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THE MENUS OF CHANGE
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

Culinary Institute of America

Residential & Dining Enterprises
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Stanford MEDICINE | Stanford Prevention Research Center

The Menus of Change University Research Collaborative

Founded in 2014

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MENU CONCEPTS AND GENERAL OPERATIONS

PRINCIPLES

OF HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE MENUS

MENUS of CHANGE® The Business of Healthy, Sustainable, Delicious Food Choices

Culinary Institute of America | HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH Department of Nutrition

BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT SOURCING AND PREPARATION

BUY Fresh AND SEASONAL, LOCAL AND GLOBAL

REWARD BETTER AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

LEVERAGE **GLOBALLY INSPIRED, PLANT-FORWARD** CULINARY STRATEGIES

FOCUS ON **WHOLE, MINIMALLY PROCESSED** FOODS

GROW EVERYDAY OPTIONS, WHILE HONORING SPECIAL OCCASION TRADITIONS

CELEBRATE CULTURAL DIVERSITY & DISCOVERY

LEAD WITH **MENU MESSAGING AROUND FLAVOR**

REDUCE PORTIONS, EMPHASIZING CALORIE QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

DESIGN HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY INTO **OPERATIONS AND DINING SPACES**

THINK PRODUCE FIRST

MAKE **WHOLE, INTACT GRAINS** THE NEW NORM

LIMIT POTATOES

MOVE LEGUMES AND NUTS TO THE CENTER OF THE PLATE

CHOOSE HEALTHIER OILS

GO "GOOD FAT," NOT "LOW FAT"

SERVE **MORE KINDS OF SEAFOOD, MORE OFTEN**

REIMAGINE DAIRY IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

USE POULTRY AND EGGS IN MODERATION

REDUCE ADDED SUGAR

SERVE **LESS RED MEAT, LESS OFTEN**

CUT THE SALT; RETHINK FLAVOR DEVELOPMENT FROM THE GROUND UP

SUBSTANTIALLY **REDUCE SUGARY BEVERAGES; INNOVATE REPLACEMENTS**

DRINK HEALTHY: FROM WATER, COFFEE, AND TEA TO (WITH CAVEATS) BEVERAGE ALCOHOL

FOODS AND INGREDIENTS

DESIGNED BY J WRIGHT DESIGN

#MCURC

Cultivating the long-term well-being of all people and the planet — one student, one meal at a time.

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Our Mission

The Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC)—co-founded and led by The Culinary Institute of America, Stanford Residential & Dining Enterprises, and Stanford Prevention Research Center— is a global network of over 80 colleges and universities accelerating progress toward healthier, more sustainable, and delicious food choices using evidence-based research, education, and innovation.

Students are the best way forward

4 million

meals served every day

70 billion

meals during their lifetime

Tomorrow's

Leaders
Entrepreneurs
Consumers
Parents

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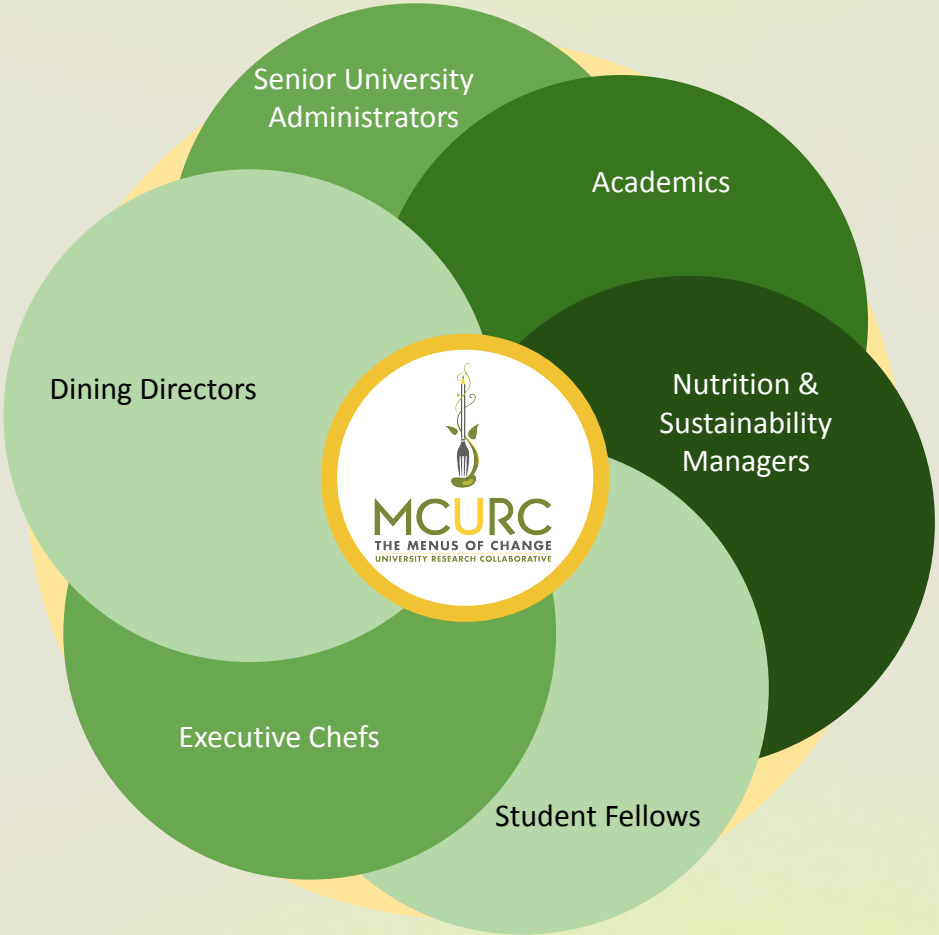
For the first time, collaborating together



Accelerating **innovation**

Advancing **MOC principles**

Pioneering **research**

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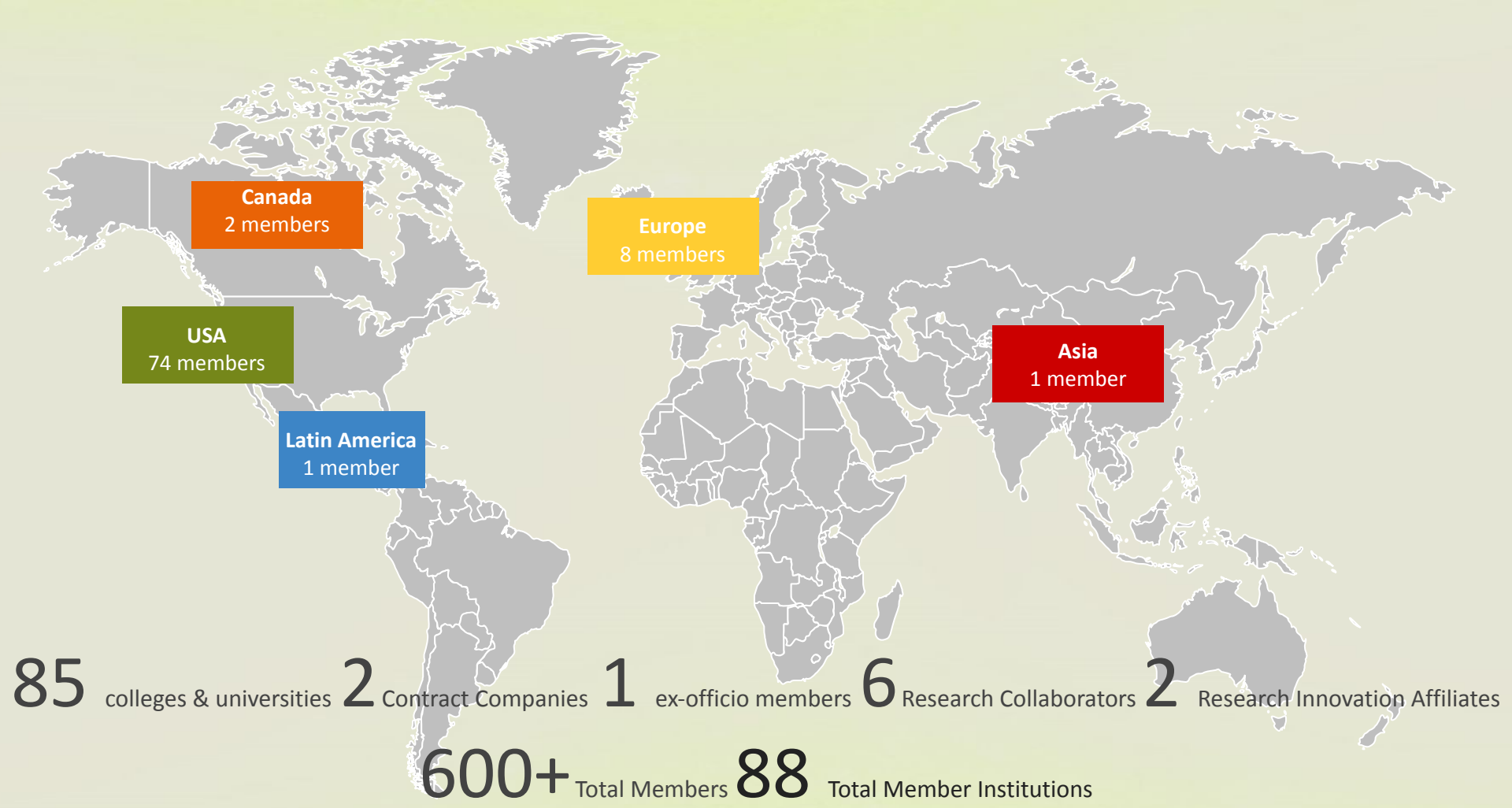

85 colleges & universities 2 Contract Companies 1 ex-officio members 6 Research Collaborators 2 Research Innovation Affiliates

600+ Total Members 88 Total Member Institutions

Extensive and Inclusive Membership

Members

Arizona State University
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Boston University
Central Washington University
Centre for Alternative Technology
Claremont Graduate University
College of the Holy Cross
Colorado State University
Columbia University
Cornell University
The Culinary Institute of America
Duke University
Drexel University
Framingham State University
Georgia College & State University
Georgetown University
George Washington University
Harvard University
Hotel Management School (Maastricht, NL)
INSEAD (France)
Johns Hopkins University
Kansas State University
King's College University
Marist University
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Michigan State University
New York University
Northeastern University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina State University
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The Ohio State University
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University of Massachusetts, Lowell
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University of Missouri
University of Montana
University of New Hampshire
University of North Texas
University of Notre Dame
University of Reading (UK)
University of Southern California
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University of Vermont
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EAT

BITE

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ReFED

World Resources Institute

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Aramark

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National Peanut Board

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GALLEY

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MCURC Research: Shifting Diets

Develop Scalable, Applied Solutions to Promote Healthy, Sustainable, and Delicious Food Choices

1

Scalable

Deliver research outcomes and methodologies based on scaled initiatives

2

Applied Solutions

Focus on practical guidelines and teamwork to ensure operational feasibility

3

To Promote Healthy, Sustainable

Keep in sight that the endgame deliverable is not only research, but impact on students' actual diets

4

And Delicious Food Choices

Identify and evaluate the culinary processes to develop delicious recipes, as taste is one of the first drivers of consumer food choices.

Collective Impact Projects

Develop a culture of sharing data on purchasing of specific foods that are at the center of the MOC principles

Operational Research

Develop process improvement interventions that will allow the improvement of dining operations

Academic Research

Develop an academic research portfolio to have broadly generalizable research published in peer-reviewed journal

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Research Model

The MCURC has pioneered a new behavioral research model to scale innovative research projects from one university across the MCURC.

	Institution(s)	Days	Data points	# of variables
Pilot in one university	1	**Up to Dozens**	**Hundreds**	**Limited**
MCURC multi-site study	**Up to 60**	**Up to Hundreds**	**Thousands**	**Extended**

The MCURC Research Agenda

Plant-forward Promotion

Transform protein menu concepts, including the Protein Flip, and elevating plant-based protein

Food Waste Reduction

Most effectively produce, promote, and upcycle food to reduce waste

Increased Food Literacy

Evaluate how education can induce healthier and more sustainable food choices

MCURC Research by the Numbers

Published Research for Food Systems Change		
Delicious Impressions Support Healthy Eating (DISH) Study- Largest study ever measuring food choices across multiple universities throughout the country.	**29% more students** chose vegetables when **labels emphasized flavor** than when focused on health attributes.	Published in *Psychological Science* (2019). **5** participating colleges and universities. **138,000** diner decisions.
Repurpose with a Purpose A toolkit, report, and digital recipe collection tackling food waste with culinary creativity.	In just one month, we collectively saved **~$20,000 in food costs, 21,000 gallons of water, and 545,000 tons of carbon emissions**, and we also improved staff morale!	12-week research sprint involving nearly **40 individuals from nine MCURC institutions** in the fall of 2023.
Impact of a "Foodprint" Seminar on College Students' Dietary Intake and Carbon Footprint	Students attending the seminar significantly **reduced their ruminant meat intake**, and significantly **increased vegetable intake**.	Published in *Nutrients* (2020). **3** participating colleges and universities.
Collective Impact Progress Report A strategic initiative of **data collection and impact analysis** that empowers members by enhancing the understanding of their institutions' protein portfolios and the collective impact of the MCURC's combined protein purchases.	Together, the participating institutions' food purchases exceed 93 million pounds. Since the initiative's launch in 2019, we have collectively reduced food-related emissions by **23%**—equivalent to **38 million tons of CO_2**.	Developed with input from **nearly 40 MCURC member institutions**, all working collectively toward the ambitious goal of a **40% reduction in food-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030**.
University Procurement for Planetary Health Evaluating Opportunities and Strategies for Aligning University Food Procurement with EAT-*Lancet* Planetary Health Diet Guidelines	Aligning university food procurement with the EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet led to an average **46.1% reduction in food-related emissions,** a **19.7-point increase in Healthy Eating Index scores**, and a **9.7% annual reduction in food costs** for universities reporting expenses.	This study aimed to assess university food procurement practices across **19 MCURC institutions from January to December 2022**, focusing on alignment with the EAT-*Lancet* Planetary Health Diet.

- **19** published operational resources
- **7** academic research publications
- **8** current multi-site and pilot projects

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Operational Research Examples

REPURPOSE WITH A PURPOSE™

Culinary Institute of America

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Residential & Dining Enterprises STANFORD UNIVERSITY *Creating a Culture of Excellence*

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MENUS OF CHANGE
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE
in collaboration with

ReFED
Rethinking Food Waste

Measurable Outcomes

Food Waste Reduction

Quantify pre-consumer food waste

Environmental Impact

Carbon and water savings

Cost Savings

Reduced food purchasing

Waste disposal costs

Labor

Social Impact

Staff engagement and morale

Customer satisfaction

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REPURPOSE WITH A PURPOSE™

PROJECT RESOURCES

REPORT

RECIPE COLLECTION

OPERATIONAL TOOLKIT

Check them out on the
[MCURC Resources Page]

DATASSENTIAL

2025 EDITION

Plant-Forward Opportunity

2024

Plant-Forward Opportunity

The Impact of Digital Media on Plant-Forward Eating

A DATASSENTIAL REPORT

in collaboration with

The Culinary Institute of America,
Food for Climate League, and the
Menus of Change University Research Collaborative

EDGY VEGGIES TOOLKIT

HOW TO INCORPORATE TASTE-FOCUSED LABELING TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHIER EATING

YOU ARE:
A restaurant manager, chef, parent, or someone else who influences what other people eat.

THE PROBLEM:
People think healthy foods are depriving and bland, and so avoid them.

THE SOLUTION:
Describing the tasty and enjoyable attributes of healthy foods makes people more likely to choose them

THE RESULT:
People eat and enjoy more vegetables and plant-based foods, which help fight chronic disease and support sustainable planetary health.

EDGY VEGGIES TOOLKIT PARTNERS

Stanford MIND & BODY LAB | Stanford SPARQ Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions | Residential & Dining Enterprises Stanford University Creating a Culture of Excellence | MCURC The Menus of Change University Research Collaborative | Better Buying Lab

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

STEP 1:
SELECT A HEALTHY DISH TO PROMOTE

Toolkit users should focus on giving edgy descriptions to healthy foods that can benefit from taste-focused language the most. Those include vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fruits, and plant-based entrées. Foods like pizza, burgers, and fries often enjoy rich labels and don't need to be described differently.

STEP 2:
MAKE SURE THE DISH TASTES GOOD

Naming raw and unseasoned brussels sprouts "spellbinding" or bland eggplant "exciting" may backfire, as diners could feel deceived. The best approach is to prepare delicious veggies and label them that way. To do so, select fresh ingredients with complimentary seasonings. The best edgy veggie dishes often include two or more fruits and vegetables to build flavor. Below are some examples:

- Butternut Squash With Apples and Sage
- Brussels Sprouts With Pomegranate and Lemon
- Watermelon With Mint and Basil
- Green Beans With Garlic and Onion
- Zucchini With Basil and Oregano
- Cucumbers With Mint and Dill
- Carrots With Ginger and Citrus
- Sweet Potatoes With Nutmeg and Cinnamon
- Cauliflower With Lemon and Garlic

STEP 3:
CREATE A TASTE-FOCUSED LABEL FOR YOUR DISH

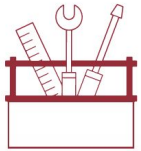
Get your whole team involved! It's easier and much more fun to talk about dishes with other people. Your goal is to list as many new ideas as you can. Refrain from critiquing or criticizing. Often, ideas that seem unpromising can turn out to be food-description gold. Follow the directions below to come up with creative labels or use the labeling cheat sheets in this toolkit that the SPARQ team has put together.

1. **Don't Say "No":** Avoid food descriptors that suggest deprivation, such as "healthy," "light," low," and "reduced." Also, think twice about using health-positive words like "high fiber" and "vitamin packed." Many people already know that vegetables are healthy but don't expect them to be flavorful, so your job is to emphasize flavor.
2. **Survey All Five Senses:** How would you describe this dish to someone who has never tried it?
   a. What does it taste like? *Examples: Sweet and Spicy Squash, Ginger-Citrus Carrots.*
   b. Look like? *Examples: Rainbow Chard, Sunny Yellow Curry.*
   c. Feel like? *Examples: Silky Smooth Yogurt, Crispy Kale Chips.*
   d. Smell like? *Examples: Cumin-scented Parsnips, Fragrant Lemon and Herb Broccoli.*
   e. Sound like? *Examples: Sizzlin' Skillet Green Beans.*
3. **Place It:** What location, culture, or time period does this dish come from? *Examples: Tuscan Salad, Moroccan Tagine, Fisherman's Stew, Beekeeper's Quinoa, Ancient Grain Bowl, Thanksgiving Apples.*
4. **Mention the Method:** How was this dish prepared? *Examples: Slow-cooked Spanish Carrots, Pan-fried Eggplants with Soy-ginger Sauce, Butter-braised Asparagus.*
5. **Nod to Naughty:** Can this dish make diners feel relaxed, casual, and maybe even a little sinful? *Examples: Dirty Veggie Po' Boy, Sloppy Joes, Indulgent Endives, Luscious Leeks, Edgy Veggies, Naughty Nuts.*
6. **Tout a Trend:** Does the dish follow a food fad? *Examples: Street-style Tacos, Farm-to-table Salad, Hippie Bowl.*

If you're stuck, use the cheat sheets in this toolkit that provide label names grouped by vegetables and edgy words grouped by themes.

STEP 4:
EVALUATE YOUR PROGRESS AND SHARE YOUR STORY

Now that you've constructed a list of edgier names for your dishes, consider the people who eat in your establishment. Choose which you think will appeal most to the typical person who eats in your venue, rather than the ones you personally like best. To evaluate the impact of this toolkit on diners, food managers should give a sample of diners the pre-toolkit survey before doing the dish-labeling activities and the post-toolkit survey after doing the dish-labeling activities. The survey is available as part of this toolkit or online at *sparqtools.org/edgyveggies*.



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Academic Research Examples

Training for transformation: examining food systems courses at US land-grant universities

Charlie T Hoffs[1]*, Nooran Chharan[2], Matthew J. Landry[3], Catherine P. Ward[4], Kemi A. Oyewole[5], May C. Wang[6], Sophie Egan[7], Janine Bruce[8] and Christopher Gardner[4]

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Higher education institutions can play an essential role in preparing students to participate in movements for just and sustainable food systems change. For the past two decades, many United States land-grant universities (LGUs) have developed food systems education (FSE) courses. This study examined the extent to which FSE courses employ four capacities deemed crucial by the FSE literature: multidimensional approaches, interdisciplinarity, centering equity, and training students to take action in food systems. The syllabi of 171 undergraduate courses at 20 LGUs were obtained by contacting instructors, and their course descriptions and learning outcomes were analyzed. This subset of LGUs were identified from the membership list of the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC), a nationwide network of colleges using campus dining halls and classrooms as living laboratories for food systems change. Most course descriptions and learning outcomes exhibited multidimensional approaches and interdisciplinarity. However, many failed to incorporate teaching content and practices that help students critically examine equity and social justice issues in food systems, or engage in transformative change. LGUs have both the resources and urgent responsibility to empower students to be part of movements to transform unjust, unsustainable food systems. The findings of this study, and an accompanying open-access syllabus website, aim to accelerate the development of FSE curricula that prepare students to change food systems.

Article

Evaluating Food Procurement against the EAT-*Lancet* Planetary Health Diet in a Sample of U.S. Universities

Jaclyn Bertoldo [1,*], Abby Fammartino [2], Sophie Egan [3], Roni A. Neff [4,5], Rebecca Grekin [6] and Julia A. Wolfson [1,5]

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Abstract: Aligning institutional food procurement with planetary health targets offers opportunities to improve nutrition and reduce food-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This study compared foods procured by 19 university dining programs in the U.S. in 2022 with the EAT-*Lancet* planetary health diet. Each university's procurement was then modeled to align with the EAT-*Lancet* planetary health diet, and changes to Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores and GHG emissions were evaluated. For a subset of universities that provided cost data, changes in annual total food costs were also estimated. Universities in this study exceeded EAT-*Lancet* planetary health targets for beef ($\bar{x}$ = 657% of target), pork ($\bar{x}$ = 587%), poultry ($\bar{x}$ = 379%), and eggs ($\bar{x}$ = 293%). All universities failed to achieve planetary health targets for legumes and nuts ($\bar{x}$ = 39% of the target) and vegetables ($\bar{x}$ = 68%). Aligning food procurement with the planetary health diet would result in an estimated average 46.1% reduction in GHG emissions and a 19.7 point increase in HEI scores. Universities that provided cost data saw an average 9.7% reduction in food costs in the EAT-*Lancet*-aligned scenario. The procurement metrics assessed in this study can help university dining programs and other institutional food service organizations set goals and monitor progress toward planetary health targets.

Keywords: nutrition; healthy diets; food systems; food procurement; planetary health; climate change; sustainability

check for updates

Citation: Bertoldo, J.; Fammartino, A.; Egan, S.; Neff, R.A.; Grekin, R.; Wolfson, J.A. Evaluating Food Procurement against the EAT-*Lancet* Planetary Health Diet in a Sample of U.S. Universities. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2024**, *21*, 945. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21070945

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Current Research Examples

MCURC 2025 Research Pipeline Overview

Project	Project Goal	Members Involved	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Expected Deliverable
Plant-Forward in Practice	*Implement plant-forward menus and behavior-change strategies*	Food for Climate League, Greener by Default, MCURC, 6 pilot sites	Phase 1: February-March 2025 Phase 2: Fall 2025	November 2025 - Spring 2026	Operational Toolkit, Engagement Workshop Spring 2026
Diet Diversity	*Increase college students' acceptance of diverse plant-based foods*	University of Maryland, University of North Texas, Rutgers, Berkeley, University of Michigan	Phase 1: Fall 2025 Phase 2: Spring 2026	Spring 2026	Operational toolkit, Report Publication Spring - Summer 2026
FoodWaste BOH	*Measure the impact of BOH food waste tracking on culinary students*	The CIA-Hyde Park, *Leanpath*	February - May 2025	Summer 2025	White Paper January 2026
CUSTOMISE	*Reduce FOH waste and adjust portion sizes at fast-casual restaurants*	Georgetown University Earth's Common, Portion Balance Coalition, ReFED MCURC, Restaurant sites	February - June 2025	Summer 2025	White Paper January 2026
Farmhouse Fumes	*Assess college students' food literacy of sustainable protein sources*	Rutgers, UNT, Princenton, CWU, UMass Lowell	Fall 2023 - Winter 2024	May - September 2025	White Paper October 2025
Protein Mix	*Dispel myths about protein, educate on protein quality, compare choices*	Harvard, Berkeley, MCURC	May - June 2025	July - October 2025	Visual Slideshow January 2026
FoodWise	*Measure the impact of employee engagement to reduce BOH waste.*	ReFED, WWF, Stanford Food Institute, MCURC, university sites	Fall 2024	Fall 2023 - Winter 2024	Operational Toolkit
CI Cost Insights Modelling	*Collective benchmark for the most cost-effective plant-forward strategies*	Pilot open to all MCURC institutions	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Custom cost-analysis

Diet Diversity Research Project

Study Purpose

Uncover opportunities and test interventions that **increase** college students' knowledge and **acceptance of diverse plant-based foods**, to **improve diet quality** as a key outcome of greater dietary diversity.

Photo: Knorr & WWF. (2019) Future 50 Foods Report.

Diet Diversity Research Project

Benefits for Participating Sites

Gain insight into how to best incorporate more diverse plant-based foods into menus, and **learn ways to communicate and serve to encourage the selection of diverse, sustainable foods**.

Deliverables: Operational Toolkit and Academic Manuscript

Photo: Knorr & WWF. (2019) Future 50 Foods Report.

Plant Forward in Practice Project

FOOD FOR CLIMATE LEAGUE

PROJECT STATEMENT

We are developing a **toolkit** and **engagement workshop** for implementing **plant-forward menus** in **campus dining facilities**, with a focus on leveraging plant-based defaults as tools for increasing the **sustainability** of foodservice operations while maintaining and ideally improving **eater satisfaction**.

MOTIVATION

After demonstrating the success of the workshop and toolkit through this study, **we will make these materials publicly available** to culinarians and other food systems leaders **to inspire and guide practical implementation of plant-forward behavior change strategies at scale.**

PARTNERS:

GREENER BY DEFAULT

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MCURC Collective Impact Initiative

MCURC Collective Impact Initiative:

A strategic initiative of data collection and impact analysis to advance healthier, more sustainable menus

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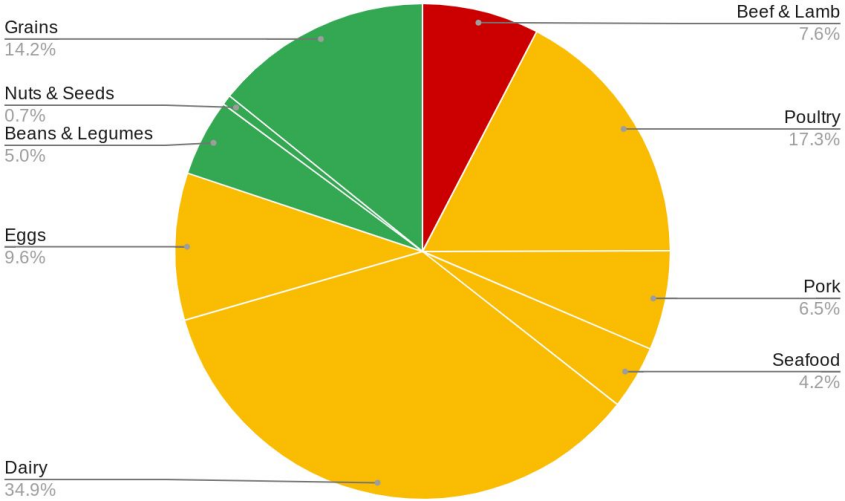
33 Participating Institutions in 2023

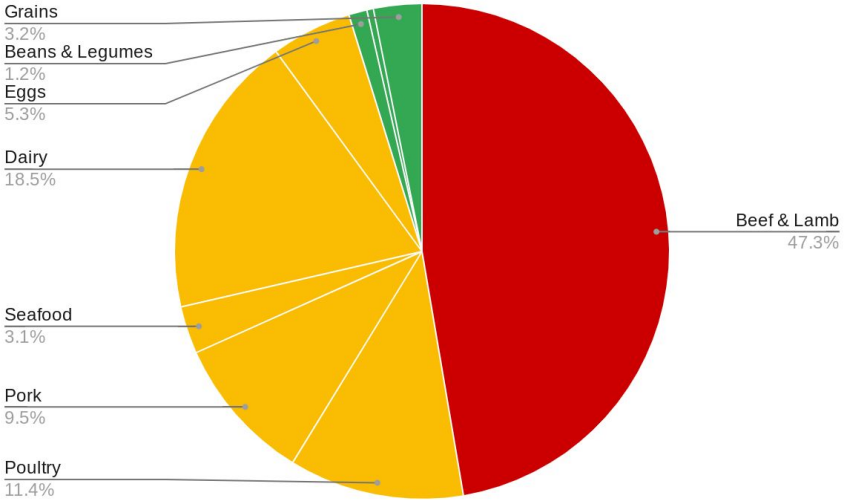
SFI - MCURC

Collective Impact Data

Collective Food Purchases - 42.4 million kg



Food-Related GHG emissions - 283 million kg CO2-eq



Beef & lamb | Other animal-based foods | Plant Proteins

MCURC Combined Protein Portfolio Analysis

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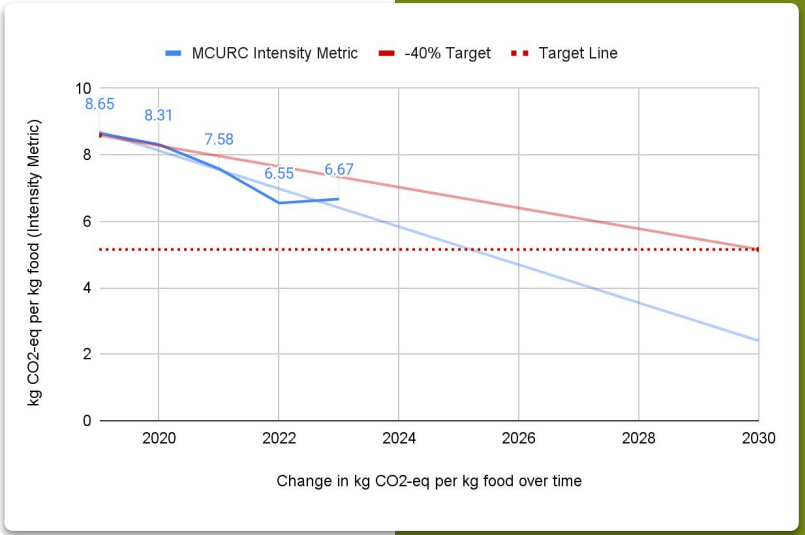
Progress to Date

- In 2023, the collective target was raised from 25% to 40% GHG reduction by 2030, aligning more closely with the EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet.
- From 2019-2023, over 300 million pounds of protein purchases were tracked by MCURC universities.
- A 23% decrease in GHG emissions per kilogram of food purchased was achieved across 33 institutions.
- This marks nearly 60% progress toward the long-term target within five years.



The MCURC Student Fellows Program

- Consists of undergraduate and graduate students from MCURC member institutions
- Gives them the opportunity to gain experience conducting research that advances healthy, sustainable, delicious food choices in college and university settings
- Offers networking opportunities with the larger MCURC network across the country and around the world
- Student Fellows act as a bridge between a member university campus and the MCURC

Program Overview (2025)

- **A cohort of ~30 students**
- **15 partner institutions**
- **8 states**
- **2 countries**
- **2 co-managers**

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Member Application

MCURC Resources

Stay informed—follow MCURC on LinkedIn for the newest updates!

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Join the MCURC All-Member Annual Meeting!

Members from across the MCURC come together annually for an in-person summit filled with inspiring talks, immersive campus tours, hands-on food experiences, and invaluable connection—hosted by a different member institution each year.

2026 MCURC Annual All-Member Meeting

October 6th-7th (pre-meeting tour 10/5)

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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