

# Food Sustainability Report Card for the Student Union Building at Dalhousie University

SUST/ENVS 3502 Final Report  
April 13, 2010

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## Abstract

The concept of sustainable development is one of the big ideas of our time. Every individual needs to appreciate their part in turning our global challenges into opportunities to build more resilient local and global communities. Sustainable actions are generally defined as “meeting the needs of the present, without compromising those of the future”, a balanced state between social, environmental, and economic success.

Dalhousie has committed to becoming a leader in sustainable institutional development and is devoted to greening our campus at all levels of operation. As students, we see the need for change and also the potential that lies in our current position within the system. Concurrently, addressing the food system and consumers’ awareness regarding the nature of the foods available at the Student Union Building at Dalhousie seemed an appropriate and meaningful undertaking treating the *Campus As A Living Laboratory*.

For the purpose of this project and in compliance with the Yale University Sustainable Food Project, evaluating “sustainable food” encompasses identifying the origin and the production methods which are crucial to sustainable operations. Sustainable foods and production practices are the results of respecting social, ecological, and economic needs which are reflected in the food production system through employing environmentally and socially sound agriculture, respecting labor rights and fair trade, and also providing operational transparency to the consumer.

A combination of exploratory and descriptive research was produced the desired results for an accurate evaluation of foods at the SUB. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from literature, and interviews concerning the Student Union Building and the food service provider Sodexo aided in creating a food report card. Sodexo provides various foods to the SUB while overall reaching less than 50% for our best practice criteria. JustUs! offers organic fair-trade coffee, herbal teas, and cane sugar receiving a perfect score for sustainability in practices. Evaluations for PizzaPizza, Booster Juice, and Tim Horton’s span from ‘good practices’ in food production to ‘foods to avoid’ as a sustainability conscious consumer.

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Conclusively, results of our research yields a number of different paths that could be pursued to enhance and further the investigation we have begun. Our recommendations for future research are widespread, encompassing aspects from policy and contracts to organic farming. New food service suppliers need to be explored while educational programs and direct student involvement are crucial in sustainable food system developments on campus. Dalhousie is at the cusp of leading Canada's universities in overall sustainability and we believe that food purchasing is the next step in continuing this impressive record. By using every resource available, including student groups, future research and educational awareness campaigns, we feel that the DSU has the ability to provide economically viable food for the masses while still honouring the importance of food sustainability in the SUB.

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## Introduction

The concept of sustainable development is one of the big ideas of our time. In the face of climate change and unprecedented human population size, everyone needs to appreciate their part in turning our global challenges into opportunities to build more resilient local and global communities. Much can be done on an individual and on a community level to fulfill society's needs while respecting the limits of nature in sustainable urban and rural systems.

Defining 'sustainability' principally depends on the context in which the term is used. From an anthropocentric perspective, the word is generally defined as "meeting the needs of the present, without compromising those of the future" (Campus Green Guide, 2009). The environmental consultant John Elkington defines sustainability further as the balanced state between social, environmental, and economic success of an operation as he applies this concept known as the 'triple bottom line' (people, planet, and profit) to corporate responsibility (ISD, 2010). According to Elkington, joining "the three pillars" of social, environmental, and economic sustainability is essential in order to reach overall sustainability of a system (ISD, 2010). Thus, sustainability cannot be obtained unless all three conditions are satisfied. An emphasis is placed on the reliance of human communities on the natural environment and on universal interconnectivity.

Considering the value of food and further the impacts of food production on people, the environment, and on local and global economies, securing sustainable food sources is a major challenge of our time. One can hardly deny the unique position universities hold in educating society and with it, the grand possibilities for far-reaching change and green development – physical and intellectual. As students, we see the need for change and also the potential that lies in our current position within the system. With a focus on food, one quickly perceives the complexity of the global production networks and the various effects food operations can have on all living things.

Consequently, sustainability cannot be constrained to describing one action but instead needs to encompass a way of operationalizing, managing and living. In the case of applying the three pillars to universities, many in Canada, and throughout the world, have committed to becoming leaders in sustainable development. Dalhousie University is

among those proclaiming institutional dedication to sustainable development and has solidified these claims in adopting the greening the campus movement. The establishment of the College of Sustainability, the Sustainability Office, and Environmental Science/Studies undergraduate programs over the past five years successfully created awareness of the issue of sustainable practices. Such measures further offer the opportunity for members of the campus community to pursue educational careers in the area of sustainable development. However, the concept of sustainability needs to be incorporated into all levels and sorts of institutional operations beyond the educational ones. In addition, an inclusive approach is essential in the evolution toward becoming a sustainable campus.

As students, we see the value and opportunity in direct involvement with decision making processes and in implementing fast change within the campus community. For that reason, addressing the food system and consumers' awareness regarding the nature of the foods available at the Student Union Building at Dalhousie seemed an appropriate and meaningful undertaking.

For the purpose of this project and in compliance with the Yale University Sustainable Food Project, "sustainable food" is defined as food coming from a production system which "can be continued indefinitely without degrading the systems and resources upon which it relies" (Yale, 2010). The Yale Sustainable Food Project has been operational since 2003 with the simple but crucial mission to reconnect people with their food through academic and practical education. The Project operates an organic farm on the Yale campus, works with administrators to implement a sustainable dining program on campus, and organizes various programs to support practical and academic education on food and agriculture (Yale, 2010).

In view of Yale University's sustainable food principles, the origin and the production methods of food are crucial in order to evaluate the sustainability of selected food items, and SUB vendors and suppliers. Sustainable foods and production practices are the results of respecting social, ecological, and economic needs which are reflected in the food production system through employing environmentally and socially sound agriculture, respecting labor rights and fair trade, and also providing operational transparency to the consumer.

Local food production contributes to the creation of self-reliant and community-based systems which are vital in increasing systemic resiliency. Supporting bioregional farming and the related economy enhances the sense of community and connects people with their food on a local level. Comparatively, the concept of organic or ecologically sound farming practices is more geared toward involving people and the planet, rather than people and profit. Organic farming often involves highly restricted use of synthetic chemicals and operates in systems more closely related to natural systems. Fair trade certifications confirm the respect for people during food production while also ensuring economic security for the workers. Ideally, the combination of the above mentioned approaches within a food production system will result in a highly resilient operation regarding Elkington's three pillars.

Constructing a report card which evaluates food items and vendors based on environmental, social, and economic sustainability can help to detect where improvements need to be made and where Dalhousie's efforts are already take effect.

The project is particularly timely because Sodexo's contract for the Student Union building will run out in July 2011. A realization of the sustainable food report card over the coming school year may therefore provide the opportunity to influence the revision process of the current contract or may assist in finding a food provider more in accordance with Dalhousie's pursuit of creating a sustainable campus environment. Optimally, the report card will be expanded to include all of Dalhousie's vendors and will be made readily available to the entire Dalhousie community.

## **Background**

Looking at what has been done in the past at Dalhousie University as well as at other universities gives perspective on where Dalhousie stands in terms of building a sustainable food system on campus. Previous work on the issue of Campus Food Sustainability has been conducted at numerous universities internationally, in Canada, and on the Dalhousie campus. Before preparing a sustainable food report card for campus foods and proposing that students, administrators, and suppliers should consider more healthy and sustainable options, feasibility of providing such foods on Dalhousie campus

needed to be proven. The examination of some relevant studies at North American Universities and at Dalhousie provided a context for the proposed development of a Sustainable Campus Food Report Card for Dalhousie University campus. A review of Yale University and of its food system operations did not only make us optimistic that a large university can adopt campus-wide sustainable food practices, but supplied critical information on appropriate evaluation criteria for this food report card. ...

Studies conducted at other North American universities showed what has been done at similar institutions and what was possible to achieve within a university's food system. Goucher College in Maryland, for example, serves meals reflecting the university's commitment to environmentally sustainable agriculture practices, fair trade and local policies, and operates a campus farm. The food service provider Bon Appétit develops and is dedicated to sustainable dining policies and clearly indicates organic and locally grown food items in the campus food outlets (NWF, 2009a). The comprehensive local and organic food policy sets the goal to purchase items within a 150 mile radius before considering international sources (SEI, 2009). Colby College in Maine contacts Sodexo (as does Dalhousie) which regularly offers vegan and vegetarian fares with more than 20 organic items on the menu and emphasizes the importance of empowering students to successfully create change regarding campus foods (NWF, 2009b).

In Canada, York University in Toronto (Counter Culture, 2004) and Concordia University in Montreal are leaders in initiating locally-grown, organic food options to be offered on their campuses (McKenna *et al.*, 2004). These universities show their commitment to executing environmental sustainability in their everyday operations. Dalhousie University can and should do the same by demonstrating its dedication to sustainable operations, particularly in providing environmentally, socially and economically sustainable food.

Focusing in on Dalhousie, the main objectives in reviewing past studies on campus was to gain baseline data to build on, to discover current opinions, concerns and policies, and to gain an understanding of the campus food service operations and existing sustainable food initiatives on campus. At Dalhousie, the Food Education & Policy

committee and the group Sustain Dal are the main initiatives involved with food service providers to encourage institutional changes toward more sustainable practices (SEI, 2009). The following is a review of previous studies done in the framework of this class, ENVS 3502 The Campus As A Living Laboratory.

McKenna *et al.* (2004) investigated the problem of unsustainable food practices at Dalhousie with the goal of determining the feasibility of having locally-grown, organic food options on campus. Results demonstrate that providing environmentally-friendly food choice to the Dalhousie population was feasible in terms of existing student interest and Sodexo's willingness to supply local, organic food if demand was evident in consumption patterns. Analysis of student sustainable food preference established a positive correlation between student preferences for local, organic foods and familiarity with the principles of sustainability. This study set the groundwork for having low impact food options on campus and providing relevant background information to the campus community.

A second study in 2005 examined how much of the food for Dalhousie's dining halls came from farms, processors and manufacturers within the Maritime Provinces (NS, NB, PEI) and whether it was feasible to increase that amount (Balser *et al.*, 2005). Demonstrating benefits of bioregional foods to health, and environmental and socio-economic sustainability, and further assessing dining hall food operations and student awareness led to the conclusion that while students are concerned, economics is the driving factor in Aramark's food purchasing decisions. Considering this finding, a subsequent study on solid food waste production at Howe Hall in 2007 revealed that 55% of students waste a considerable amount of food (about 250 lb) every day owing to poor food quality/taste or poor variety (Budgell *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, a simple conclusion is that money could be saved if Aramark provided better quality foods (i.e. local, organic) while attending to its responsibility to provide healthy food to students.

Building on these studies, two student groups in 2009 attempted to establish student-run food coops sourcing foods locally and from organic producers to fill the gap



of lacking sustainable food options on campus. One group identified the environmental movement as an answer to sustainability issues and recognized the unique position of university students to cause systemic changes through pro-environmental behavior (Antze *et al.*, 2009). Antze *et al.* (2009) addressed campus sustainability by suggesting carbon footprint reductions through implementing the above mentioned student-run locally sourced food coop within the SUB and examined the feasibility of either replacing or supplementing current food services with the coop. For insurance reasons, neither Aramark nor Sodexo are currently able to supply local meat products to the university, a system leaving little room for direct student involvement (Briggins *et al.*, 2009). Relevant survey findings include that 34 % and 25 % of students consider eating locally sourced food and eating organic food on campus as very important respectively, while 81 % stated to be willing to pay slightly more than they currently do for food that is from local sources (Antze *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, providing report card evaluations and giving students the option to select healthier, more sustainable but sometimes more expensive food may be a viable approach to “greening the campus”.

From reviewing previous studies done in the framework of this class, we identified two main problems. First, the Dalhousie food distribution system is established and run by multinational corporations, Sodexo, responsible for food outlets on campus (McKenna *et al.*, 2004), and Aramark, responsible for all food services in student residences and academic buildings with the exception of the Student Union Building (SUB) (Briggins *et al.*, 2009). The companies are attempting to meet student demands for locally and organically sourced foods, however, students still have no direct influence on or involvement in the food operations on campus. Second, the lack of awareness of the significant impact food consumption has on the overall environmental, social and health well being of individuals and the community (Briggins *et al.*, 2009).

A general emphasis in conclusions and recommendations is placed on the need to bring student demand for local, organic food to the attention of campus food services and administrators. Creating a campus food report card would be valuable to students by

providing accessible background information and helping consumers chose foods in accordance with their concern for sustainable products.

The review identified one limitation that could not be resolved by providing the proposed food report card. Although local farmers could meet supply and distribution needs, lack of federal inspection and insurance of small-scale local farming products (a more money- and time-consuming procedure) is a barrier to Aramark's willingness to purchase food from local farmers (Balser *et al.*, 2005). Sodexo is also subject to a number of constraints (mostly legal/liability concerns), which hampers its ability to effectively supply Dalhousie with a majority of local food (Antze *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, Sodexo's exclusivity contract with the university limits the sale of food on campus by independent organizations since Sodexo alone is currently responsible for renting vending spaces to mostly international franchises (Briggins *et al.*, 2009).

The Sustainable Endowment Institute (SEI) served as a further source of information concerning Dalhousie's position in sustainable campus practices. The *College Sustainability Report Card* is a free public service website that provides sustainability profiles for over 300 colleges in North America (SEI, 2009). A comparative evaluation of campus sustainability activities identifies universities that are leaders in sustainability with the aim to provide accessible information for schools and establish more effective sustainability practices. The success of the most recent report card for 2010 (96 percent respond rate) may indicate the usefulness to this project in preparing evaluation variables for a Dalhousie campus food sustainability report card. Other investigated school food report cards such as one offered by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI, 2006) were solely concerned with nutritional values and high school nutrition policy, not sustainability.

Considering both, the *College Sustainability Report Card* awarding Dalhousie with a combined A grade in the Food and Recycling category (based on a survey completed by Dalhousie's Resident District Food Service Director Derrick Hines; SEI, 2009), and also the findings from previous studies concerned with food sustainability at

Dalhousie (revealing serious room for improvement), the proposed study will offer a more accurate picture of Dalhousie's food system sustainability on campus. Investigating the SUB food system may further be of interest as Sodexo's operations has never been included in the *College Sustainability Report Card*.

Currently, four food suppliers are contacted by Sodexo to provide services in addition to Sodexo's own foods. Sodexo itself is a multinational corporation providing integrated food and facilities management services to Canada, the USA and Mexico serving 10 million customers in 6,000 locations per day. Sodexo claims to promote local, organic, and healthy ingredients for their foods "wherever possible" (Sodexo Inc., 2010). Tim Horton's is the largest Canadian franchise operating internationally to serve conventional coffee and fast foods (<http://nuthatch.typepad.com/beans/2007/12/tim-hortons-cof.html>). PizzaPizza is also a Canadian fast food franchise serving pizza and other fast foods nationally. Booster Juice is a Canadian fresh juice chain operating internationally to provide "health-conscious" smoothies. Just Us! is a worker owned cooperative and Canada's first Fair Trade coffee roaster operating out of Wolfville, N.S. (JustUs, 2009). The company offers organic fair-trade products building on the three pillars of quality products, social and environmental responsibility.

### **Purpose and objectives**

The importance of the proposed project lies in presenting the campus community with relevant background information on food options available at vendors in the SUB. The current, conventional food production and distribution system is a major obstacle to Dalhousie in regard to its official commitment to sustainable practices. Through providing an accessible, detailed and categorized report card, we aim to facilitate a democratic bottom-up approach to dealing with food sustainability issues which directly empowers students to individually make a positive contribution to this vision. Consumers need to appreciate the effects their decisions may have on the environment, on the economy, and on other people.

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The short-term goal of this project is to make information available to consumers and create awareness and appreciation of sustainable food systems. This may help consumers make informed food purchasing decisions which match their values. The mid- and long-term goal is to give the Dalhousie campus community the opportunity to influence the SUB food system through bottom-up governance. Overall, we aim to provide a useful tool to help facilitate and contribute to positive change, welcoming a sustainable community at Dalhousie University.

We expect this project to be successful for two reasons. First, the literature review reveals sufficient student concern for the sustainable food issue. Second, recent statements from Sodexo representatives disclose the impact consumer demand has on the range of foods offered. The success of this report card therefore relies on the assumption that consumer awareness and education can influence behavioral change. And further, student demand for products and information is of primary concern to the SUB food service providers

## **Methods**

### **Design of Study**

A combination of exploratory and descriptive research was conducted to yield the desired results for an accurate evaluation of foods at the SUB. Qualitative and quantitative analysis was applied to the gathered results. The methods that were employed encompass literature reviews, interviews and informative emails.

Exploratory and descriptive methods were used to gain extensive knowledge of the food system at Dalhousie with emphasis on the Student Union (SUB). Since the SUB is overseen by the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) it was necessary to draw and understand the differences between the food system in the SUB and other food distributors at Dalhousie. Comprehensive analysis of the Yale Sustainable Food Purchasing Guide was required as the categories and guidelines for the research were based on the Yale Sustainable Food Project methods. The methods were used to ensure that accurate questions were formulated for the interviews, and to appropriately grade the investigated food items. The intended focus was on the food distribution at the Student

Union Building (SUB) on Studley campus. The SUB was chosen for its central location and because it holds the highest density of food retailers and also has the greatest traffic of patrons. In addition, the SUB is not an academic building, which avoids targeting a particular academic discipline, and activities in the SUB are largely governed by students, not administrators.

The criteria were established using Yale's guidelines and were divided into the three categories of geography, ownership and practices (Figure 1). These categories were further divided into five sections and allocated points depending on certain criteria.

For geography the highest score (10) is local, within Nova Scotia, followed by 9-7 for regional, meaning within Atlantic Canada, 6-4 National (Canada), 3-1 for operations in North America, and 0 for international.

For ownership the highest awarded point (10) was family owned and/or cooperative and/or community owned all small to mid size product, 9-7 local business or farmers, 6-4 regionally owned corporation, 3-1 national corporation and/or large scale corporately-owned farms, and 0 multinational corporation and/or large-scale corporately-owned farms.

The practices highest awarded point (10) was organic, free-range, grass-fed and certified fair trade depending on the food item that was evaluated, 9-7 organic not certified and fair labour practices, 6-4 integrated pest management and/or ecologically grown, 3-1 small-scale conventional and/or limited use of synthetic chemicals and 0 monoculture/agribusiness, conventional grain fed/ extensive use of synthetic chemicals.

Each food item was allocated the adequate points based on the criteria and then tallied, this resulted in scores for best practice (27-30 points), good practice (15-26 points), and avoid (0-14 points). With the use of these compiled grades, a food report card tailored to consumers at the SUB was created including background information on franchises and food options available.

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Evaluation scheme based on the Yale Sustainable Purchasing Guide (2004)			
Points	Geography	Ownership	Practices
10	Local (Nova Scotia)	Family-owned/ Cooperative/Community-owned (small to mid size production)	Organic, free-range, grass-fed, certified fair-trade
9-7	Regional (Atlantic Canada)	Local business/farmers	Organic not certified, fair labor practices
6-4	National (Canada)	Regionally-owned corporation	Integrated Pest Management /ecologically grown
3-1	North America	National corporation/large-scale corporately-owned farms	Small-scale conventional, limited use of synthetic chemicals
0	International	Multinational corporation/large-scale corporately-owned farms	Monoculture/Agribusiness, conventional grain-fed/use of synthetic chemicals
 = best practices (27-30 points)  = avoid product (0-14 points)  = good practices (15-26 points)			

**Figure 1** Evaluation scheme based on Yale Sustainable Purchasing Guide (2004), used to evaluate the chosen food items in the SUB.

### Sample

Our target sample included primarily informants directly affiliated with the food system in the SUB, although additional individuals were contacted outside of the SUB's food system to clarify particular information. Through analyzing Dalhousie's food system and understanding Yale's methods we were able to determine the most prominent individuals to speak to. Those who were contacted were identified purposively or through snowballed contacts. Targeted first were candidates in the upper most positions responsible for the food system in the SUB; Sodexo, the contracted food distributor, and the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) who is responsible for choosing and signing numerous contracts with Sodexo. Through these interviews we were able to recognize additional contacts of suppliers and franchises. All individuals that were questioned were informed of our goals, the project we were involved in, and also on their right to keep the information they provided confidential in our report. Purposively emailing was administered to those not directly associated with the food in the SUB to verify some of the information that was received from the interviews. This approach helped to gain a different perspective and to again snowball additional contacts.

## Instrumentation

In order to determine the methods that would need to be employed in collecting the necessary data; we first did extensive research of the food system at Dalhousie and also literary review of Yale's successes, operations, procedures and recommendations. The *a priori* approach was applicable to identify key themes that relate to our study, however, *a posteriori* approach was used on a variety of information (Wright, 2010). Yale's Sustainable Food Purchasing Guide was our primary resource in investigating the food in the SUB, and it was further used to formulate our categories and grading scheme.

The majority of the information that is available concerning Dalhousie's food system does not apply to the SUB; this became a major hurdle in trying to understand the complexities of the system. Owing to that issue, multiple emails were sent to determine who was relevant to our research, or to eliminated misunderstood data and to overall gain a better understanding of the food system. Interviews were extremely important to our research because the information provided yielded versatility to the results and provided insights directly from the company source. The interviews were conducted in person or via phone, and the questions were conducted in a purposive manner. Our first open ended, face to face interviews were carried out with Laurie Hennigar and Mindy Duffy, Sodexo representatives (Appendix 1), and with Shannon Zimmer, DSU president and student representative (Appendix 2). The interviews provided greater insight into to the SUB food system and additionally resulted in snowballing additional contacts. Through these interviews we were able to determine some of the food suppliers. We further learned that the franchises operate on their own account and not under Sodexo while still vending Sodexo products. We then carried out numerous phone interviews with some of Sodexo's suppliers including H.E. Keddy Bros. (Appendix 3) who supply the bulk of their produce, and Eden Valley (Appendix 4) the supplier of chicken, turkey and eggs. Additional phone interviews were completed with representatives from the franchises JustUs!, Tim Horton's, Booster Juice, and PizzaPizza. Contact with the suppliers and the franchises provided us with the required information concerning the categories we established concerning geography of food purchased, ownership and production practices. Numerous attempts were made to contact Yale, but with no avail.

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The methods utilized for our research were appropriate for the intended goals. Although literary review was necessary to formulate our guidelines and compare the food system in the SUB to other institutions, the interviews and emails were the most valid to our report. Due to the lack of external information concerning Sodexo's operations, direct questioning was necessary to understand their policies and their role in the SUB, and to gather names of some of their suppliers. The same reasoning applies for interviewing the DSU representatives because the contract with Sodexo is blocked from all students to view, and their role in the system had to be verified. Information needed from the franchises and suppliers also required direct questioning, although some information was found online.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity of the project was achieved, even though with numerous hurdles and having to adjust the scope in order to accommodate for these challenges. Overall there was little deviation from our original intentions as we were able to adequately adapt to the challenges. Backup checks on the interviewees were carried out to ensure that we contacted the correct individuals and that their response would directly correlate to our report objectives. The purposed questions for the interviews were carefully chosen to garner the correct information needed to adequately analyze the data and compile an accurate grade. In the end we were able to compile a graded report card of the SUB's food system which incorporates the aspects that were determined to be important to the evaluation. The report card generally achieved to determine the location of food origin, the production practices and the ownership of the operations or who is in control of the foods production.

Reliability of our project may be hard to achieve as the nature of the context our research was conducted in and the individuals we spoke to exists in an ever shifting system. Given that the contract for Sodexo is up for renewal in 2011, the food system in the SUB may be altered and if others were to build on our research past this date the context may be different from ours. Furthermore the two most valuable interviews we conducted were with individuals that are temporarily in those positions; Laurie Hennigar



is temporarily replacing Cindy MacDonald as Food Director for Sodexo and Shannon Zimmerman who has completed her term as DSU president. If there is little deviation to the system and the players then the reliability may be easily achieved. To ensure reliability the categories developed using Yale's guidelines can remain the same and can be applied more in depth and to more food items in the SUB.

### **Analysis**

Analysis of the data gathered from interviews and from website research was conducted by comparing the information to the determined categories and rankings (Figure 1). The grade given to each food item was decided among the group as a whole based on the information that was provided from interviews and the background information obtained through prior research.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation to our research was time. More time would have allowed us to conduct more extensive research of the franchises and investigated more products. Considerable limitations were presented with the lack of transparency of companies inhibiting us from gaining a lot of information on suppliers, their products, and practices of food production. The confidentiality of the contract between the DSU and Sodexo concerning policies employed was also an issue, prohibiting us from obtaining a list of suppliers or products. Lastly, the inability to contact Yale posed an issue regarding the vital nature of information on Yale's practices to our project. Even though numerous phone calls were made and repeated emails sent to many individuals, no response was ever received. If contact with Yale had been achieved, we may have been able to direct our research more appropriately by making use of valuable recommendations and notice of problems that were potentially encountered.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations we incorporated in our study include reduction of the project scope and selecting only the most purchased items at the vendors rather than the entire menu for evaluation. We also chose to only focus on the SUB rather than the food system at

Dalhousie in its entirety. Lastly, our research was purely exploratory, and although some of our results were quantitative, more exhaustive research would need to be conducted to gain true insight of all food provided at the SUB.

### Result

Each of the five vendors in the SUB was evaluated using the criteria presented in the methods section. The grades are representations of the vendor’s sustainability with respect to the most popular food choices.

### Interviews

During our interview with Sodexo, we were informed that they were unwilling to provide any information on their food due to confidentiality reasons (unwanted competition for the providers). Therefore, we would not be given any information unless we chose particular ingredients and/or products from each menu and talked to their respective vendors individually. Thus, the most popular foods from each vendor were chosen to ensure a feasible goal was maintained. Each ingredient and/or product from the vendors were chosen and their grades for sustainability are as follows:

#### *Sodexo*

Sodexo provides foods such as: sandwiches, egg salad, turkey, and garden salad. The sandwiches received a 12/30, their egg salad was given an 18/30, turkey received a 6/30 and the garden salad, with the highest sustainability rating, received a 20/30. It was also determined that Sodexo participates in community involvement. Table 1 provides a list of the geographic areas from which Sodexo’s foods are grown and purchased. This data was received from Sodexo themselves during a phone interview.

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**Table 1** *The geological areas in which Sodexo purchases their food or ingredients for their vendors in the Student Union Building (SUB) on Dalhousie Campus, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

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Product or Ingredient	Growth and Purchasing Area
Golden Delicious apples	Annapolis Valley, N.S.
Macintosh apples	Annapolis Valley, N.S.
Cortland apples	Annapolis Valley, N.S.

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Red Delicious apples	Annapolis Valley, N.S.
Carrots	Annapolis Valley, N.S., New Jersey, Florida
Field cucumbers	
English cucumbers	Annapolis Valley, N.S.
Lettuce	Annapolis Valley, N.S., Ontario
Tomatoes	Annapolis Valley, N.S., California
Green peppers	Annapolis Valley, N.S., California
Mushrooms	Annapolis Valley, N.S., Quebec, California
Onions	Annapolis Valley, N.S.
Celery	Annapolis Valley, N.S., Ontario Quebec

*Note.* All data was provided by Sodexo through an interview(s) (in person, or by telephone) and/or email(s).

*JustUs!*

JustUs! organic fair-trade coffee, herbal teas, and cane sugar all received 30/30 for their sustainability. The Scotsburn milk, which is supplied by Sodexo, received a 17/30, and the Silk Soymilk, also provided by Sodexo, received a 9/30. JustUs! is also engaged in community involvement, environmental stewardship, and fair-trade. Table 2 provides a list of the geographic areas from which JustUs! foods are grown and purchased.

**Table 2** *The geological areas in which JustUs! purchases their food or ingredients for their vendors in the Student Union Building (SUB) on Dalhousie Campus, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

Product or Ingredient	Growth and Purchasing Area
Coffee beans	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Columbia, India
Herbal teas	Ecuador
Sugar cane	Paraguay
Earl Grey tea	Sir Lanka
Ceylon tea	Sir Lanka
Scotsburn milk	N.S.
Silk soymilk	North America, mostly Midwest USA

*Note.* JustUs! provided all the data through an interview in person and through website information.

### *PizzaPizza*

The most popular food purchased at PizzaPizza is their vegetarian pizza but a grade was unattainable due to insufficient data. The only other information provided was their community involvement. Nonetheless, even with limited received data, Table 3 represents the geographic areas from which PizzaPizza ingredients are grown and purchased.

**Table 3** *The geological areas in which PizzaPizza purchases their food or ingredients for their vendors in the Student Union Building (SUB) on Dalhousie Campus, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

Product or Ingredient	Growth and Purchasing Area
Beef	Ontario
Sandwich meats (turkey and chicken)	Ontario
Eggs	New Minus

*Note.* All data was provided by PizzaPizza through an interview(s) (in person, or by telephone) and/or email(s).

### *Booster Juice*

Grades are based on the four most popular smoothies and booster purchased and those are: Strawberry Sunshine (3/30), Mango Hurricane (3/30), Tropical Tornado (3/30), and Verry Berry (4/30). Whey protein powder is the most popular booster and it received a 5/30. Booster Juice participates in community evolvement. Table 4 represents the geographic areas from which the Booster Juice ingredients are grown and purchased.

**Table 4** *The geological areas in which Booster Juice purchases their food or ingredients for their vendors in the Student Union Building (SUB) on Dalhousie Campus, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

Product or Ingredient	Growth and Purchasing Area
Baxters milk	Halifax Regional Municipality
Blueberries	North America (U.S., Oregon & Canada)
Strawberries	California, China, South America
Bananas	Guatemala
Pineapple	Guatemala
Mangos	Philippines, South America
Raspberries	China
Passion fruit	South America
Guava	South America
Whey protein powder	Edmonton

*Note.* All data was provided by PizzaPizza through an interview(s) (in person, or by telephone) and/or email(s).

#### *Tim Horton's*

At Tim Horton's, the regular coffee received a 19/30, the bagels received a 6/30, and the sandwich buns received a 6/30. Tim Horton's participates in community involvement and environmental stewardship practices. Table 5 represents the geographic areas from which the Tim Horton's ingredients and products are grown and purchased.

**Table 5** *The geological areas in which Tim Horton's purchases their food or ingredients for their vendors in the Student Union Building (SUB) on Dalhousie Campus, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

Product or Ingredient	Growth and Purchasing Area
Enriched wheat flour	Mid-West Canada, Mid-West United States
Coffee beans	Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Columbia, Brazil

*Note.* Tim Horton's provided all data through an interview(s) (in person, or by telephone) and/or email(s).

## Discussion

Creating sustainable food systems in large institutions like universities has been found to be an embraced challenge worldwide. Our project analyzes the food system at Dalhousie University's Student Union Building by examining the origin, ownership, and cultivation practices of available foods, to determine whether our existing food system can meet the needs of current students without compromising Dalhousie's goal of creating a sustainable campus environment.

The Student Union Building has five main vendors; JustUs!, Tim Horton's, Booster Juice, PizzaPizza, and Sodexo which is the institutionally contracted food service provider. Our goal was to accurately determine the food sustainability by investigating each vendor's most popular meal options and analyzing each ingredient individually.

The grades for each one were marked out of thirty based on geography, ownership, and practices. Geography is important because buying locally decreases transportation and with that, use of fossil fuels and emissions of green house gases. Buying local increases the sense of community, and secures local revenue and employment. Ownership is another aspect crucial to sustainability. Multinational corporations can influence government policy, often lack environmental literacy and labour standards, and compete with local farmers, overall leading to unsustainable methods. More sustainable methods are generally practiced by family owned farms making them a better choice for purchasing food.

Moreover, cultivation practices may be one of the most influential components of sustainability. Organic agriculture commonly involves practices fostering soil integrity, biodiversity, and water conservation. Synthetic chemicals used in other farming practices are eliminated which decreases contamination through water runoff and greenhouse gas emissions. In regard to animal welfare, organic may also be the better choice as free-range and grass-feeding are common practices. Lastly, supporting fair-trade operations ensures social justice in the food production process where workers receive fair treatment and wages, making it a socially and economically sustainable practice.

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The Student Union Building serves 1,800 customers a day, 800 of those buy tea or coffee (Antze *et al.*, 2009). The large quantity of coffee being sold makes it essential to provide sustainable options in order to green the campus. JustUs! was found to provide sustainable tea, coffee, and sugar, achieving the highest report card grade for JustUs! products of 30/30. Tea and coffee were their most purchased items scoring perfect grades for being grown locally in terms of coffee production (i.e. best practice; high altitude shade-grown in the natural growing range for coffee), organic, certified fair-trade, and having Workers Cooperative in growing and processing operations. Since the majority of people add milk in their tea and coffee, Silk soy milk and Scotburn milk were also evaluated. Silk soy milk scored poorly because the provider Silk is a multinational corporation producing in western central USA. However, almost 100% of the soybeans used are grown organically in large-scale farms in North America. Scotburn scored significantly higher because the milk is locally produced, regionally owned, and from small- to mid-scale operations. Despite having low marks for milk and soymilk, the vendor providing JustUs! products at the SUB is a valuable asset in terms of reaching Dalhousie's overall goal to promote a sustainable campus.

Although their main sale is coffee, Tim Horton's sells approximately 700 bagels plus sandwich buns daily. The wheat used in baking the bread and bagels comes from a range of corporately owned farms in North America. The farms practice conventional agriculture which generally involves the use of synthetic chemicals. However, in terms of coffee Time Horton's providers grow coffee in adequate cultivation regions, are regionally owned, and operate small-scale conventional farms. The vendor received an overall grade of 13/30 for its coffee, bagels, and sandwich buns, and can be classified as an unsustainable food operation.

Sodexo supplies approximately 50-80 sandwiches and 30 salads to costumers daily (Antze *et al.*, 2009). Through interviews with Laurie Hennigar for Sodexo, and a representative of Eden Valley's sales department, and reviewing the company websites it was discovered that meat used in the sandwiches is produced in Quebec and Ontario from large-scale farms none being organic or free-range (see appendix 4 for interview

questions). This resulted in a very poor grade for sandwiches because these kinds of meat production systems are simply unsustainable regarding our evaluation criteria.

Continuing to sell these meats may result in an increase of greenhouse gases from shipping, use of synthetic chemicals, and socially unfit labour practices. Egg sandwiches prove to be the best choice when thinking sustainably. Eden Valley is a regionally-owned farm that provides local eggs that are neither organic nor free-range. However, we discovered that Sodexo has the option to purchase free-range eggs from the region. Through a phone interview with H.E. Keddy Brothers (Appendix 3), the main produce supplier to Sodexo, it was found that the majority of vegetables in Sodexo salads is grown in Atlantic Canada by medium-sized family farms. The farmers do not use integrated pest management or sell organic, however, they do follow safety programs enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and are further verified by an annual third party audit. This resulted in a 20/30 for vegetables and a 12/30 for meats, leaving Sodexo with an overall mark of 16/30. As the contract with Sodexo comes to an end in July 2011, it is advised Dalhousie opts for a more sustainable choice.

Booster Juice's most popular drinks including Strawberry Sunshine, Mango Hurricane, Tropical Tornado, and Very Berry. These were analyzed to determine the sustainability of the fruit ingredients. During a phone interview it was determined the fruit was grown all over the world by a multinational corporation making it one of the least sustainable out of all the SUB vendors. Information regarding the type of practices used were unavailable and should be further explored. The milk and yogurt in the smoothies is locally sourced, however, the producers are multinational corporations which do not partake in sustainable practices. The overall grade for Booster Juice is thus a 4/30.

Although Pizza Pizza claims to receive as many ingredients as they can from within Canada, a lack of transparency resulted in a mark of 0/30.

Our project aimed to provide an explanatory sustainable food report card for the Student Union Building. Doing so has confirmed that Dalhousie does not have a



sustainable food system within the SUB and changes will have to be made in the future to meet the university's commitments. The report card revealed an overall unsustainable food system mostly resulting from a lack of local and organic foods available and from multinational ownership. Exploring other vendors that believe in the values of providing sustainable food, i.e. JustUs!, and that use sustainable practices is necessary for truly greening the campus.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of our research we see a number of different paths that could be pursued to enhance and further the investigation we have begun. Our recommendations for future research are widespread, encompassing aspects from policy and contracts to organic farming. To begin, we suggest extended research be done on the Dalhousie Student Union contract with Sodexo as well as the vendors Sodexo employs as we were unable to thoroughly explore every aspects due to time constraints and confidentiality clauses.

We also suggest expanding the already existing Report Card to include *Aramark*, the contracted company in charge of supplying the residence halls and other campus outlets with food. Sodexo, though influential in Dalhousie's overall food sustainability, is only a fraction of the food served on campus and therefore researching *Aramark* as well as *Sodexo* would give a better understanding of the overarching problems and potential solutions in Dalhousie's current food sustainability.

Research on organic food distributors within the Dalhousie "local" range could potentially contribute to moving toward more local, organic food at Dalhousie. Even if the Student Union Building is still contracted out to Sodexo, discovering local, organic farms could provide a resource for community members and/or student groups to open a farmer's market or a booth (managed by Sodexo) in the SUB that would offer students, faculty and staff a food option still sanction with Sodexo and the DSU but also with more sustainable options.

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The closing suggestion for future research is to explore alternative food distributor companies that have made sustainability a priority in their work. This would give Dalhousie the opportunity to investigate other options in terms of by whom, and from where, their food is delivered from. In addition, exploring a variety of different companies, even if none were ultimately pursued, would allow the Dalhousie Student Union to gain information on better ways to manage their food services, hopefully allowing the DSU to make better choices when it comes time for contract renewal. For example, food suppliers such as *Aramark* strive for excellence in areas such as developing and implementing long-term environmental stewardship programs and policies for food purchasing, supply chain, buildings operations, energy and water conservation, transportation, and waste management (Aramark, 2010). By gaining information on how other companies have succeeded, Dalhousie would have the option to either implement some of these successes with Sodexo or to replace Sodexo with a company more focused on current, as well as future, sustainability in the food system.

The suggestion of further research on companies supplying the Student Union Building is also a course for future action that we propose. As the DSU changes constantly when students graduate and move on, we suggest no longer signing 10 years contracts like the existing one as such contracts leave the current student body with no voice over food choices. Such measures are prudent because universities have a constantly changing demographics and the food system needs to be able to reflect the contemporary demand. Signing long-term, non-negotiable contracts is not advisable as they are unable to accommodate this constant variability. In addition to shortening contracts, we suggest not only researching alternate companies that could supply food to the SUB, but also legitimately pursuing meetings and discussions with these alternative companies to ultimately decide which one best suits Dalhousie's vision, and particularly the students' needs.

Concurrently, we suggest first organizing student groups that focus on food issues on campus to offer students the chance to become involved with the campus food process. Optimally, implementing necessary changes such as supplying more vegetarian, vegan, allergy friendly and dietary need friendly foods on campus in place other than residence halls will occur through bottom-up governance. Knowing what students are

looking for is also the first step in accurately choosing a future supplier for the SUB. Furthermore, if the DSU chooses to sign another contract with Sodexo, involvement from student focus groups and organizations could offer alternative ways to improve sustainable food choices in the SUB. Some positive options include weekly farmer's markets and/or additional programs like Muggy Mondays and Tupperware Tuesdays.

Though improving food sustainability in the SUB can be greatly facilitated by student groups, we also propose creating educational awareness campaigns about the food choices on campus and the effects of making choices on sustainability for those students who are uninformed or unaware. We feel that educating students on how simple activities, such as daily purchasing and eating habits, can greatly affect and improve sustainability, is a step towards generating greater concern about the problems the SUB currently faces in terms of food sustainability. In addition, we hope this new knowledge would initiate calls for further action from people previously indifferent or uneducated on the problems we face with the predominant global food system. At the same time, providing and developing possible solutions is essential.

In the event that the DSU chooses to sign a contract with a different company, we suggest further action be taken in ensuring that as much food as possible is supplied locally and is organically grown. Included in this, we suggest pursuing local farms that are small and family run as such options would not only improve sourcing locally, but contribute to the local economy as well. Additionally, employing a company that is open in how, when and who they source foods from is important as it promotes fair relationships with the supplying farmers and distributors. Such operations further assure students and future researchers that the food supplied is indeed being produced locally and organically.

In the event that the DSU chooses to renew their contract with Sodexo, we suggest possible changes to the contract including removing the confidentiality clause that denies students basic access to view it. By doing so, future researchers, as well as all other stakeholders would be able to see exactly how the system works in addition to possible ways to work in and around it to achieve sustainability on campus. This would allow the DSU to honor its contract with Sodexo while still allowing Dalhousie's students to have a say in the food sustainability in the SUB.

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In conclusion, we found that though there is a lot of work to be done in many different aspects of the SUB's food in order to make the options more sustainable, there are a plethora of interesting and available avenues open to pursue the change. Dalhousie is at the cusp of leading Canada's universities in overall sustainability and we believe that food purchasing is the next step in continuing this impressive record. By using every resource available, including student groups, future research and educational awareness campaigns, we feel that the DSU has the ability to provide economically viable food for the masses while still honouring the importance of food sustainability in the SUB.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview: Laurie Hennigar, Sodexo Food Director and Mindy Duffy Sodexo representative**

How long have you been in operation?

When is the contract with the DSU up from renewal?

How do the franchises work within the Sodexo company in the SUB?

How much food is purchased local?

Can you elaborate on your definition of local? Does it entail local producers and local suppliers?

What are your local boundaries?

Do you provide any organic products?

Can you discuss your fish purchasing and the methods used in capture?

Are there any considerations for dietary/religious concerns?

Can you provide us with a list of your suppliers?

Can you provide us with a product list?

## Appendix 2

### **Interview: Shannon Zimmerman, DSU President and Doyle (?) ??**

Can we have a product or supplier list?

Why did the DSU choose to sign with Sodexo and not Aramark?

When is the contract with Sodexo up for renewal?

Is the contract open for anyone to view?

If no, most likely because of confidentiality reasons, why would the DSU sign a contract that students and consumers could see?

Who regulates the policies for Sodexo? If the DSU does, what are those policies?

Does the DSU plan to renew the contract? Is there any major changes that are hoped to be added?

Who decides which franchises operate in the SUB?

Who is currently responsible for overseeing the franchises?

Are sustainability issues considered when contracting corporations to operate in the SUB?

How transparent is the SUB food system in terms of consumer concern/rights? i.e. in terms of food origin/ingredients and certification?

## Appendix 3

### **Interview: Brady Keddy manager of H.E. Keddy Bros produce supplier for Sodexo.**

Can you explain what your role is as a supplier with Sodexo at the DSU?

How often do you deliver to the SUB?

What types of farm ownership do you deal with?

Do you deal with any organic farmers?

What types of methods are employed on the farms?

Do any use Integrated Pest Management?

Asked where each produce item was grown and when purchased: golden delicious apples, Macintosh apples, Cortland apples, red delicious apples, carrots, celery, field and English cucumbers, romaine and iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, green peppers, mushrooms and onions.

### **Phone Interviews:**

**Sodexo (Receptionist – (902) 494-2126):**



Q: Is Sodexo involved in purchasing the ingredients for Booster Juice:

A: No, Booster Juice is involved in their own purchasing. They get their ingredients and follow the same guidelines as the Booster Juice in Clayton Park.

**Booster Juice (Clayton Park Employee – (902) 444-8404)**

Q: Do you know where the ingredients are grown and purchased from?

A: I know that the bananas come from Guatemala but I am unsure of where all the other fruits and vegetables come from. I know that they are all pre-packaged and pre-frozen and delivered to our store.

Q: What about the dairy products; do you know where those are manufactured and purchased from?

A: The yogurt and milk are all from the local Halifax area.

Q: Do you know what brand the milk is?

A: The milk is Scotsburn milk.

**Booster Juice Food Purchasing Manager Diane Kerrpit (Canada: Edmonton, Alberta – (780) 440-6770)**

Q: Do you know where the ingredients for the smoothies are grown and purchased from?

A: We purchase our food from crops all over the world and we have multiple crops for specific fruits in case a certain crop fails one year and to meet seasonal requirements. We get blueberries from North America and Oregon, more specifically. Strawberries come from California, China, and South America. The bananas only come from Guatemala, as well as the pineapples. Mangos are from the Philippines and raspberries are from China and South America. Passion fruit and guava come from places in South America.

Q: What about peaches?

A: We no longer have peaches at booster juice.

Q: Is there a replacement for the peaches in some of the smoothies or is it left out all together because in Halifax peaches still remain on the menus?

A: The peaches are now replaced with a peach sorbet, which is mixed and pre-packaged for all vendors under the Booster Juice label.

Q: And the dairy products are usually from the local areas of wherever the Booster Juice store is, correct?

A: Yes, Booster Juice sends advisors to new franchises that open and they make sure that the franchise is run properly and they determine where local products can be purchased.

Q: Do you know where the boosters are produced and purchased, or more specifically, the whey protein powder?

A: The whey protein powder comes from Canada, as well as all the other boosters.

Comment: All fruits are instantly frozen and packaged under the IQF (Individually Quick Frozen) label.

**Tim Horton's Interview Questions → March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 → Customer Service Representative Margaret**

Q: What can you tell me about the bagels and sandwich buns Tim Horton's uses?

A: I can send you a detailed nutritional guide and ingredient list.

Q: Do you know where these ingredients are sourced from or who supplies Tim Horton's?

A: No. This information is confidential and unavailable to the public.

Q: What can you tell me about the coffee served at Tim Horton's?

A: There are no additives to Tim Horton's coffee so there is no ingredient list however there is a detailed summary of where Tim's Horton's gets it's coffee online on the Tim Horton's website. What I can tell you is that we use 100% Arabica beans.