Sustainability at CAROLINA DINING SERVICES

Here at CDS, we understand our responsibility to integrate sustainable practices into our everyday operations. Our sustainability initiatives go beyond just food: our holistic approach addresses waste stream, energy consumption, resource & facility management, as well as education, promotion, and awareness.

If you’d like to learn even more, you can reference our 2022 Sustainability Report on dining.unc.edu or reach out to our Sustainability Manager, Victoria Hill, at vhill@ad.unc.edu with any questions.

Sustainable Food

Providing healthy and nutritious food is at the heart of CDS; we offer foods that are good for both you and the planet. We are committed to changing the culture of food by nourishing guests with menus that emphasize sustainable, fresh, whole foods that are raised, grown, harvested and produced locally whenever possible.

We partner with student interns to participate in the Real Food Challenge, in which we have committed to maintaining over 20% “Real Food” purchases that meet strict third-party standards qualifying as local, fair, ecologically sound, and/or humane.

We purchase products from within a 250-mile radius of campus, prioritizing NC vendors, whenever the quality and quantity meets our need and financial parameters. In the 2021-2022 academic year, approximately 25% of our residential dining purchases were from North Carolina!

We seek out third-party certified options like organic, fair-trade, and Animal Welfare Approved, and strive for transparency in our sustainable food purchasing.

We only order locally sourced dairy, organic bananas, grass-fed burgers, organic fair-trade coffee, and cage free eggs (whenever the supply chain allows).

We encourage plant-based eating by offering a vegan Plant Forward station daily and “Meat-Less” Mondays at our two main dining halls. No matter the day, there are multiple tasty vegan and vegetarian options available.

Local Highlight

All eggs served by CDS this summer are sourced from the Piedmont Progressive Farmers’ Cooperative, a nonprofit organization comprised of Black farmers in the Piedmont region. These brown eggs are pastured and free-range, and are raised using organic growing principles.
Reusables Program

Our reusable to-go program allows us to divert approximately 150,000 disposable containers from the landfill each year! These reusable to-go containers are available in Chase and Top of Lenoir, and Meal Plan holders can check out up to two containers* at a time for free. When you’re done eating, you can bring your used containers back to the dining halls to swap for a clean one. For those without a Meal Plan, fret not! You can participate by purchasing a reusable to-go container for $3.50.

We also encourage students to bring their reusable cups and mugs to the dining hall! Customers with a CDS cup or thermos can receive $0.99 refills on fountain beverages and self-serve coffee at select locations** for up to 16 oz. Additionally, Alpine Deli and Alpine Bagel offer 20% off fountain beverages and 10% off self-serve coffee with any reusable to-go cup. Port City Java offers $0.25 discounts on coffee refills with a PCJ or CDS cups (up to 16 oz).

*If two containers have been checked out, the Meal Plan holder will need to either return a container or purchase a new one for $3.50.

**This discount is available at Lenoir Mainstreet, Beach Café, Rams Market, Café McColi, Blue Ram, Café Converge, and Atrium Café.

Community

We regularly engage in community outreach to spread awareness of our sustainability efforts, and educate the UNC community on creating sustainable food systems. We make it a priority to collaborate with student-led environmental groups and community organizations on our shared initiatives.

We meet weekly with our Student Dining Board to discuss new and innovative sustainable dining initiatives. We also provide a $10,000 annual grant to go towards projects of their choice addressing food insecurity on campus.

We partner with the UNC Office of Waste Reduction and Recycling to seek out cross-promotional opportunities for waste-related initiatives, obtain and exchange waste diversion statistics, and organize recycling and composting pick-ups.

During the academic year, we donate approximately 150 lbs. of food each week to community organizations like the Inter-Faith Council.

We make it a priority to support BIPOC, women, and minority-owned farms and businesses through our food purchasing when possible.

Since 2010, we have collaborated with student interns to participate in the Real Food Challenge, in which we have committed to maintaining over 20% “Real Food” purchases that meet strict third-party standards qualifying as local, fair, ecologically sound, and/or humane.

We partner with Edible Campus to help educate students on sustainable foods and meal preparation. Each year, we donate $10,000 towards their cause of making fresh, nutritious produce available to everyone across campus. Check out their satellite gardens for some free herbs and veggies!

This Fall, we will be relaunching #EatSortWin, a social media campaign to raise awareness about food waste while educating the community about composting.

Did You Know?

Our #Choose2Reuse campaign was awarded the 2020 NACUPS Gold Award for Educational Outreach in Sustainability!
We recognize the massive amount of discarded material produced by the food industry every day. It is with this in mind that we prioritize finding innovative solutions to divert waste from landfills by reducing and reusing materials. Our food waste management process allows us to identify and eliminate wasteful procedures, and we batch cook to minimize our waste. We also partner with the Office of Waste Reduction & Recycling (OWRR) to track our waste diversion. Our total recovery rate for the 2019-2020 academic year was 67% at Lenoir and 69% at Chase!

**COMPOSTING**

We offer front-of-house composting and fully compostable packaging, utensils, and cups at the Student Union, Chase Hall, Lenoir Mainstreet, and Beach Café.

We compost pre- and post-consumer waste in Chase and Top of Lenoir. When you take your plate to the dish return, you can rest easy knowing that any leftover food or napkins will be composted, and not sent to the landfill.

In 2021, we diverted nearly 550,000 pounds of food waste from the landfill. During our last full operating year, 2019, we diverted over 1 million pounds!

**RECYCLING**

You can find front of house recycling bins in all our main dining locations: Chase Hall, Beach Café, Lenoir Mainstreet, and McColl Café, as well as the Student Union! We also recycle bottles, cans, and cardboard in our back of house food prep stations. Lastly, our fryer oil is filtered for optimized usage, and then recycled into biodiesel!

**Conservation**

We strive to conserve water, energy, and resources to reduce our environmental impact. By moving towards more plant-based and locally sourced menus, our meat-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions fell by 42% between 2014-2018, and our composting program allows us to divert approximately 3.8 million pounds of GHG’s each month.

Our trayless dining program reduces our water consumption by 144,000 gallons each year, and we turn kitchen hoods off at the end of shifts to reduce the capacity at which the air handlers work. We also employ energy efficient lighting, and use LED lighting at Top of Lenoir and CFLs at Rams Head and Chase Hall.

We prioritize sustainable construction by purchasing Energy Star-rated equipment whenever possible, and incorporating recycled and reclaimed materials, as well as low VOC paints and glues in new construction & renovations.
MEET THE
Sustainability Manager

Victoria Hill

Victoria received her B.S. from the University of South Carolina Honors College, where she studied environmental science with a focus on food sustainability. She is now working with the CDS team to educate the UNC community on sustainable food systems while exploring new solutions for food recovery, waste management, sustainable purchasing, and campus food insecurity.