

No Trays. No Paper. No Waste. Sustainable Dining at UMass Amherst.

It was a perfect match for sustainable dining. UMass Dining was ready to increase its sustainable efforts, and the newly-formed student group, the SGA Environmental Committee, was working to create policies which contribute to sustainability at UMass. By aligning student involvement with UMass Dining administration, these dovetailing interests resulted in two ideas which will significantly reduce waste in the Dining Commons. Starting fall semester 2009, UMass Dining will eliminate use of both trays and paper cups in all four Dining Commons.

By eliminating trays in the Dining Commons on campus, UMass Dining is joining its peer institutions in a combined effort to reduce food waste and to save electricity, water, and soap. Buffet-style dining on college campuses allows students to take as much food as they want, whether they can finish it or not. The ample space on a cafeteria tray lends itself to wasteful over-consumption. According to the UMass Office of Waste Management here on campus, students average 5-6 ounces of food waste per meal in college dining halls. Eliminating the use of trays will limit students to one plate at a time, which eliminates the urge to take more food than is needed. Trayless dining encourages students to only take what they can eat, not just what they want. Students can always return for seconds if they are still hungry afterwards. Eliminating trays also means less to wash behind the scenes. Less to wash means shorter cycles, less water usage, less electricity used, and less soap needed. It's a win-win situation. Not only is trayless the healthy choice for college students trying to resist the 'freshmen 15,' it is the environmentally sustainable choice for UMass Dining.

The buck does not stop here. In the past, UMass Dining also provided paper cups for students to take hot beverages and ice cream to go. Now UMass Dining advocates the green option, reusable bottles and mugs to replace throw-away paper cups. Reusable, stainless steel water bottles are to be included with the purchase of a campus meal plan, and reusable mugs will be available to purchase. Both may be used in any of the UMass Dining Commons for students to fill up and take with them. And—just as before—ice cream cones can be used to take ice cream to go.

"I think our students are ready for all these green initiatives. As one of the nation's largest operators of campus dining, we would like to take a leadership role to take it to the next level. There is so much we can do to embrace sustainability", commented Ken Toong, Executive Director of UMass Dining.

Both of these initiatives will reduce the UMass overall ecological footprint while saving money at the same time. What's more, these savings will benefit the students directly. Preventing waste allows UMass Dining to further enhance the quality of the food provided in each of the four Dining Commons on campus.

Sustainable dining? Sounds like a good deal!



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