

A Sustainable Philosophy

Sustainability flows through almost every aspect of Dining Services at Dominican University in San Rafael, Calif.

“The importance of focusing on sustainability really begins on the purchasing level: how we purchase it, where we purchase it and understanding that when we are working with local farmers and local vendors, it really brings it down to a community level,” said Jim Julian, district manager with Epicurean Group, the campus foodservice provider. “Then carrying that on to an academic environment like Dominican, it is the education of the students, because today’s students are much more engaged in where their food comes from. They want to know where that radish comes from or where that chicken comes from, and for us to be able to give them specific farm names where these products are coming from, really helps them understand that we are doing what we say we are doing. We are following through on our pledge to them to be fresh, local and honest in our food. It is both ways — it is educating the students, and then following through on our promise to be that right vendor.”

Dining tries to purchase all of its items locally and seasonally. “We do our best to source within 150 miles year round,” he said. “Especially this time of year, right here in the middle of California, we have access to incredible farms, incredible produce, literally nine to 10 months of the year within a 75-mile radius, even going into the winter. Our winter is almost always delayed in the Bay area, so we are getting fresh produce sometimes as late as November out of a local field. It is because we have Indian summer here. But even during the wintertime, we are still able to source fairly regionally. We are still able to source from central California, which is still within our 150-mile radius. That is not just our produce, it is all the way down to the free-range chickens and grass-



fed beef that we utilize. It is all here within striking distance of all of our academic accounts.”

Buying seasonally has a number of benefits. “We don’t have cycle menus. We do seasonal menus, so we are sourcing what is in season,” said Julian. “We are not buying strawberries in December, and we aren’t looking for oranges in the middle of summer. It is those little things that allow our chefs to be creative. We do menus six or seven days out. We are working on next week’s menu right now. We are able to adjust to the reports that we get from the fields every day or every other day of what is going to be available Tuesday of next week. It allows us that much more creativity.”

He continued, “It allows us to keep it fresh because as we know, college students can get bored with the same offerings. Pushing the envelope as far as food and those things is very important. I say it all the time: education doesn’t end just because it is lunchtime. It has to be an ongoing conversation with breakfast, lunch, dinner and the other opportunities we have to impart a little wisdom.”

Seasonality has a bottom-line benefit as well. “It allows





us to manage the budget that we are given, so it is a win-win for everybody," said Julian. "We hit our numbers, the students get great food, various selections of cuisines with the freshest produce available any given week. When you purchase local and seasonal, you are doing the right thing, from the students' aspect, but also from the background monetary aspect of the company. I hate to bring this up, but it is about dollars and cents, but if you manage to what is happening in the fields you are always going to be right."

Waste management is also important. "Another one of the key things we do is watch all of our production so we are not wasting the resources we have been given here," said Julian. "That does not mean running out of anything, but it means very closely monitoring what the students are eating and adjusting our menus."

Dining is also working with the local government of Marin County with its sustainable practices. "For a few years now, Marin has been trying to pioneer more sustainable practices countywide," said Dr. Paul Raccanello, Dominican's dean of students. "For years they were doing a lot of composting. They have always been big in the recycling. The sanitation district is probably one of the pioneers in the country. They started a Food-to-Energy program about two years ago, where basically, they take compost that goes into a special bin and at their plant, they have these

anaerobic digesters that convert it all into methane gas. They use the gas to power the water treatment plant and other things in the area. In addition to everything that Epicurean is doing on the front end, they are also working with our community partners so that we can be as sustainable as possible in the back end, as well."

Dining Services serves most of its meals in the dining hall; but when students need to take items to go, they make sure to use compostable products from World Centric. "They are one of the partners that we have had with Epicurean for years now," said Julian. "With any of the box lunches that we do for any faculty events, if that is the direction they want to go, everything will go into compost. It will break down in 60-80 days."

Dining is also concerned with animal welfare. "It is the right thing to do and one of the foundations of Epicurean Group. With the students and their ongoing education, they want to know how the food was raised. We can tell them that that chicken was running around the field. The eggs that we use are cage-free."

Epicurean also is open about its policies with students. "It is not a significant percentage, but there is a percentage that, from day one, there is an interest, if not a passion, for learning how their food is sourced, where it is coming from and the sustainable aspect behind the meals they get in the dining hall," said Raccanello. "For students, it is an issue for



Sustainability

them when it becomes an issue. When they start to have questions, and it comes up in the classroom discussion about sustainability or conservation or whatever it is, and then they give the example of food, then they are going to want to know about the meals they eat here in the dining hall."

He continued, "Epicurean will not only show them, but demonstrate what their commitment is: 'This is what we do, this is how we are reducing the carbon footprint.' This does two things: it reassures the students that we are doing what we talk about we are doing. It is a learning moment for them."

Julian added, "You can talk to that with a clear conscience. You are not white-washing what is on the board. Our pledge is visible for all to see. I have shown students the labels so that they can see what we are doing. Then they are the biggest advocates. They carry that information out into the community to those who want to hear it or not that we are doing what we actually say we are doing."

-OCH

—Continued from page 17, Princeton

In an effort to educate students on the environmental impact of some of their choices in the dining hall, Campus Dining set up a simple way for them to track food waste. "In the dining halls, we had weighing scales and a flipchart," she said. "As students finished their meals, they would pour any liquid into a jar, and any solid, organic food into a clear bin. They literally saw how much good food was being wasted. On the flipchart, it would say: 'At breakfast, we had 47.2 pounds of waste, which equals to 2.7 ounces per person.' At the lowest-common denominator, we were able to quantify how much food was being wasted, and it was a visual experience of recognizing that there is something that every individual person could do about that."

Haneef wants other schools to steal the idea. "Our approach on all of this has been, at Princeton, we want to develop solutions; but any institution across the globe can do it. We are about developing solutions and sharing them. We refer to it as open source. We are going to problem solve: and where we have success, we will try to keep it as open source as possible — so a small institution that does not have any practices, can still find a clear plastic bin, can go and get a \$5 scale and can use a paper and pencil and do something about a global challenge."

Community partnership is a big part of the vision. "Last year, we expanded a community partnership with the Princeton School District," she said. "It has four elementary schools within the district. Last year, we went with a farmer and one of our chefs to the schools, and the chef produced a broccoli-leaf slaw with agave syrup. The elementary school kids were being taught about building a relationship with their own food system. There is nothing more brightening for our day than when a first-grade student asked for seconds of the broccoli-leaf slaw. The broccoli leaf otherwise would have gone to landfill or to waste."

The campus sustainability efforts will continue to grow into the future. "The goal is that every year, we will take on one or two innovation projects that we can support student interest and work with students in thinking through what a future solution in sustainable food systems looks like, from farm to fork and back," said Haneef.

-OCH

Introducing



Reduced Sodium Soups

SODIUM
LESS THAN
400 MG PER
SERVING

Nutrition Compliant to the National School Lunch Program
After decades of seafood soups, sauces and chowder formulating, Sea Watch International has built a state of the art canned soup plant which is USDA & Kosher certified to offer a broad line of traditional soups.

Reduced Sodium Soups: Chicken Noodle,
Tomato, Cream of Mushroom, Cream of Celery, and Cream of Chicken.



Sea Watch International 800-732-2526 - sales@seaclam.com