

9. Dining Services and Sustainability



Left: biodegradable tableware and food on display at the Phoenix Grille
Right: Organic-Greens-To-Go Salad Bar in the Student Center Food Court

All food services at UCI are provided through ARAMARK, except for franchises such as Starbucks and Café Espresso, and the graduate student-run pub. During the 2006 – 2007 Academic Year, Aramark began implementing a sustainability program for UCI Dining Services. This program was expanded rapidly starting in Fall 2007 when Robert Perez became the Resident District Manager with UCI Dining. The organic and local options have multiplied at an impressive rate, and students working on food sustainability at UCI have noted that Mr. Perez has been a catalyst for positive change within the system.

Locally Produced Foods

UCI Dining implemented a “Locally Grown Program” in Winter 2007, to work with Sysco to identify purchased foods grown within 150 miles of the campus. As of Spring 2007, less than 1% of the total food budget was spent on food produced within 150 miles of campus, including the following:

Carrots	Green Pepper	Cilantro	Avocado
Lemons	Red Pepper	Radish	Sprout Alfalfa
Oranges	Chard Swiss	Green Collard	Sprout Bean
Tangerine	Cabbage	Celery	Grapefruit

However, as of May 2008, approximately 18% of the total food budget is spent on food produced locally. Currently UCI dining aggressively seeks to procure the greatest possible amount of locally produced food products. This includes produce, dairy, bakery and grocery items. The innovative new method started by Mr. Perez in the Fall of 2007 asks food distributors to email lists of what products are produced locally that they have available each week to managers, and then managers are able to source the produce they need from the closest producers possible, cutting costs as well as carbon emissions, while

increasing food freshness and supporting the local agricultural economy, which is rapidly disappearing in Orange County.



Signs like this one in Phoenix Grille are now posted on salad bars to display to customers which items UCI sources locally. Some items are always sourced locally (top) while other items are seasonal and vary month to month, or even weekly.

Organic Foods

Approximately 10% of the total food budget is now spent on certified organic foods. The organic options in dining commons are offered at no extra cost to the consumer. There is a fully organic salad bar in Mesa dining commons and several retail establishments now offer organic salads, sandwiches, and more. “Organic To Go” products are now offered at Zot-n-Go, the convenience store in the Student Center. These offerings include sandwiches, wraps and salads that are made locally with organic and natural ingredients. Zot-n-Go also carries numerous other organic and natural products such as Amy’s organic soups and frozen dinners as well as many other packaged goods.

West Food Court also offers organic salads at Organic Greens-to-Go, where made-to-order salads are prepared using all organic ingredients. Organic soy milk is also offered by UCI Dining, and some bakery raw products are organic. At salad bars, some canned salad bar toppings such as garbanzo beans and artichoke hearts are organic as well as some salad dressings.





Cage-Free Eggs Poster on display at Phoenix Grille, during pilot program in Spring 2007, before UCI Dining switched entirely to 100% Organic, Cage-Free Eggs (at all ARAMARK-managed locations).

100% Organic, Cage-Free Eggs

All eggs served at ARAMARK managed locations at UCI are now organic, cage-free eggs. There is no cost increase passed on to the consumer. See this article in the New University: http://www.newuniversity.org/main/article?slug=dining_goes_cage-free_7. The switch to organic, cage-free eggs began as a pilot program during Spring 2007, when cage-free eggs were offered as an option during breakfast in 3 on-campus retail dining locations for a slightly higher price than other eggs offered. Most of the shell eggs are also sourced from California, although the liquid eggs may not be.

Vegan, Vegetarian and Healthy Options

At each meal served in dining commons at UCI, there are at least 2 or 3 vegetarian options, and at least one vegan option. ARAMARK works with Students for Sustainability, Irvine Students Against Animal Cruelty (ISAAC), Green Campus, and other students interested in increasing the quantity and quality of vegan and vegetarian options at UCI, as well as UCI Nutrition Program Manager Emily Bell to facilitate educational dining tours and healthy eating tours and seminars. Vegan dinners have been organized at several dining commons in cooperation with ISAAC, including Pippin, Mesa Court, and Brandywine. For detailed information on vegan/veggie options, see www.ucidining.com.

Due to the extremely large quantities required to serve the University, ARAMARK purchases all its produce from Sysco because Sysco offers reliability, food regulations and safety, and helps to ensure that produce is properly prepared for food service. UCI adheres to Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Guidelines for seafood. Seafood Watch Site: <http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp>; West Coast Guide: http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/content/media/MBA_SeafoodWatch_WestCoastGuide.pdf

Sustainability Spotlight:

Robert Perez, Resident District Manager, UCI Dining/ ARAMARK



As the liaison between food service provider ARAMARK and UCI, Robert Perez has prioritized sustainability in campus dining needs. He has not only been responsive to student requests for more sustainable choices in our dining areas, such as organic cage free eggs, more organic foods and vegetarian and vegan options, but he has also been a champion in the process, going above and beyond what students expected. He brought Organics-To-Go and Organic Greens-to-go, and initiated the innovative processes for getting more local and organic foods onto our plates here at UCI. Students all over campus have been applauding these developments!

Trayless Dining Coming Soon

An All-you-care-to-eat program is offered in dining commons at UCI. This is a featured benefit of meal plans, since customers are guaranteed to have many options to choose from. Chancellor Drake has expressed interest in implementing a Trayless dining program, or at least limiting the allowed number of trays to one per trip through the food line. Some students take two trays and throw away excess food, increasing food waste.

UCI Dining plans to introduce a **Trayless Dining in Fall 2008** to reduce food wastage. This maintains the ability of students to eat as much as they would like, while limiting the amount that can be carried at one time. This may help to prevent those with eyes larger than their stomachs from wasting as much food. A successful Trayless Dining pilot program was conducted on Earth Day, 2008. UCI Dining is currently looking for a way to donate the trays that will be disused from UCI Dining Halls to someplace that could use them, such as a homeless shelter or school nearby.



Weigh the Waste:

Students for Sustainability Kelsey Meagher and Matthew Seamon teamed up with UCI Dining to educate students about the negative environmental impacts of wasting food and to encourage students to "Think Green and Take Only What You Need."

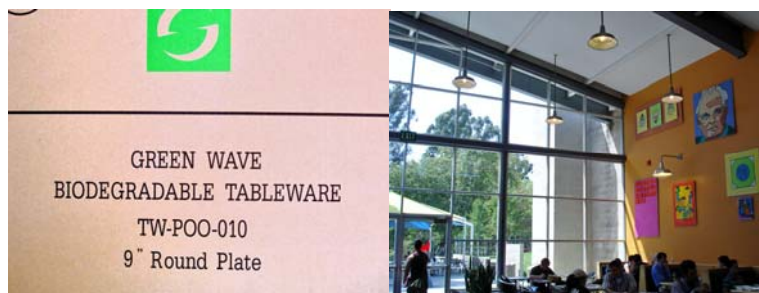
Weigh the Waste Event

In the Spring of 2007, students of Green Campus sponsored a Weigh the Waste Event in one of the dining commons in collaboration with recycling coordinator Suzanne Hibbs. The purpose of the event was to educate students about reducing food waste and the harmful effects waste has on the environment. Students from Green Campus asked students preparing to leave the dining commons to scrape their excess food into special trash bins which were then weighed. The event was replicated at the end of the quarter to see if there was any improvement in amount wasted by students.

Weigh the Waste was once again conducted in the Fall of 2007 in Mesa Commons and Pippin dining halls, during the Food Waste Awareness Campaign carried out by Students for Sustainability and UCI Dining. Educational materials were provided to student diners on the negative environmental effects of food waste, and encouraged them to “Think Green and Take Only What You Need.”

The Food Waste Awareness Campaign of the Fall of 2007 planned two sets of events a month apart to see if there would be a difference in the amount of food wasted by the second event. The first set of events were held Oct. 29 & Nov. 1, from 5:00pm - 8:00pm, when diners at Pippin wasted 346 lbs. of food, and the final set of events were held on November 26 and November 29th. These dates were chosen because the same exact dinner menu was served on both pairs of evenings, to make comparison more accurate. Diners at Pippin the second time around only wasted 288 lbs. of food, a reduction of 58 pounds, approximately 17%.

Coffee Grounds Recycling: In collaboration with Facilities Management, UCI Dining is separating out old coffee grinds in specially labeled recycle bins. These coffee grounds will be used by the landscaping team to mix the coffee grounds into the soil throughout the University landscaping. Coffee grounds act as a natural fertilizer.



Biodegradable plates and to-go containers

As of early 2007, biodegradable containers for to-go items and biodegradable plates for use in retail dining locations is fully implemented in place of Styrofoam and other disposable products. Instead of plastic silverware, Spudware, which is made from 80% potato starch and 20% soy oil and is biodegradable. All napkins in dining commons and retail locations are made from 100% post-consumer content recycled and unbleached

paper. Special one-at-a-time dispensers have replaced stacks of napkins in dining halls and the student center food court to prevent waste. At all dining commons, reusable service ware is used. This does not, however, extend to UCI Catering. Events are frequently catered using Styrofoam or plastic plates, and different napkins and plasticware. Apparently the biodegradable tableware, spudware and recycled napkins are not high-quality enough for catered events, and it is sometimes not feasible to offer ceramic plates (which are offered at a higher price per plate).

Other sustainability programs in UCI Dining

UCI spends approximately 3% of the total food budget on Fair Trade Coffee.

Fair Trade Coffee is offered daily at all UCI locations that serve coffee, including Starbucks. This new daily service offering began in Spring 2007, and reflects UCI Dining's new commitment to sustainability. Cyber A Café now serves 100% EcoGrounds Java City coffee, which promotes social, ecological and economic sustainability.



Java City Eco-Grounds

The mission of Eco-Grounds is to work with coffee growers to promote a sustainable social, ecological, and economic model for the production and trade of coffee that benefits the farmers, their families, and the natural environment. Many Eco-Grounds beans are Fair Trade Certified, and two are Rainforest Alliance Certified. Fair Trade is an alternative trade model that organizes small farmers into cooperatives and links them with importers, guaranteeing them a minimum price. They also have a decaffeinated coffee that uses the Swiss Water Process, which is a patented decaffeination process that does not use any chemicals.

Starbucks: Pastries at Starbucks are locally baked in Santa Ana, and transported using reusable crates instead of cardboard. Fair-trade certified coffee is also always available. Starbucks also claims to harvest its own teak trees from teak plantations in making its custom-designed furniture, in an effort to help to prevent destruction of wild rain forests.

Compact-Fluorescent Lightbulbs: CFLs (some of which were provided by the Green Campus Program) are used in all UCI dining locations, where feasible. Some light bulbs

already in use actually use less energy than the 30 Watt CFL bulbs provided by the Green Campus Program. In those instances, the bulbs were not replaced. Overall, UCI Dining replaced approximately 100 light bulbs with CFLs donated by Green Campus in 2006-7. Green campus also helped UCI Dining install Energy Star appliances.

Waste Grease: Used fryer grease is sent to Bakers Commodities rendering service and recycled to make animal feed. More information on this type of service can be found at www.renderers.org. Composting is not currently feasible at the University, and there is no nearby composting location which we can use off-site. What is needed is a local commercial composting operation that accepts food for compost and sells the compost to regional farmers. If this were available, UCI Dining might be able to provide food for composting to such an operation.

Donation of Leftover Baked Goods from Dining Commons: UCI Dining donates approximately 100 lbs per week of left-over baked goods such as cookies, cakes, pies, dessert bars, and breads from Pippin, Mesa and Brandywine Commons to America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest charitable hunger relief organization, made up of more than 200 local food bank organizations throughout the US. The donated food is picked up by The Hope House in Costa Mesa, a non-profit drug rehabilitation center.

Sustainability Spotlight: Kim Pham, 2007 UCI alumnus, environmental activist



Kim founded the food donation program here at UCI in 2006-7. She put countless hours into forming the connections necessary to establish a relationship between UCI Dining and America's Second Harvest, so that unconsumed baked goods from UCI dining halls go to people in need at the Hope House rather than going to the landfill. She hopes that the program continues to grow, donating more kinds of food to more people in need in the future, continuing to link social justice and the environment through food donation. Kim is now in law school at UCLA.

As of Spring 2007, quarterly **dining service audits** are performed in both retail and residential dining locations at UCI. However, they are not focused only on sustainability. **Recycling bins** are placed outside all dining locations to encourage bottle, glass, newspaper and mixed paper recycling. In collaboration with Facilities and Waste Management, UCI Dining offers a price **discount incentive for using a reusable personal mug**. This helps to reduce paper cup & lid waste.

UCI Residential Dining (Mesa Commons, Brandywine and Pippin) also participates in **Recyclemania** competitions annually for waste reduction <http://www.recyclemaniacs.org>

Recommendations:

1. Food “carbon footprint” signs at dining locations: Alongside nutritional information, foods should be “labeled” with lbs. of CO₂ equivalent or some other carbon footprint, especially beef, fish, grains and tropical fruits (along with brief explanation of the main cause or source of carbon emissions – e.g. “flown from Chile” or “methane produced by livestock”) There should be some kind of graphic such as a “thermometer” type of scale, a dot that changes color and size containing the number of lbs. of CO₂, or something that can be generalized to each menu item sign and compared at a glance. (For example, beef, shrimp, and rice would be red, while local, organic, in-season produce would be dark green, etc.) Ideally all food “labels” would also list the origin of the item. Technically, this listing of food origins is required on packaging by US law, but it is flagrantly violated. In the future, perhaps even water usage used in production could be included on labels. The idea behind this labeling is to allow students to make choices between foods based upon the facts, extending the learning environment of the University into the dining room.

2. Extend Sustainability Programs to UCI Catering: Eliminate plastic and Styrofoam plates and utensils in UCI Catering, or increase their price so that they are more expensive than ceramic plates and glasses. This would serve to include the environmental costs of plastic and Styrofoam in the bill, thereby discouraging the use of disposables and encouraging the use of reusable plates and silverware. At least offer recyclable options (only #1, 2 plastics recyclable). Also offer local and organic options for catered events.

3. Continue to increase proportion of foods offered that are local and organic: As Americans continue to learn about the health and environmental benefits of eating organic foods, there is a rapidly growing demand for organic food, and we see the emergence of the term ‘locavore’. These positive developments have already been reflected by the amazingly sudden and exciting increase in organic offerings here at UCI over the past year. The UCI community will continue to become a healthier, more sustainable place as these proportions continue to increase.

4. Waste grease to biodiesel for campus trucks and busses: UCI has made a commitment to using biodiesel for busses and trucks by converting large portions of campus fleets. This is a responsible decision with regard to air quality and reducing dependence on foreign oil, etc. However, the biodiesel we use comes from World Energy (<http://www.worldenergy.net/products/>), and according to Mark Brunk, former Fleet Services Superintendent, it is made primarily from soybeans. While some soybeans are grown in the US, the Amazon rainforest is rapidly being converted to soybean fields to meet new demands for biodiesel. World Energy has offices in the U.S., Europe, South America and Southeast Asia, which indicates that they are sourcing soybean oil from the Amazon and palm oil from the rainforests of Southeast Asia, which are also rapidly being converted to oil palm plantations, partly to feed the growing demand for biodiesel in Europe and the US, as well as other nations.

Buying fuel made from monocropped soybeans grown on another continent on land that once supported an incredibly biodiverse rainforest is not very efficient or environmentally responsible. Instead, UCI should convert its 9-10 tons (18,000 – 20,000 lbs.) of waste grease (which will likely grow with the addition of the new student center) per year into biodiesel for its busses and trucks. UCI has considered this option in the past and decided not to “get into the fuel-making business,” in the words of one administrator. However, to do so would be a far more ecologically sound and environmentally responsible option than buying biodiesel made from Amazonian soybeans or Southeast Asian palm oil.

5. Phasing out or eliminating all-you-can-eat service to reduce waste: The plan to move toward “Trayless dining” at UCI is an excellent development because this is likely to reduce food waste without changing the cost of dining for UCI students. Another option to consider for the future is switching to a pay-as-you-eat system. Many other Universities have phased out all-you-can-eat service to reduce waste and costs. For example, the cafeterias at the University of Waterloo in Canada switched from an “all you can eat” system to a “pay as you eat system” (Debit Card system) in 1993. A before-and-after waste audit revealed that with the “pay as you eat system” students were throwing away 70% less food from their plates per meal. Eliminating food from the waste stream not only saves on purchasing and disposal costs, but also helps to curb our global warming impact, as decomposing food emits methane, which is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

6. Composting pilot program: Perhaps a student or a local grower could be found who is interested in receiving free food scraps to compost. Then the decomposing food would be put back into the growing cycle rather than simply clogging the landfill. Robert Perez has noted that the best option would be to locate a local company that would be willing to pick up food scraps, compost them, and then sell the compost to local farmers for fertilizer. Some students are interested in seeing such a program develop on campus, with a demonstration garden that could be used by classes to learn about seeds, sustainable agriculture and the food system. Such programs are popular at [UC Santa Cruz](#) and [Yale](#).

7. Increase donation to local shelters of excess food items beyond baked goods when feasible. Building on what Kim Pham started, ARAMARK and UCI should find ways to donate more food to prevent waste and increase community service.

Organic-to-Go salads



Center: Zot-n-Go



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