

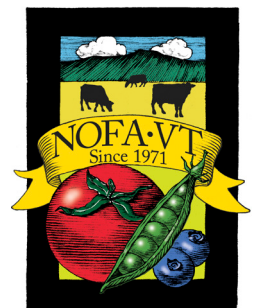
GREEN MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

# Incorporating the Dining Program into Sustainability Education

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NOFA-VT FARM TO COLLEGE  
CASE STUDY



# Incorporating the Dining Program into Sustainability Education

*Green Mountain College is utilizing an existing resource on campus--the dining program--as a living laboratory and component of a holistic educational experience for students to learn about sustainable food systems, demonstrating that campuses can do more than just purchase local foods to contribute to a sustainable food economy.*

Among the many ways campuses contribute to the creation of a more sustainable local food system, one of the most obvious actions is purchasing as much local and sustainable food as possible. While Green Mountain College (GMC) has, and continues, to purchase local and sustainable food, they also recognize some limitations to this strategy. The GMC administration feels that increasing the amount of local and sustainable food served on campus

stronger local food system.

GMC is a small school located in rural southwestern Vermont that has been nationally recognized for leadership in sustainability. Their dining program, like the rest of campus, is focused at all levels on sustainability, from procurement to waste management. The campus currently uses the criteria developed by The Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) for the Sustainability

Tracking, Assessment, and Reporting System (STARS) to track food purchases<sup>1</sup>. As of 2017, this tracking showed that nearly 12% of their food was either locally sourced (from within 250 miles

of campus) or third party verified to be ecologically sound, fair, and/or humane.<sup>2</sup>

**While locally sourced food is highly valued by GMC, it is just one component of their sustainable dining program and is equally as valued as other sustainability characteristics, such as organic.**



would increase student debt-load, which they are reluctant to do. Rather than primarily focusing their efforts on purchasing, **they have taken a more holistic approach, coupling procurement in the dining program with education opportunities** to equip students with the knowledge and skills to find real-world solutions that build a

## COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

### DINING MANAGEMENT:

Chartwells Food Service Management Company

**STUDENT BODY:** 400 on-campus (500 total)

**MEALS SERVED DAILY:** 700

**DINING HALLS:** 1

**ON-CAMPUS FARM:** 23 acres

GMC's dining program turned their focus to sustainable food purchasing before most campuses, and has served as a pioneer in the field. Inspired by a course taught by GMC faculty, Philip Ackerman-Leist, in 2006, the college decided to aim for 30% local, sustainable, or organic food on campus within three years (a purchasing goal made before the Real Food Challenge)<sup>3</sup>. Students in the course developed protocols for tracking purchases in order to benchmark progress years before most other campuses had begun to think about tracking sustainable food.

<sup>1</sup> AASHE STARS is a self-reported framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance and make meaningful comparisons over time and across institutions.

<sup>2</sup> There are various systems, with unique criteria, for tracking local and sustainable food purchases at institutions, and therefore, the percentage of local food purchased at institutions should not be directly compared.

<sup>3</sup> The Real Food Challenge is a national student-led movement to pressure colleges and universities to commit 20% of their food budget towards local, fair, humane, or ecologically sound sources by 2020.





**Go beyond purchasing!** If budgets are a constraint, there are still ways to use your campus dining program to contribute to a more vibrant local food system. Try integrating your dining program into curriculum to bring greater awareness to the process of sourcing and serving local foods.

Chartwells, to reduce internal purchasing restrictions (i.e. the proportion of purchases that must be made through Chartwells' national purchasing agreements) and liability requirements (i.e. the amount of liability insurance farmers must carry in order to sell to GMC) to enable more local and sustainable food to be served on campus. GMC has essentially become Chartwells' flagship site for what a sustainable dining program can look like.

While GMC may have been a pioneering campus in sustainable dining, many other campuses have since adopted similar goals and systems. What sets GMC apart, however, is their **mission to use**

**their dining program to educate students to be conscious, active participants in a local, sustainable food system.** The college has a long-standing and innovative Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems undergraduate program that aims to "show students how to take part in the current food revolution that is transforming farming and how we view food."<sup>4</sup>

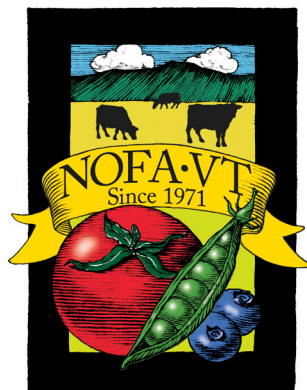
Dining staff, college faculty, and on-campus farm staff collaborate to integrate educational curriculum with efforts to create a more local, sustainable campus food system. For example, the dining director, Dave Ondria, regularly teaches skill-building courses on food sourcing,

preserving, and preparation that both teach students important life skills and directly tie into the campus dining program. Special events and workshops utilize dining hall staff and facilities to teach students how to use local foods, which are then incorporated into the meal program.

By making education part of the mission the dining program, GMC is closing the gaps between the people who grow, prepare, and consume food on campus. When asked why it is important for the dining program to educate students, Ondria remarked, "It breaks down barriers." He explained how **involving students in the dining program exposes them to where their food comes from, how it is prepared, and what it costs to make a meal**, and that this knowledge debunks myths about institutional food service.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.greenmtn.edu/academics/undergraduate/majors/sustainable-agriculture-food-systems/>





This case study is one of three written about local food programs at Vermont colleges (one independently-operated and two food service management companies). These case studies were inspired by the Vermont Farm to Plate Report, "**Opportunities and Barriers to Greater Local Food Procurement in Vermont Higher Education Food Service,**" in which 12 of the 21 higher education food service operations in Vermont were interviewed about the strategies that enable them to utilize local foods. Based on the report, NOFA-VT and the Vermont Agency of Food, Agriculture and Markets, as part of Vermont Farm to Plate's Farm to Institution Task Force, compiled these case studies to feature successful and diverse approaches to values-based and local/regional food purchasing. Each case study is partly a story – of how each campus progressed to their current local food purchasing and practices – and partly an illustration of best practices that are key to their success and could be implemented on other campuses. Mostly, these case studies are a chance for Vermont colleges to learn from

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