

Eating Green on Campus: Sustainable Food Choices for CSB/SJU Students

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Abstract

As the famous saying goes, "You are what you eat." According to the College Sustainability Report Card, 98 percent of 322 schools surveyed purchase some local food, and 70 percent maintain a community garden or farm. However, there are no guidelines written for college students on how to make sustainable food choices. CSB/SJU 2010 Sustainability Survey shows that 86.4% of students agree that the school can become more sustainable simply by changing behaviors and habits. Faced with various dining and grocery options, how can students make the necessary changes to eat more sustainably? Students must take the initiative to make conscious food decisions at stores and campus dining facilities as well as demand more sustainable food options from campus foodservices. At CSB/SJU, students should choose local and seasonal foods, organic products, and vegetarian options to create the most practical and sustainable diet.



Employees at Gorecki Dining Center at CSB shucking fresh local corn. Twenty percent of food consumed at CSB/SJU is considered local. CSB spent \$30,000 at a local farm for local produce in the last season.

Photo Credit: Ryan Dale

Students eating at the Gorecki Dining Center at CSB. Because of the high quality and wide selection of food, more students are choosing to eat on campus.

Photo Credit: Media Services



Reasons for Students to Eat More Sustainably

- 1) At CSB/SJU 75.5% of students believe sustainable practices will improve their lives.
- 2) Choosing locally grown and produced foods supports the farms and communities in the area.
- 3) Choosing sustainable food options helps students become better stewards of the environment.
- 4) At CSB/SJU 95.5% of students try to make healthy food choices. Sustainable food options promote the consumption of high-quality, healthy foods.
- 5) College and university dining services' top priority is to serve the students, making them extremely responsive to students' demands. If students choose and request sustainable foods, campus foodservices will be required to become more sustainable to meet the demand.

Methods

CSB/SJU Sustainability Survey indicates students' desire to adopt sustainable behaviors, including conscious food choices. Extensive literature review on food production processes defines sustainable food to be the following (in order of preference): local and seasonal, organic, and vegetarian. Research on sustainable practices in college and university dining services puts CSB/SJU's efforts in context, proving there is room for improvement. Interviews with the campus foodservice directors and area grocery store managers provide information on what sustainable food options are available to students. Analyses of the different options at each location reveal the best options for CSB/SJU students.

Guidelines to Sustainable Food Choices for CSB/SJU Students

Options	Advantages	Drawbacks	Recommendations
Campus Dining Services (CSB/SJU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Sustainable efforts . Convenient . Wide selection . Responsive to students' demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Limited sustainable practices . High cost . Sustainable/Local food not identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Choose vegetarian options. . Choose local food when it is labeled. . Request sustainable food.
Farmers' Market (St. Joseph)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Local and seasonal food . Preferable location . Low prices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Limited selection . Limited opening time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Take full advantage of it during peak harvesting season. . Go as much as possible during winter.
Coborn's (St. Joseph)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Preferable location . Local conventional chicken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Local food not identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Buy seasonal and organic. . Buy conventional chicken here.
Target (Crossroads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Low prices . Other merchandise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Limited selection . Local food not identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Pick up organic food items every time you are here.
Good Earth Food Co-op (St. Cloud)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Sustainable food . Abundant information passed along with food purchase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Far away . High prices . Limited Selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Stop by when you are in the neighborhood. . Buy what you can reasonably afford.

Table 1: Pros and cons of campus foodservice and area grocery stores available to CSB/SJU students and the recommendations for each. Students who follow the recommendations as much as possible will achieve the more sustainable diet.

Conclusion

Students must be proactive and make behavioral shifts to push themselves and their institutions towards sustainability. As explained in Table 1, CSB/SJU students can make better informed decisions on how to eat more sustainably both in campus dining facilities and at grocery stores. Choosing local and seasonal, organic, and vegetarian foods, students can fulfill their personal commitments and help the school improve its sustainable practices.



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