

Dining Services Information

Mission and Vision:

COA Dining Services is committed to providing high quality, healthy, delicious and predominately hand-prepared meals incorporating the use of local and organic food products whenever possible. We offer affordable meals at Blair Dining Hall and Sea Urchin Café during the week and provide catering for college events, meetings, and celebrations. Dining Services are a vital part of the COA community and we want to promote healthy selections to support a healthy lifestyle. By considering the environmental, social, economic and political impacts of food, we are able to prepare meals that promote the values of the college while remaining committed to providing excellent and responsive service. We strive to be a center for food education and experiential learning for the COA community and beyond.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why do we make the food choices we do? What are the factors? The kitchen aims to provide healthy, flavorful, and responsible/sustainable foods. However, we can only get what's available; we do our best to balance the price of food with the moral parameters expressed by the college community.

How do we make decisions about local and organic foods? The primary factors for local and organic purchasing are cost and availability, both in terms of seasonality and quantity. Because we live in Maine and students expect and require some variety in their diets, many food purchases can't be sourced locally and organically. Although there are local and organic sources for some foods, many of them cannot provide a high enough quantity stock for us. Meat, for example, cannot always be sourced locally because we require regular large amounts. During the summer months, when summer programs are using TAB, we are able to provide the highest quantity of local and organic food. Fall is another good time to source locally, during these months we use up to 75% local food in the kitchen. In winter months however, there isn't much we can get.

Our other major factor is cost. We generally pay the going price for anything available locally, but with organic foods we sometimes have to balance the kitchen's budget, students' budget, and what is available. We recognize that most COA students try to be frugal and can't afford to spend huge amounts of money at every meal. The bottom line is that we get what's available locally or that is organic, as long as the price isn't overly costly.

Where does our food come from? All over the place. We regularly purchase chicken from an Amish chicken farm in Pennsylvania; we buy lamb and beef from Meadowsweet Farm (about 40% of our meat is "local"); we get our dairy from Garelick Farms; our distributor gets fruits and vegetables wherever they are most locally available; we buy tofu from our distributor (PFG Northcenter); and we buy our grains from Associated Buyers (based in the Northeast). We make our seitan and tempeh in the kitchen.

How much food do we get from Beech Hill Farm? We try to use as much food from Beach Hill Farm as

we can. If it is available and we can store it, TAB will purchase it. Beech Hill emphasizes selling their much of their produce through Community Supported Agriculture and the farm stand. Availability varies widely by season and year, as with all local crops.

What does the kitchen consider when making decisions about fish & seafood?

Other Seafood: We buy most of our seafood from Maine Shellfish; they source as locally as possible. When it is available and in season, we buy shrimp and scallops right off the boat.

Why farm raised salmon? The salmon alternative to locally farm-raised is Alaskan wild caught, which we have available to us after it is shipped overseas for freeze-processing. So we get local farm raised salmon, which we try to make sure we get from aquaculture farms that we know to be responsibly run.

What's the story with compost from the kitchen? During the summer and fall, compost from the COA kitchen goes to Beach Hill Farm and is composted there. The farm generally picks it up when it delivers produce so as to avoid making multiple trips with their truck. During the winter and spring, our kitchen scraps are composted in the Community Garden by work-study students.

What is the relationship between TAB and the café? Most of the food for the two dining areas is different; the café provides primarily sandwiches and other lunch and snack foods like pizzas and smoothies, while TAB has full hot meals. Because most of the food is prepared in TAB's kitchen and there isn't enough time to make extra variety each day, the daily soups and desserts are the same. Students can use their meal plans at either the Sea Urchin or TAB for one meal, with one meal being equivalent to \$8 of café products.

On which foods do we spend the most money? Meat and juice.

How much do we spend replacing dishes? We spend approximately \$2,000 a year on dishes; mugs are the biggest portion of this.

What do we purchase fair trade? All of our coffee is fair trade, and most of our staples such as rice, beans, and other grains. We hope to see greater availability of these items and are working towards a point where all of our foods can be fair trade.

Why isn't the all the food vegetarian? There was a time when TAB only served vegetarian food; COA dining services have come to take a much larger role meeting the nutrition requirements of students and others in the COA community. With the increased diversity of all kinds in the student body, we have found that the great majority of our students are not vegetarian, and many want and expect meat. We also want to make sure that it is easy for students to get complete, balanced meals—when people are new to making all of their own food choices; it is easier to eat healthy if the choices are familiar.

What percentage of meals is vegetarian? One-third of meals from the kitchen are vegetarian. Of the 15 meals each week, 5-6 are exclusively vegetarian; there are vegetarian and vegan options available at every meal.

Can we accommodate dietary restrictions? We do our best to accommodate a wide range of dietary restrictions that students notify us of when they complete their meal plan forms. It is much easier to ensure that we always accommodate specific restrictions if we know when a student will be present to eat, that is to say if they are on a meal plan rather than a declining balance.

What kinds of fats are used in the kitchen? The kitchen mostly uses canola and extra-virgin olive oil for cooking. In some cases we use sesame oil or other flavoring oils.

How much food is pre-processed? Well under 10% of our foods are pre-processed (such as veggie burgers or veggie sausage). We only use these foods if we consider them to be a good product and get good feedback from students.

How many meals include proteins, starches, and vegetables? Every meal includes options for each of these three nutritional requirements.

Can we have all the food labeled? Labeling really depends on student participation—we have welcomed classes and students who want to trace and label all of our food, but there just isn't enough time for kitchen staff to do this regularly. The SP 11 Food-print class re-labeled the juices in the juice machine, a great example of students taking that kind of initiative.

What are the meal plans, and where do they work? There are now four meal plan options, all of which can be used in either TAB or Sea Urchin café in Deering. The options are a full (fifteen/week) meal plan, ten meals/week, five meals/week, and a \$100 declining balance.

How do the meal cards work? If you're on the fifteen, ten or five meal plan you've purchased the whole meal including sides, salad, and your drink, and in TAB are allowed to have seconds as available. In the café you get an eight dollar equivalent for your lunch. When you purchase food a la carte, you purchase food and beverages by the serving and are not eligible to have seconds.

If you have any more questions, just ask! There is an annual Student Life Committee meeting about the kitchen, if you have comments or suggestions you are welcome to submit them. Ken and Lise are happy to answer questions that you might have. Finally, there is a notebook in TAB that is good for comments and suggestions, positive reinforcement is always welcome!