

# Viewpoint: Sustainability initiatives highlight Sodexo campus dining programs

*From local (and sometimes in-house) sourcing to dining venue cards indicating the carbon impact of different dishes and food waste recycling using worms to produce compost, the company is making its college meal offerings healthier for both diners and the planet.*

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## From farm to table, and back to farm

Warren Wilson College (WWC) has a robust sustainability program, allowing them to serve students locally harvested produce and meat, then use food waste to go back to the fields which grew that food.

WWC, located in Swannanoa, N.C., has a student-run campus garden that includes an herb crew, focused on growing herbs for use in things like salves and tea mixes, and the main garden crew, focused on growing food. Each week, they send WWC Dining chefs a list of what's available, the chefs put in their orders, then get the fresh, local produce to incorporate into their menus for Gladfelter Dining Hall and Cowpie Café, according to Summer Vishnu, WWC Dining marketing & sustainability coordinator.

While WWC Dining hopes to use even more of the campus garden's produce in their kitchens, Vishnu said, they also use produce from other local farms using food procurers in the area.

“They connect us with different farms within a 100-mile radius,” Vishnu said. “They are a great way for us to buy local produce.”

Not only is the dining program using hyper-local produce, it is also using meat from animals raised on the campus farm.



Each week, they send Warren Wilson Dining chefs get a list of what's available from the campus garden, put in their orders, then get the fresh, local produce to incorporate into their menus.

“Almost 100 percent of our beef comes from the campus farm,” Vishnu said. “That’s a wonderful situation. Part of eating sustainably is eating as locally as possible.”

Students raise the animals, including cows, pigs, sheep and chickens, until they are ready to go to processing. The dining program is then able to purchase that meat, in addition to eggs from the chickens when they are producing.

On the menus for the cafes, WWC Dining notes what is from local sources, and what is directly from WWC farms. Students eat hyper-local food and know that what they’re eating is sustainable. Not only that, but when they’re done eating, they can further contribute to the sustainability process.

Composting is a big component of WWC Dining’s sustainability program. They work with the college’s Community-Orientated Regeneration Efforts (CORE) Crew, which oversees composting, recycling and sustainability on campus.

Composting scraps are collected at Gladfelter Dining Hall and Cowpie Café, both from students scraping materials off their plates, and the employees in the kitchens and dishrooms putting food waste into compost bins. The CORE Crew picks up these bins, loads them onto trucks, which take the waste a mere quarter-mile away to WWC’s composting site that uses aerated static pile composting. The compost made here goes back into the college’s garden, right back where we started.

Since the start of the spring semester, the kitchens produced 11,066 pounds of food waste, diverted to compost, according to the CORE Crew. Though that number is a bit lower than past semesters, that is partly due to some other places food has been diverted.

Starting in the spring semester, some of the waste has been diverted to pig buckets. Employees in the kitchens prepping vegetables will put small scraps into buckets that CORE Crew picks up to feed to the campus farm’s pigs.

Also this year WWC Dining has gone a step further, partnering with Food Connection to donate leftover food from the dining stations to benefit those in need. Since January, they have donated 2,450 pounds of food.

“We couldn’t do all of this without the help from the school and their crews,” Vishnu said, adding that she appreciates the uniqueness of the school to be able to provide these opportunities for sustainability.