

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

**APPROVED 2-27-08    REVISED 3-29-11    REVISED 5-1-13**

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. Our efforts focus on both Campus Dining and Emory Healthcare locations.

This document outlines specific buying priorities for eight\* 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. We set our priorities by asking ourselves, “If we can only do one thing, what would we want to do first?”

\* Revisions to these guidelines were carried out in 2011, when our original ten categories were combined into seven by combining four grocery categories into one. The committee agreed that processed foods with multiple ingredients could not be sufficiently verified to count towards local purchases, and non-dairy beverages were also excluded from tracking to meet local purchasing goals, regardless of where they were manufactured. In 2013, with changes in national certification processes and with the development of Emory's new tracking system, priorities were also revised.

## **PRIORITIES BY FOOD CATEGORY**

### **1. Milk and dairy**

First priority: produced free from routine use of antibiotics and hormones

Second priority: sourced from certified grass fed animals (American Grassfed Association)

Third priority: from eight-state southern region

Fourth priority: from Georgia

Fifth priority: certified organic (USDA)

Sixth priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified sustainable and from Georgia.

### **2. Eggs**

First priority: produced free from routine antibiotic use

Second priority: certified humanely raised (Humane Farm Animal Care)

Third priority: from eight-state southern region

Fourth priority: from Georgia

Fifth priority: certified organic (USDA)

Ultimate goal: certified humane and sustainable and from Georgia.

### **3. Vegetables and fruits**

First priority: from Georgia Second priority: from eight-state southern region

Third priority: certified organic (USDA)

Fourth priority: certified Fair Trade

Fifth priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified sustainable and from Georgia.

### **4. Chicken**

First priority: produced free from routine antibiotic use

Second priority: certified humanely raised (Humane Farm Animal Care)

Third priority: from Georgia

Fourth priority: from eight-state southern region

Fifth priority certified organic (USDA)

Sixth priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified humane and sustainable and from Georgia.

## **5. Beef**

First priority: certified humanely raised (Humane Farm Animal Care)

Second priority: certified grassfed (American Grassfed Association)

Third priority: from eight-state southern region

Fourth priority: from Georgia

Fifth priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified grassfed, humane, and sustainable and from Georgia.

## **6. Pork and other meats**

First priority: certified humanely raised (Humane Farm Animal Care)

Second priority: from Georgia

Third priority: from eight-state southern region

Fourth priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified humane and sustainable and from Georgia.

## **7. Seafood**

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

Second priority: Marine Stewardship Council certification

Third priority: Sustainable Seafood Forum recognition

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

## **8. Grocery**

First priority: certified organic

Second certified Fair Trade

Third priority: certified sustainable (Food Alliance or alternative certification)

Ultimate goal: certified sustainable.

### **RATIONALE FOR THESE PRIORITIES**

**Hormone and antibiotic free:** By choosing milk, dairy, eggs, chickens, and other meats produced without routine administration of antibiotics or artificial hormones, we eliminate a major risk of generating 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.

Guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration make this priority automatically fulfilled for some foods; for example, hormones are not approved for use in eggs and poultry,

**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 produce 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 energy-intensive grain production, farmland erosion and groundwater contamination. We recognize American Grassfed Association's certification of grassfed and may add other certifications in the future.

**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** While at present no “sustainable” certification is available in Georgia, the kinds of standards articulated by Food Alliance certification go beyond the USDA checklist approach to organic certification and offer assurance of sustainable management practices at the whole-farm level. Certified sustainable farms will 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 usually part of sustainable certification. We have kept “certified sustainable” are part of our goals, in hopes that appropriate certifications will soon become available.

**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. (<http://www.certifiedhumane.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** certification seeks to guarantee improved environmental practices and higher returns to producers in developing countries. For products where plantation agriculture can be certified, Fair Trade offers improved labor conditions, higher pay, and rights to organize. Fair trade certification supports local economic development efforts, democratic processes, and direct relations between buyers and sellers. (<http://www.fairtrade.net/>).

## References

- American Public Health Association 2003. Precautionary Moratorium on New Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations. Policy Statement 2003-7. [www.aph.org/legislative](http://www.aph.org/legislative). Accessed 11-11-07.
- Bussel, Robert 2003. Taking on "Big Chicken":Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance. *Labor Stud.* 28(2):1-24.
- Chapin A, et al. 2005. Airborne Multidrug-Resistant Bacteria Isolated from a Concentrated Swine Feeding Operation. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 113(2):137-42.
- Clancy, K. 2006. *Greener Pastures*. Cambridge: Union of Concerned Scientists Publications.
- \_\_ 2006. Greener Eggs and Ham: The benefits of Pasture-Raised Swine, Poultry and Egg Production. Union of Concerned Scientists. Cambridge, MA.
- Community Food Security Coalition 2007. Farm to College Programs. [www.farmtocollege.org](http://www.farmtocollege.org). Accessed 9-12-07.
- Cordain, L., B. A. Watkins, et al. 2002. Fatty acid analysis of wild ruminant tissues: evolutionary implications for reducing diet-related chronic disease. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 56(3): 181-191.
- Eartheasy.com. 2006. Pesticides and Produce Recommendations for produce with lowest levels of pesticide residues and produce to avoid. [http://eartheasy.com/eat\\_pesticides\\_produce.htm](http://eartheasy.com/eat_pesticides_produce.htm). Accessed 12-22-06.
- Halweil, Brian 2002. *Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market*. Worldwatch Paper 163. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.
- Horrigan L, et al. 2001. How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Human Health Harms of Industrial Agriculture. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 110(5):445-456.
- Key, et al. 2004. Diet, Nutrition, and the Prevention of Cancer. *Public Health Nutrition* 7(1A):187-200.
- Kingsolver, Barbara 2007. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. NY: HarperCollins.
- Mann, N. 2000. Dietary lean red meat and human evolution. *European Journal of Nutrition*. 39(2): 71-79
- Pirog, Rich, et. al. 2001. Food, Fuel, and Freeways: An Iowa Perspective on How Far Food Travels, Food Usage, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University. [www.leopold.iastate.edu](http://www.leopold.iastate.edu).
- Pollan, Michael 2005. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. NY: Penguin Press.
- Pretty, Jules 2002 *Agri-Culture: Reconnecting People, Land, and Nature*. London: Earthscan.
- \_\_ 2005 *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Agriculture*. London: Earthscan.
- Rembialkowska, E. 2004. The impact of organic agriculture on food quality. *Agricultura* 3:19-26
- Report of the Sustainability Committee, Emory University 2006. [www.finadmin.emory.edu/policies/SustyReportFinal.pdf](http://www.finadmin.emory.edu/policies/SustyReportFinal.pdf)
- Roberts E.M. et al. 2007. Maternal residence near agricultural pesticide applications and autism spectrum disorders among children in the California Central Valley. *Environ Health Perspectives* 115(10):1482-9.
- Wang, Shirley and Kelly D. Brownell 2005. Public Policy and Obesity: The Need to Marry Science with Advocacy. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 28:235-52.
- Willett, Walter C. 2006. The Mediterranean Diet: Science and Practice. *Public Health Nutrition* 9(1A):105-110.
- World Health Organization 2003. Joint FAO/OIE/WHO Expert Workshop on Non-Human Antimicrobial Usage and Antimicrobial Resistance: Scientific Assessment. [www.who.int/foodsafety/micro/meetings/en/report.pdf](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/micro/meetings/en/report.pdf). Accessed 10-18-07.