

ANNUAL REPORT

Data for People and the Planet:
Moving Towards Thriving

FY2025



OPENING STATEMENT

The UMass Dining Sustainability team is excited to introduce our first Annual Report. Often times it's easy to look at the next thing ahead, like the opening of the Food Recovery Network or the return of our interns to campus, but it is also important to make note of and celebrate all that we have accomplished. As I reflect back on the 7 years that I have been the Director of Sustainability, I am amazed at the scope and variety of the work we have done, the amazing people we have worked with over that time, and the numerous contributions we have made to the climate action effort here on campus and beyond! I couldn't be prouder of my team and the 70+ interns that have come through our department during that time.

Our work to integrate the value of sustainability, emphasize interconnectedness, and build toward a hopeful, joyful, and regenerative future spans across all the divisions of Auxiliary Enterprises. We do this with intention, passion, and humility, while focusing on connecting with a wide sector of students, faculty, staff, and the broader region knowing that practicing climate action has a ripple effect not only with people and place, but also over time. We emphasize building meaningful relationships through collaboration, and develop engagement strategies that are diverse, inclusive, and designed to evolve.

Included in this report, you will find a sample of our impact data, some highlights from the past year, and a glimpse into some of the things on the horizon for the year ahead. Our hope for this report is that something of what you read here inspires you to reach out to learn more or connect with us about new ideas and opportunities to collaborate.

With Kindness,
Kathy Wicks, Director of Sustainability (center)
Monica Guzik, Sustainability Manager (left)
Dan Bensonoff, Permaculture Garden Manager (right)



"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

-Jane Goodall

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STUDENT VOICES

At UMass Dining, students are the people we serve, AND they also help guide and validate our sustainability efforts. FY25 survey results continue to affirm that students care and are concerned about the environment, expect meaningful climate action, and want their dining experience to reflect that.



Six Americas Super Short Survey (SASSY) This nationally recognized survey has been regularly administered from 2022-2025. One thing has remained the same; **student perceptions of climate change remain urgent.**

94%

of students fall into the **“Alarmed”** or **“Concerned”** categories, indicating high levels of climate change awareness and a growing sense of personal responsibility.

Students are **linking these concerns to their daily experiences with food and dining.** In responses from 2024-2025 on-campus surveys:

91%

of students **“agree”** or **“strongly agree”** that sustainability and protecting the environment are critical issues today.

92%

of students reported it is **“very”** or **“somewhat”** important that UMass Dining prioritizes sustainability in food sourcing and waste management.

“I think we are going in the right direction towards a more sustainable campus environment!”

-Student feedback

2025 Climate Conscious Dining Survey

FY25 HIGHLIGHTS

A Year of Collaboration, Celebration, and Impact

This year our Dining Sustainability efforts focused on strengthening partnerships and celebrating the people and values that shape our food system. From food recovery and upcycled ingredients to community appreciation and statewide engagement, FY25 was filled with milestones that reflect our commitment to both people and the planet. We also continued to host events under our Dining for a Cooler Planet campaign, that inspired climate-conscious dining and campus-wide sustainability engagement.



FOOD RECOVERY NETWORK In Fall 2024, we helped re-launched the UMass chapter of the Food Recovery Network, a student-led initiative that reduces food waste and addresses food insecurity by recovering surplus dining hall food for distribution. The meals launched in October 2024, serving over 370 meals in seven weeks. Building on this momentum, the program expanded in Spring 2025 to an additional site, serving meals twice a week. By the end of the year the Food Recovery Network served over 2,100 meals.

SPARE FOOD COLLABORATION In Fall 2024, we partnered with Spare Food Co. to bring upcycled ingredients to campus menus through their plant-based Spare Starter. A launch event featured tastings, a scavenger hunt, and special dishes, while Hampshire Dining Commons began using a 30% Spare Burger blend in all ground beef recipes, substantially reducing waste and emissions while making meals more plant-forward!

"I am so glad to be partnered with UMass Dining Sustainability to make the Food Recovery Network possible! This program inspires me to work toward reducing food waste in the future, beyond UMass, and educate more people on why this mission is so important."

-Leah Fenster, UMass Food Recovery Network Student Leader

SEAFOOD DAY AT THE STATEHOUSE On October 16, 2024, UMass Dining participated in Massachusetts Seafood Day at the State House, highlighting the value of local fisheries. Our team served day-boat scallop ceviche, showcasing our commitment to seafood that supports local economies, sustains ocean ecosystems, and delivers great flavor.

FARMER APPRECIATION DINNER In November 2024, UMass Dining hosted a Farmer Appreciation Dinner, bringing together farmers, students, and campus and community leaders for a family-style meal celebrating local food. Massachusetts Commissioner of Agricultural Resources, Ashley Randall, opened the evening, emphasizing the vital role of farms in building a resilient regional food system.

SPECIAL EVENTS In FY25, UMass Dining Sustainability hosted a number of events exploring the intersections of food, climate, culture, and health through shared meals and storytelling under our Dining for a Cooler Planet Campaign.

FALL

- **Climate Change and Farming Week:** Panelists from across the local food system discussed climate challenges like drought resilience and crop adaptation, paired with a local menu and cooking demo.
- **Indigenous Foodways & Climate Action:** Chef Sherry Pocknett and her daughters shared stories and traditional ecological knowledge alongside a cooking demo and Indigenous-inspired menu.

SPRING

- **Sustainable Seafood:** Chef Barton Seaver highlighted ocean stewardship, nutrition, and climate-smart eating with a tasting and student Q&A.



OUR IMPACT

Every year UMass Dining Sustainability works to transform ideas into actions that contribute to and support a resilient food system that is better for people and the planet, now and into the future. This section highlights the tangible outcomes of our work across core focus areas: local and sustainable purchasing, low-carbon and plant-forward dining, permaculture, and waste reduction and diversion. Through data-driven tools, hands-on programs, and partnerships, we are always measuring and evolving our impact.

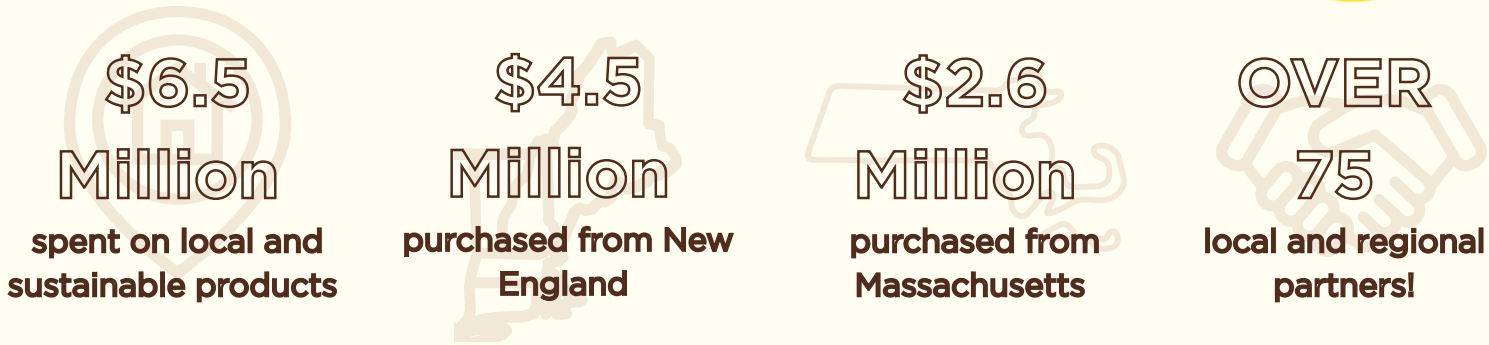


LOCAL & SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

We believe that ingredients matter for people, the planet, and regional resilience. That’s why we prioritize sourcing local and sustainable foods whenever possible. Our local purchasing priorities are tiered, starting with farms in Massachusetts. The next tier expands to New England Region, and the final tier are farms/producers within a 250-mile radius of campus. For our sustainability standards we align with the AASHE STARS guidelines, which recognize third-party certifications for environmentally and socially responsible food production. This framework helps guide our selection of products that support soil health, biodiversity, animal welfare, fair labor, and climate resilience.

“We are all so lucky to be in community with UMass in thinking through ways to move our food system forward. And specifically grateful for Dining Sustainability's tangible impact in our local farm economy. Thanks for your partnership.”

- Jennifer Core, Executive Director CISA



CLIMATE CONSCIOUS DINING WITH THE CARBON RATING ON THE MENU

Every meal can be a small but powerful act of climate action. That’s why we developed our Climate-Conscious Dining campaign that includes our transparent A-E Carbon Rating System powered by My Emissions, to help students easily identify and choose lower-carbon meals.

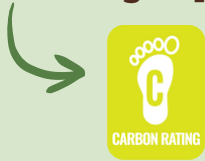
By calculating the full life-cycle emissions of every menu item, from farming and processing to transportation and packaging, we work with My Emissions to assign each meal an easy-to-understand carbon rating, enabling diners to prioritize A, B, & C rated options to reduce their impact.



FY25 CARBON IMPACT

Average carbon intensity of all purchased food and drinks:

3.11 kgCO₂e/kg



Average emissions per diner:

2.64 kgCO₂e/diner



A and B rated items made up **over 70%** of the total weight of all purchases



THE SPARE FOOD CO.

By shifting to the **SPARE blend of 30% surplus vegetables and 70% beef** in our burgers and all our ground-beef recipes at Hampshire and, starting in FY26, Franklin Dining Commons, we’ve made a meaningful **cut in our menu’s carbon emissions.**

This blend allows us to **retain the flavor and texture** people expect from a classic beef dish, while lowering emissions by incorporating surplus veggies. It’s a **small act with big climate impact!**

PERMACULTURE INITIATIVE

Now in its 15th growing season the UMass Permaculture Initiative continues to thrive as a hub of hands-on engagement, connection and community building, and ecological stewardship. Across UMass's five on-campus gardens, students harvested over 1,700 pounds of produce including fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and even rice while experimenting with new crops like luffa gourds and figs. Over the past year the team hosted 13 workshops and events, welcomed hundreds of volunteers and tour participants, and introduced a campus biogas digester to reduce food waste and emissions. With vibrant farmers' markets, creative collaborations like the Salsa con Salsa workshop, and expanded garden space, the program remains rooted in the campus community.



"Thanks for bringing a community here to those searching for one."

-Anonymous student note from the Garden Notebook



100+
Plant species
grown



26+
Group tours with
400+ participants!



12+
Farmers Markets
held every year

WASTE REDUCTION & DIVERSION

In FY25, UMass Dining continued to advance our strategies in waste reduction and diversion combining cutting-edge technology, innovative partnerships, and student-powered engagement. Our efforts spanned from waste prevention in kitchens to diversion through anaerobic digestion. By leveraging data, design, and collaboration, we work to minimize environmental impact while supporting a campus culture of sustainability, innovation, and social responsibility.



REDUCTION

- AI Tracking Technology
- Menu Engineering
- Dining Common Design
- Just in Time Cooking
- Small Plate, Big Flavor

DIVERSION

- Food donations through the Food Recovery Network
- Vanguard Renewables
Anerobic Digestion at Barstow's Farm in Hadley, MA

347,809 lbs
of consumption data tracked
with Metafoodx

224,399 lbs
of pre-consumer food waste
tracked with Leanpath

2,810,800 lbs
of food waste diverted
to anerobic digestion

TRACKING OUR WASTE

Back in FY24, UMass Dining Sustainability began compiling and tracking data for all waste streams - food waste, recycling, and landfill - leaving campus in collaboration with the Office of Waste Management. This effort has strengthened our ability to understand waste generation across all campus dining operations and identify opportunities to reduce waste campus-wide.

Using the data collected, one thing we track is food waste per meal swipe to measure the average amount of food wasted per diner, including both pre- and post-consumer waste. This metric offers valuable insight into operational efficiency and dining behaviors over time.

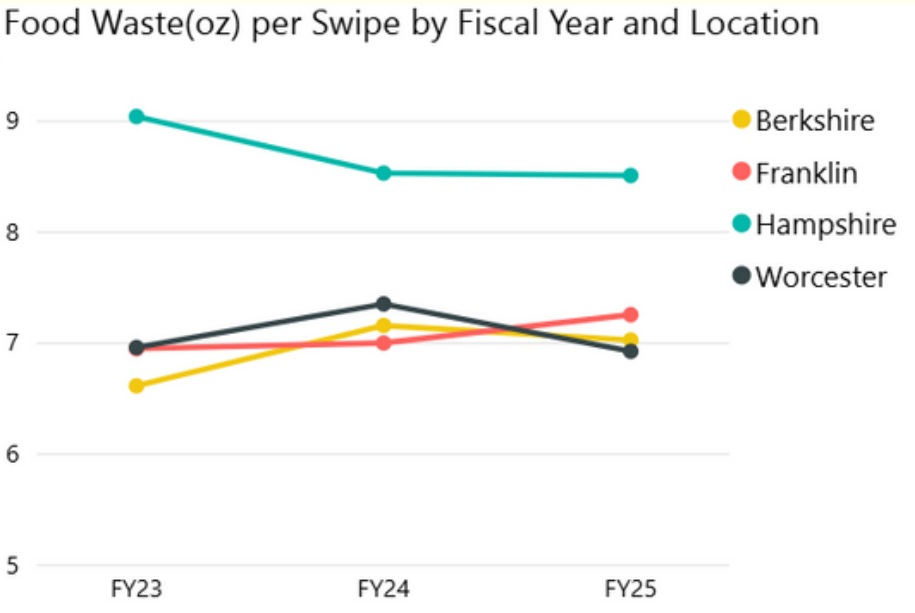
0.13 oz

less food waste on average per swipe in FY25 vs. FY24 across all locations

Across thousands of daily meal swipes, that's a lot of food kept out of the waste stream!

Trends Over Time

Food waste per meal swipe continues to trend in a positive direction across most dining commons. These patterns highlight ongoing progress in reducing pre- and post-consumer waste, student engagement efforts, and improved planning across locations.



A special thank you to our current and past Data Analysis Interns, who have been instrumental in collecting and organizing this data and in developing the interactive Power BI dashboards that allow for continuous, real-time tracking and analysis.

OUR JOURNEY

2009

- Trayless Dining introduced at all residential Dining Commons

2010

- Franklin Permaculture Garden implementation begins

2011

- UMass Dining begins serving only local, cage free eggs
- UMass Student Farmers Market launches

2013

- Permaculture Garden expands to include a garden at the Chancellor's House
- UMass Permaculture Initiative named the White House Champions of Change winner
- UMass Dining becomes the largest signer of the Real Food Challenge committed to sourcing 20% Real Food by 2020

2016

- UMass Dining partners with the UMass Food Recovery Network
- UMass Dining publishes 'Local Procurement Guide for Institutional Food Service'

2015

- UMass Dining receives \$500,000 grant from the Kendall Foundation to achieve 20% local and sustainable food

2017

- UMass Dining receives \$275,000 grant from the Kendall Foundation to help transform regional food procurement practices
- UMass Dining begins tracking food waste with Leanpath

2018

- Partnered with Boston Public Schools to transform their culinary and local procurement program
- Launched the Dining for a Cooler Planet campaign

2019

- Local and sustainable seafood perception research with the Food Science Department

2021

- \$319,000 Kendall Grant to develop, test, and integrate local and sustainable kelp products from Atlantic Sea Farms onto UMass Dining Menu
- Carbon Rating on the Menu Research and Pilot launches

2023

- Launched No Taste for Waste Campaign to reduce single use plastic in dining
- Completed the *Kelp on the Menu Handbook* in partnership with Atlantic Sea Farms and the Kendall Foundation
- Partnered with rStream, an alum-owned green-tech start up, to audit campus waste stream

2025

- Piloted rStream's latest mobile sorting system at the Campus Center and UMass Transfer Station
- All four Dining Commons transition to tracking food waste with Metafoodx
- Launched the Climate Conscious Dining Campaign to elevate the Carbon Rating on the Menu
- Collaborated with the School of Earth and Sustainability on the Climate Literacy Training Program

2020

- Accomplished Real Food Challenge Goal, Sourcing 29% in 2020
- Created a virtual Sustainability and Resilience Workshop Series live from the garden and kitchen
- Launched the *What Indigenous Foodways can teach us about Climate Action* event series

2022

- A-E Carbon Rating on all menu items at all four Dining Commons through partnership with My Emissions – First college and university in the nation to do so.
- Franklin Permaculture Garden Expansion begins

2024

- UMass Dining helps re-launch the student-led Food Recovery Network
- Introduced The Spare Food Co.'s Spare Burger blend, of 70% beef and 30% upcycled veggies, to all ground beef recipes at Hampshire Dining Commons
- Piloted Metafoodx's consumption tracking technology at Worcester DC and the Campus Center

"The School of Earth & Sustainability is proud to partner with Auxiliary Enterprises and considers Kathy and her team critical partners in our mission to advance a more sustainable future for our community and beyond."

-Darci Connor Maresca, Assistant Director SES



LOOKING AHEAD

As we look to FY26, UMass Dining Sustainability is excited to build on the successes of the past year and continue shaping a campus dining program that's healthy, sustainable, and delicious.

We will continue to advance our Climate-Conscious Dining campaign through our Carbon Rating on the Menu, increasing low carbon menu planning, and campus-wide engagement and awareness efforts.

Our events will continue to create spaces for education, dialogue, and shared meals. We'll bring back favorites like cooking demos and speaker panels, in addition to the hands-on, land-based opportunities through the Permaculture Initiative.

In FY26 we'll amplify Local Spotlights and expand local offerings to celebrate the farmers, producers and fishers whose work sustains our region. These strategies bring more transparency and storytelling to menus while strengthening the relationships with our local and regional producers.

On the operations side, we'll fully transition to MetaFoodX as our primary food waste tracking technology, including adding it to catering operations. With AI-powered consumption tracking we'll be able to better align production with demand, reduce overproduction, and find new ways to connect it to other initiatives, like the carbon impact of dishes.

With these efforts, FY26 will be a year of deeper impact, stronger connections, and continued leadership in building a resilient and sustainable food system on campus and in the broader region.



Stay connected with
UMass Dining
Sustainability!

