Report on Food Issues

Background and Purpose

Food is a substantial aspect of daily living, and it is fundamental that the DSU adopt a food policy to address the needs of students and diminish the particular concerns raised. The aim of this report is to make institutional reforms to food services on campus through the creation of a food collective with formal decision-making abilities.

Survey

In October 2019, the Dalhousie Student Union Sustainability Office (DSUSO) administered a survey to gauge student’s opinions about food on campus. The food survey highlighted several food issues on Dalhousie campus and produced some recommendations to improve the current situation. The results of the survey show that students are concerned with single-use plastics and cups that are used at events and by food services like Tim Hortons, Booster juice, among others. Another critical problem is that Sexton Campus only possesses one food service, Fredericks. The lack of food alternatives, especially for students that have unique diets (Halal, Kosher, or cultural meals,) poses a barrier. Another big concern that was raised was the amount of food waste generated by the residence meal hall. Students also pointed out that the food served at meal halls also tends to be unhealthy. The only healthy option is fruits, which is not enough for students to have a balanced nutritious diet. Through the survey administered by DSUSO, we learned what students thought about the affordability, accessibility, and diversity of healthy food on campus. Students were specifically asked if there was a food policy, what issues they hoped the policy would tackle.

In total, 99 responses were obtained from the survey; 65.7 % were domestic students, while 34.3% were international students. In a further breakdown, 62.6% of students studied on Studley campus, and 27.3% on Sexton with the remaining 10% on either Carleton or the Agriculture campus in Truro. Some other questions asked were:

- How aware are you about food sustainability issues on campus?
- If they would be interested in attending a workshop on food sustainability and insecurity if offered?
- How would they rate the affordability of healthy food options on campus?
- If food options on campus were diverse?
The questions were asked using a Likert scale from 1-5. An infographic summary of the results can be found in Appendix A of this report.

**Analysis**

**Single-Use Cups**

Last year, the Office of Sustainability launched a reusable mug program in the Killam Memorial Library. This was done to reduce single-use cups on campus, with the library the pilot location for the program. Customers were able to select a reusable mug for use in the Atrium area and return it when they were done. This program not only solves the environmental aspect of waste, but saves money for beverage buyers as they get a discount when they bring a mug, cup, bottle, etc. Other universities are beginning to see the value of this initiative as the University of Toronto, Carleton, McGill and Harvard have implemented bring a mug/lug a mug programs at their universities. The structure is similar as a discount given in all food service locations on the campus when students bring their mug. These universities have noted a reduction in disposable paper cups after a reusable cup program was implemented. The University of Toronto mentioned that in an academic year after the program was created, 76,561 cups did not go into the garbage (University of Toronto, 2014).

A group of students at Dalhousie for ENVS/SUST 3502 completed a study on the Reusable mug program. In the survey they administered, one of the questions was whether students would support the program being implemented campus-wide and 93% of those surveyed indicated support. Only 50% of the people surveyed knew about the pilot project in the Killam, which shows the need for more promotion not only about the program but about discounts given by Dal food service providers when people bring their cup or mug. The study also looked into what percentage of students used disposable cups or brought their own. They found that 83% used disposable cups, 12% brought their reusable mug and only 5% utilized the program-issued mugs. The data collection was done at the Second Cup in the Killam Library (Archibald, Bi, Fong, & Privado, 2019) The study outlined some limitations to the program, which are expected since it is still in the early phase. This should not minimize the potential the program has to offer since evidence from other universities has identified such a program to be useful.

**Waste Reduction in Meal Halls**

Food waste reduction can reap financial, social and environmental benefits to the university, and is a vital problem at Dalhousie University meal halls. A study found that Howe hall produced 110.8 kilograms of plate waste within a month; this amount of waste is enough to feed an individual for two months (Douglas, 2019). With buffet-style serving, it is no surprise that a tremendous amount of food gets wasted every day. A study conducted by a Dal student on food loss in the Sheriff meal hall found that grains and vegetables were the most wasted food options, that each student wasted 36g of food each day, and that 21g of this food loss could be avoided if better anti-waste strategies were in place (Brown, 2012). Another study conducted in 2017 by Dalhousie students on food wasting attitudes and behaviours in Howe meal hall found that 87% of students do not finish their food in a sitting. Of the 87%, 78% identified the reason for food waste to be the meal being unappetizing. This indicates that there would likely be a decrease in waste if food quality were increased in meal halls. Although most food waste was attributed to food
quality, 63% of students stated that if possible, they would package their leftovers to eat at a later time (MacDonald, Rotteveel, Selim-Omar, Brown, Qin, Allen, 2017).

Sexton Campus

The survey found that students on Sexton Campus need a second food option. Sexton students need to be assured that the DSU and the University are committed to the needs of all students, not only those on Studley campus. Additional food services on Sexton are needed as the only other options for food on the campus are vending machines or the meal hall (which is only accessible to students with a meal plan) or to leave campus to find food downtown which is not financially or physically accessible for many students.

Potential Solutions

So, what can be done? At the University of Ottawa, for example, they created a “Love Food Not Waste Challenge” to reduce food waste in dining halls. The challenge is geared towards assisting students in keeping good food out of the compost bin by motivating them to pledge to collect less food, go back for seconds and sample new items. This is aimed so that students only take as much as they can eat and prevent wastage. The research conducted on the Sheriff and Howe dining halls also produced recommendations including allowing students to take out leftovers; implementing financial incentives; and offering food samples. Both studies emphasized that changing behaviour is essential to influencing how students prevent waste. This could be executed through financial incentives when students can be charged a $1 or $2 if they do not finish their meal. Doing this could deter the tendency to take larger portions that could be wasted. Additionally, offering food samples could be beneficial in providing students with the opportunity to determine what they would like to eat rather than throwing away excess.

Need for a Food Collective

The Food Collective was originally formed to put forth food-related initiatives that would nourish the life of students. Although its presence has been passive, members of the Collective have done various successful work on campus like the breakfast club, which is held on the Sexton campus. We recognized that there is more we can do to make food readily available and make Dalhousie a champion when it comes to advocating for environmental sustainability. To do that, the Collective requires having a formal identity within the institution.

This need is evident from schools where a recognized Food Collective or Coalition was able to make reforms that yielded immense benefits to students. The Concordia Food Coalition, for example, is the most widely known student coalition and deals with “the economic, ecological, and social implications of the food system at Concordia University” (Concordia Food Coalition, n.d). They work with both student societies and community groups to achieve their mandate. The Carleton Food Collective is another example. The collective was formed initially to address food insecurity due to rising tuition and rent costs in Ottawa. The Collective has since then grown to include more members, and puts on events like movie screenings, educational workshops and gardening sessions. McMaster University in Ontario also has a Food Collective dedicated to making sure that food is always accessible to aid students, alumni, and staff dealing with food insecurity.
These Collectives are currently thriving and making changes in the lives of students, staff and faculty through their commitment to alleviating food insecurity. The Dalhousie Food Collective would like to follow in their footsteps in formalization. The terms of reference in Appendix B outline the proposed structure and purpose of the Food Collective.

Recommendations Arising from This Report

The DSU Sustainability Office Recommends that the DSU:

1. Work with food service providers on campus to create and promote incentives that support sustainability. For example, Tim Hortons gives customers 10% off their beverage when they bring their own mug or cup.
2. Implement a system that will increase student’s use of reusable containers for food on campus.
3. Lobby the University to establish an additional food service on Sexton campus.
4. Lobby the university to enforce stricter waste reduction strategies on campus in collaboration with the DSUSO and the Dalhousie Office of Sustainability (DOS). This is especially needed in residence meal hall, which will necessitate collaboration with the University.
5. Provide the Food Collective with the authority to sit in on meetings between the DSU and food providers especially those concerning food contracts, with voting power, and potentially the ability to veto decisions that are not in the best interest of students.
Appendix A: Food Survey Results Infographic

DSU SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE

FOOD SURVEY

In 2019 We Decided to Conduct a Food Survey to Understand What Students Thought About Food on Campus

The survey had 99 responses
Of this number 65.7% were domestic students and 34.3% were international students

How Aware Students are About Food Sustainability Issues on Campus?

1=Do not know 5=Very Much aware

Is Healthy Food Options on Campus Affordable?

1=Not affordable 5=Very affordable

Are Food Options Offered on Campus Diverse?

Some of the no were from students who felt Sexton lacked food diversity

Maybe 2.1%
No 44.7%
Yes 53.2%
Appendix B: Proposed Terms of Reference for The Food Collective

DSU Food Collective

Purpose: The Food Collective aims to address food sustainability issues on campus. The Collective brings together representatives from all areas of the DSU that work on food issues in order to advise Council and the Executive on campaigns, services, policy, and operations as they relate to issues of food sovereignty, food security, and sustainable food practices. The Collective is also empowered to organize events and campaigns to educate DSU members about food issues and to prepare and publish surveys and reports on food issues.

Goals:
The Collective aims:

- To ensure that food issues are prioritized as an area of focus for the DSU;
- To collect, create, and provide informed knowledge about food security, food sovereignty, and sustainable food practices to the entire student body;
- To advise the DSU on food issues and how best to meet the food-related needs of DSU members;
- To coordinate the DSU’s advocacy and research efforts around food issues and to encourage collaboration between offices, departments, and decision-making bodies.

Members:
The voting members of the committee are:

- The DSUSO Food Commissioner, who serves as Chair of the Collective and leads both event planning and research activities;
- The DSU Vice President, Academic and External, who serves as a liaison between the Collective and DSU Council;
- One DSU Food Bank staff member or volunteer appointed by the Food Bank Manager;
- One DSU Market staff member or volunteer appointed by the Market Operations Manager;
- One Loaded Ladle board member, staff member or volunteer appointed by the Loaded Ladle Board, who provides access to programming, and ongoing learning/conferences for other Collective members and offers support for breakfast club and cooking classes offered by DSUSO;
- One general member of the DSU who is conducting research through the Dalhousie Food Policy Lab, to be appointed by the Collective; and
- One general member of the DSU who is taking the majority of their classes at the Sexton campus, to be appointed by Council.

Meetings:
The Collective holds at least one meeting per month. Additional meetings can be called by the Collective Chair as needed, or upon written request from at least three other members of the Committee. All meetings are chaired and scheduled by the Food Commissioner and they prepare the meeting agenda.

Meetings of the Collective are generally open, meaning any DSU member may attend and speak. The Collective can also invite non-members to attend particular meetings to offer unique insight and support. For example, the Collective may wish to invite a researcher from the Dalhousie University Food Policy Lab to discuss policy changes; the DSU Member Services Coordinator to discuss services; or the DSU Director of Operations to discuss changes to SUB operations and/or businesses.

**Budget:**

The Food Collective does not have its own budget or funds but may submit a request to the Executive Committee to utilize funds from the Advocacy/Campaigns or Programming budgets. Any such requests must be accompanied by a detailed budget for how the money requested will be used and will be subject to applicable approval processes. DSUSO may also choose to allocate funds to particular events or initiatives created by the Food Collective, subject to their own internal approval processes.

**Reporting:**

After each meeting of the Food Collective, the VPAE will report on their activities at the next meeting of DSU Council. Additional or more detailed reports may from time to time be requested by Council. Any such reports will be prepared in writing by the Collective Chair and will be made available on the DSU website along with other Council documents.
References


• MacDonald, L., Rotteveel, L., Selim-Omar, J., Brown, N., Qin, S., Allen, S. (2017). Food Wasting Attitudes and Behaviors Among Residence Meal Hall Users at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dalhousie University, Canada