

**SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES FOR FOOD SERVICE PURCHASING
EMORY UNIVERSITY SUSTAINABLE FOOD COMMITTEE**

FEBRUARY 27, 2008

Emory University’s strategic planning efforts include commitment to a more sustainable food system for our campuses and hospitals. The goals adopted in our university strategic plan are “to provide and encourage healthy food choices at all times of day” and to “procure 75% of ingredients from local or sustainably grown sources by 2015” (Report of the Sustainability Committee, 2006). In April 2007, the Sustainable Food Committee was appointed by the President, and with this document we have begun to clarify what we mean by “sustainable” and “local” food. We seek to specify how sustainability’s “triple bottom line” of environmental, social, and economic criteria applies to food purchasing decisions, given our particular situation in the Southeastern United States. The criteria listed below will have to be balanced against cost and supply constraints, and we expect these guidelines to be modified with experience as our work progresses. We have focused on Campus Dining locations; the hospitals will be a later phase of implementation.

This document outlines specific buying priorities for ten food categories, and explanations for the recommended criteria follow the listed priorities. The box below summarizes the full range of desirable criteria that the committee recognizes at present. Since availability is currently low for most of these desired criteria, we have decided to focus on the source goals and the farming practice goals in our recommended priorities for each food category specified below. The remaining issues of farm scale and the form of ownership are important, but not given priorities at present. We hope our buying efforts will soon be able to focus on small- and medium-scale farms as well as independent/family farms and cooperatives, because evidence is strong that such groups support important aspects of sustainability. Specifying scale and ownership goals at this time, however, would restrict availability too severely.

<u>DESIRABILITY</u>		<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>PRACTICES</u>	<u>SCALE</u>	<u>OWNERSHIP</u>
HIGH		GEORGIA REGION	SUSTAINABLE FAIR TRADE	SMALL & MEDIUM	INDEPENDENT FARM & COOPERATIVE
LOW		U.S. INTERNATIONAL	CONVENTIONAL	LARGE	CORPORATE

We have specified below what we mean by “sustainable” and “local.” With regard to production practices, we are able to take advantage of a number of certification systems that are emerging in the United States and around the world, to help us verify food production methods that embody the triple bottom line of sustainability. These two dimensions of our commitment to sustainability allow us to contribute a number of related goals, including rural economic health, civic vitality, open space preservation, reduced use of fossil fuels, environmental protection from harmful agricultural inputs and practices, preservation of biodiversity, safe and

just working conditions in the agricultural sector, improved human health, optimal nutrition, and new systems of accountability.

PRIORITIES BY FOOD CATEGORY

1. Milk and dairy

Ultimate goal: from Georgia dairies and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: hormone and antibiotic free

Next priority: grass fed

Next priority: from regional dairies

Next priority: from Georgia dairies

Next priority: certified organic (USDA)

2. Eggs

Ultimate goal: certified Humanely Raised and Handled (Humane Animal Farm Care) or Free Farmed (American Humane Association), from Georgia, and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: antibiotic free

Next priority: certified either humanely or free farmed

Next priority: from regional producers

Next priority: from Georgia

Next priority: certified organic (USDA)

3. Vegetables and fruits:

Ultimate goal: Georgia grown and certified sustainable (Food Alliance) or Fair Trade (for international products).

First priority: regionally grown

Next priority: Georgia grown

Next priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance)

Next priority: Fair Trade/improved labor conditions (for international products).

4. Chicken

Ultimate goal: certified humane, Georgia grown, and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: antibiotic free

Next priority: certified either Humanely Raised and Handled (Humane Animal Farm Care) or Free Farmed (American Humane Association)

Next priority: Fair Trade/improved labor conditions

Next priority: regionally grown

Next priority: Georgia grown

Next priority: certified organic (USDA)

5. Beef, pork, and other meats

Ultimate goal: certified humane, Georgia grown and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: grass fed, hormone and antibiotic free

Next priority: regionally grown

Next priority: Georgia grown
Next priority: certified humane

6. Seafood

Ultimate goal: Seafood Watch Southeast “best” and “good” list and Marine Stewardship Council certification and Sustainable Seafood Forum recognition.

First priority: Seafood Watch Southeast “best” and “good” list

Next priority: Marine Stewardship Council certification

Next priority: Sustainable Seafood Forum recognition

7. Grocery—grains and legumes

Ultimate goal: regionally grown, certified sustainable (Food Alliance), and Fair Trade/improved labor conditions.

First priority: regionally grown

Next priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance)

8. Grocery—pantry items/canned/frozen

Ultimate goal: minimally processed and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: minimally processed

9. Grocery—prepared foods (ready to eat)

Ultimate goal: minimally processed, regionally produced, and certified organic (USDA).

First priority: minimally processed

Next priority: regionally produced or certified organic (USDA)

10. Grocery—imported foods

Ultimate goal: Fair Trade/improved labor conditions, minimally processed, and certified sustainable (Food Alliance).

First priority: Fair Trade/improved labor conditions

Next priority: minimally processed or certified organic

RATIONALE FOR THESE PRIORITIES

Hormone and antibiotic free: By choosing milk, dairy, eggs, chickens, and other meats produced without antibiotics or artificial hormones, we eliminate a major source for antibiotic resistance within the food supply and protect human health against potential endocrine disruption. In addition to promoting food safety, the elimination of routine antibiotic treatment within the dairy, poultry, and livestock industries can lead to more humane treatment of these animals. For example, without routine antibiotic treatment, animals require more living space and must be housed in cleaner facilities. This raises the bar for industrial practices, favors smaller production units, and sets a consumer-based standard for expectations of quality and safety.

Grass fed (pasture raised) meats: Medical studies have determined that increased consumption of saturated fats increases the risk of heart disease and cancer. Recent research

has found the conventional grain-based animal diets responsible for producing meat with higher levels of these fats. Pasture-raised meats and dairy show significantly lower levels of total and saturated fats and higher levels of the omega-3 fatty acids found to lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and hypertension. While a meat-free diet may remain attractive for various reasons (and reduces greenhouse gas emissions), it is increasingly clear that a diet of moderate amounts of pasture-raised meat is consistent with health recommendations. Production of grass fed meats can also contribute to reduced environmental harms from erosion and groundwater contamination.

Georgia grown and regionally grown: Locally grown food offers fresher, tastier food and often reduces the use of fossil fuel for transport, thereby lowering Emory's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and to the depletion of non-renewable resources. Our goals for local and regional food support a vibrant Southern economy, preserve open space and agricultural landscapes, provide easier access for direct relationships with farmers, and help preserve the regional farming culture. A survey of 110 Farm-to-College programs by the Community Food Security Coalition (2007) shows that nearly half choose 50-200 miles as their target radius for "local" food. Another 20% choose "state-wide" and 10% choose their region. In making our decision to prioritize "Georgia grown," we considered a common standard for "local food" of "a day's drive" which is often translated as 200 miles (400 miles round trip). For Atlanta, a 200-mile radius covers almost all of south Georgia, and reaches to Columbia (South Carolina), Asheville (North Carolina), Knoxville (Tennessee), and to Birmingham and Montgomery (Alabama). We found it unreasonable to try to prioritize food from one half of North or South Carolina or sections of other adjacent states. We therefore decided to give highest priority to Georgia farmers, where we hope to develop relationships with known producers. As products become available, we hope to buy more of our food from areas close to Emory.

However, recognizing the limits of the Georgia growing season, we agreed a second priority is our 8-state region of Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, and Mississippi. Our decision to prefer foods in this region—as opposed to organic produce from California or Mexico—speaks to our concern for environmental issues, but also to our desire to support the rural economy of Georgia and the preservation of farming traditions. By prioritizing the 8-state area, we can also focus on partnerships with under-served areas of the region, and look for opportunities to buy from cooperatives of minority farmers. Our hope is, of course, that sustainably certified food will soon be widely available from our region.

Certified organic (USDA standards) milk, dairy, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and chickens offer the assurance that environmental harms have been minimized through prohibitions on many pesticides, on genetically-modified food varieties, and chemical fertilizers. Though these foods often travel long distances, the health benefits to farmers, farm workers and farm ecosystems makes this option an important step toward a more sustainable food system.

(<http://www.ams.usda.gov/NOP/indexIE.htm>)

Certified sustainable (Food Alliance standards) goes beyond the USDA checklist approach to organic certification and offers assurance of sustainable management practices at the whole-farm level. Certified farms demonstrate attention to management practices that improve soil

quality, reduce chemical use, improve crop rotations, maintain biodiversity in soil, seeds, and natural habitats on the whole farm, protect water quality, conserve energy, manage waste, provide safe and fair working conditions and worker pay, and assure the humane treatment of animals. Farmer goals for continuous improvement are part of Food Alliance certification.

Humanely Raised and Handled (Humane Animal Farm Care, begun 2003) certifies farms that raise animals without antibiotics or added hormones and allow them to engage in natural behaviors with sufficient space, shelter and appropriate handling to limit stress. Animal production methods keep the welfare of the farm animal in mind and are inspected for precise, objective standards for farm animal treatment. Certification for **Free Farmed** (American Humane Association, begun 2000) assures that animals are raised cage-free, also in a humane manner. (<http://www.certifiedhumane.org/>; <http://www.americanhumane.org/>).

Seafood: Fish and seafood concerns include health risks from the bioaccumulation of mercury, environmental impacts of aquaculture, bycatch that harms unintended species, and overfishing of populations at risk. Three groups have stepped forward in recent years to help ascertain sustainable fisheries. The *Monterey Bay Aquarium* researches regional species whose fisheries generally fall in line with sustainable practices under its Seafood Watch program. Within the Seafood Watch “best choices” and “good alternatives” for the Southeast are a suitable range of wild and farmed species that will allow Emory to support responsible fishing and safe consumption. (<http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp>).

A second group, the *Marine Stewardship Council*, certifies particular fisheries that are being harvested on a sustainable basis and includes health criteria in their ratings, but do not include farmed seafood. Only a small number of species are now certified, and limiting Emory’s purchases to only those species would be difficult. Therefore, we recommend that a preference for MSC certification is desirable when we choose those species (<http://www.msc.org>). The newest sustainable fisheries group, *Sustainable Seafood Forum*, highlights path-breaking seafood producers concerned with the health and well being of their employees as well as their impact upon the environment. These fishers at present are too few in number and their products too expensive to adopt as an Emory goal, but that may change in the future. (<http://fn.cfs.purdue.edu/fish4health/Walletcard/walletcard.htm>).

Fair Trade certified products guarantee improved labor conditions and higher pay in plantation agriculture and among producer cooperatives in developing (and some developed) countries. Fair trade certified producers must support local economic development efforts, democratic processes, and direct relations between buyers and sellers. (<http://transfairusa.org>).

Minimally processed foods avoid the loss of nutrient value, introduction of trans-fats, added salt, sugars, corn syrup, and chemical additives, and the high energy costs associated with many processed products. Among other issues, we considered evidence that energy dense, high fat, and low fiber foods may override human satiety mechanisms and thereby contribute to our society’s growing problem with obesity. Our priority on minimally-processed foods will help support a healthier diet for the Emory community.

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