**2017 CA Higher Education Sustainability Conference**

**Best Practice Award Proposal**

**Project Title:** (word limit: 15)

# Cal Poly Campus Dining: Sustainable dining to reduce the university’s foodprint. (11)

**Which category best fits your proposal?**

Sustainable Food Systems

**Project location(s)**

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

**Completion date or implementation period**

The program was implemented in the 2015/16 academic year and will continue and evolve into the future.

**Narrative of project goals and strategies** (word limit: 300)

As one of the largest commercial services at Cal Poly, Campus Dining strives to lessen its environmental impact on campus, providing students with an environmentally friendly campus now and in the future. To this end, Campus Dining’s food sustainability program was developed to reduce Cal Poly’s overall ecological “foodprint.”

Program strategies were threefold and were developed to: increase food sustainability through procurement, production and waste practices; build partnerships across campus with stakeholders sharing common goals for a more holistic, effective approach; and employ community outreach to educate and promote food sustainability.

The program was officially launched fall quarter 2015 to align with national Campus Sustainability Month. Campus Dining had expanded on its growing list of local food providers, exceeding the California State University’s goal of having sustainable food purchases at 20 percent of overall food budget by 2020 Cal Poly’s sustainable food purchases totaled approximately 22 percent for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Campus Dining reduced packaging entirely and/or replaced it with sustainable materials. It also eliminated trays to reduce water use and replaced older vehicles with more environmentally friendly ones. During this time, Dining also partnered with the university on its Zero Waste program to help meet the CSU Chancellor’s goal of zero waste by 2020.

The Zero Waste partnership is just one of the many food sustainability collaborations. Campus Dining worked with Facilities, University Housing and the Kennedy Library to implement recycling and composting efforts. Dining collaborated with faculty and students on food sustainability research and activities, including participation in Food Day and Earth Day events. In addition, Dining united the entire campus for Cal Poly’s first ever *State Of Our Plate* – a forum to discuss Cal Poly food with a panel of nutrition, sustainability, agriculture and health experts. The forum generated meaningful feedback from the campus community. (299)

**Relevancy to the Best Practice Program** (word limit: 200)

Campus Dining’s food sustainability program provides a universal example of viable, sustainable dining practices. The program achieved significant benefits, at relatively low costs. It also helped Campus Dining build bridges across the university, uniting diverse groups of students, staff and faculty toward a common goal – a more sustainable future for Cal Poly.

Two primary features of the program qualify it as a worthwhile best practice for other universities: information sharing and partnerships.

Information sharing was key to the program’s success. Campus Dining made resources easily accessible and understandable, utilizing a variety of outreach methods. Campus members were well informed about how to reduce their foodprint – eating local, passing on packaging, recycling and composting, and taking only the amount they can eat. The campus community was receptive to the sustainability messaging, especially the information about local sourcing.

Partnerships were also a key strategy in executing the program and a factor that continues to drive its success. The sustainable dining movement represents a cross-functional university effort – one that has helped convey Campus Dining’s commitment to the university as a whole and Cal Poly’s future. In this way, Campus Dining also demonstrated its ongoing pledge to the university’s environmental, economic and social wellbeing. (200)

**Collaborative design and implementation** (word limit: 200)

To maintain food sustainability on campus, it takes a concerted effort from all stakeholders. A primary benefit of Campus Dining’s sustainability program was the collaboration it fostered with various campus departments, organizations and student clubs. Working together, great strides were made to educate the campus community on food sustainability.

These coalitions furthered the program’s reach and impact. The partnerships led to the addition of zero waste stations in all dining facilities. They inspired faculty and student projects on food sustainability, providing many learn by doing opportunities. One particularly impactful project was led by a student from Cal Poly’s Sustainability Club. She created 3-D signage of actual dining packaging to inform diners where to dispose of their items, lowering waste stream contamination.

The Campus Dining sustainability program also contributed to more effective practices beyond dining venues. For example, zero waste events have been put in place. Catering services use a food waste equation to reduce waste and locally compost any leftover food scraps from events. Partnerships in the local community have also helped further Cal Poly’s food sustainability systems. In addition to the products Dining purchases from local, organic farms and producers, campus markets sell several products from locally owned businesses. (200)

**Education and outreach** (word limit: 200)

Education and outreach were central to Campus Dining’s food sustainability effort. From inception to implementation, the program was audience-driven. Although the sustainability messaging was consistent, outreach methods were diverse – to reach the right people with the right information. In addition to the engagement at multiple events, messaging was spread across many other campus channels.

An integrated *Reduce Your Foodprint* marketing campaign was developed, which included a series of advertisements placed in the student newspaper, The Mustang News. These ads literally “stepped” across the entire paper, featuring tips on how to eat sustainably. A native advertisement that quizzed students on how to sort their trash was also created, winning national recognition. Social media was utilized to engage students with useful food sustainability facts and tips. Campus Dining’s website also featured the sustainability program prominently for those seeking more information.

The *Reduce Your Foodprint* message was highly visible in all dining venues, on signage displays and video monitors – it was even turned into temporary tattoos that were distributed at events. Additional signage was created to educate diners on local food providers, what to compost and recycle and how to sort dishes to save water, and the benefits of reusable to-go packaging. (198)

**Project Cost**

* Total Project Cost – $39,700 ($1800 marketing cost, $25,000 Zero Waste bins costs, $12,900 Eco-to-go packaging)
* Total Incentives Received (if applicable) N/A

**Quantitative Savings and Benefits** (one or more of the following)

Number of people reached by your program (please describe how you determined this number)

The Cal Poly food sustainability program reached the entire Cal Poly campus community of 24,650. This number was determined by using media impressions of how many times a food sustainability message was viewed during 2015/16, which totaled more than 2 million. As a rule of thumb, a message needs to be viewed seven times for it to resonate with its intended audience.

Estimated greenhouse gas emission reductions in metric tons CO2e

32% of the Campus Dining fleet is electric saving XX metric tons of CO2e annually.

Measured annual water savings in gallons:

3.4 million gallons of water saved, eliminating trays and purchasing more water efficient systems.

Annual waste reduction in pounds:

200,000 pounds of cardboard were recycled.

100% of plastic bags and Styrofoam were eliminated from Campus Dining diverting XX pounds from the landfill.

70% of our dining venues offer compostable cups diverting XX pounds into the landfill.

230 tons of food scraps and coffee grounds are locally composted into nutrient-rich soil.

8,400 pounds of recovered cooking oil turned into bio-diesel, soap or a supplement for animal feed.

Percentage of total food and beverage purchases that is local (under 250 miles) in origin and/or meets one or more third party-certified sustainability criteria (e.g. USDA certified organic). List the third party-certified sustainability criteria included

Based on the AASHE/STARS\* Food and Beverage Purchasing Product Classification Guide, a total of 9.5% of purchasing was categorized as "conventional products with other sustainability attributes." When combined with the "third party verified or both local and community based" metric, this equates to nearly 22% of purchasing for the 2015-2016 academic year.

\*AASHE-Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

STARS-Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System

List any green business or green restaurant certifications that this project achieved

N/A

Additional environmental, social, and/or economic sustainability benefits:

Beyond quantifiable benefits to the environment, this program provided a framework for how Cal Poly students, faculty and staff can practice food sustainability – not only on campus but at home. It also opened the door for future research and learning. Campus Dining receives on average five requests per week from students doing projects on sustainability and is currently participating in five senior projects. Campus Dining is also working with faculty on three research projects. One is based on re-useable packaging and its effects on waste reduction. The other examines the effects of augmented reality on consumer food choice. The third (Megan to supply)

**Supporting documents: can attach up to two supporting documents, no more than 10 MB each.**