more symbiotic relationship between large-scale food served to young vibrant students and the impact that has on their future health, and the future health of their (and your) environment based on the commitment you choose to make within your operations:

- Know your local food system and what is available to you.
- Engineer menu to incorporate sustainable food offerings (local, seasonal, organic, fairly traded, sustainable seafood, humanely raised and certified meat).
- Bring a farmer's market to campus – supporting local farmers and educating about the local food system.
- Purchase from local food producers and processors.
- Engage students in a school garden project.
- Track the mileage that food is currently traveling to arrive at your facility, and put a plan in place to reduce the average number of miles per plate traveled.
- Conserve water through initiatives like removing cafeteria trays, or defrost food in refrigerators, as opposed to running water.
- Choose to do business with companies that already have their own sustainable practices in place.
- Establish a plate waste and composting program.
- Send food scraps to a local farm for animal feed.
- Utilize eco-friendly, compostable containers and utensils.
- Offer reusable containers, bottles or mugs for sale.
- Recycle your own containers and packaging waste.
- Establish a food donation program with local food banks or pantries.
- Recycle your fry oil and send to a bio-diesel company.
- Purchase environmentally friendly transport vehicles.
- Purchase and install energy-efficient equipment and lighting.
- Partner with other invested departments on your campus.

...and MUCH, MUCH MORE!

Dietitians serve as the food and nutrition professionals in foodservice management. As food and nutrition professionals we promote a sustainable food system, not only when it comes to food and consumption, but also through the many avenues of the total operation. A dietitian's role is not solely focused on individual- or population-level health, and therefore not only are we now weighing in more on food origin, but post-consumer handling of waste as well: literally from seed to fork and back to farm again to grow your future food, now that's what you call closing the sustainable [and nutritious] loop! Our ultimate goal is to support a secure food environment and one that will continue to give back, grow, nurture and produce healthy, nutritious food for the future generations who will walk through our dining facilities for one main thing, the food and nourishment we offer them.

And after you have decided upon your commitment level and feasibility of sustainable practice to your operation, don't forget to share your ideas, promote your efforts, continue to foster your local relationships, market your change, educate your student customers, plan opportunities to keep the conversation going and continue to shift change one step at a time. Remember to seek out a dietitian along the way to assist in promoting your efforts and to educate around the impact of the change.

Don't forget to take the time to [sustainably] savor your impact! **-OCH**

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