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Entry details

Entry Name:	Sustainable Procurement - UNC Wilmington
Institution Name:	UNC Wilmington
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Joseph Bush, Registered Dietitian

UNCW's commitment to sustainable procurement continues to be a defining priority for both our dining operations and our student body. Over the past year, this commitment has translated into clear, measurable progress, driven by intentional expansion of local partnerships and a strengthened focus on regional sourcing. From August 2024 to December 2024, local purchasing represented 15% of our total procurement. From August 2025 to December 2025, that figure rose to 24.8%, marking a significant year-over-year increase and demonstrating the effectiveness of our strategy.

This growth is supported by a robust network of 150+ local partners, including growers, producers, food trucks, and retail vendors. Their contributions have expanded the presence of locally sourced items across our dining locations, strengthening our regional supply chain and embedding sustainability deeply into the everyday student dining experience.

Student engagement provides additional evidence of the initiative's positive impact. Signature events such as Farm to Feast, the Annual Oyster Roast, Feast Down East Mobile Markets, and Taste of NC consistently rank among the highest-attended events on campus. Their popularity reflects strong student demand for local, ethical sourcing and reinforces the cultural and educational value of sustainable dining at UNCW.

Evidence that the initiative was socially responsible:

This initiative demonstrates social responsibility by using procurement as a tool to strengthen the regional economy and support small businesses, family farms, and minority-owned vendors. One of our strongest partners on campus is Feast Down East, a Wilmington-based food hub whose mission is to connect regional farms with culinary partners and expand access to affordable, seasonal produce. UNCW Dining helps extend these benefits directly to students through monthly markets, making them more accessible to those residing on campus.

Additional initiatives, including the UNCW Dining Farmers Market, where we bring local producers directly to campus, increase transparency while improving student access to fresh, locally sourced food. Signature events such as National Eat Local Day further reinforce this impact by featuring in-person producer storytelling, highlighting the people behind the food, and fostering meaningful connections between students. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate a commitment to social equity, community partnership, and responsible purchasing practices.

Creativity and Innovation:

The UNCW Dining Sustainability team developed its own internal local-tracking system in August 2024, allowing us to more accurately capture and analyze spend data month over month. This system provides greater visibility into purchasing trends and supports continuous improvement. We have placed a focus on creating proprietary dining concepts centered on local sourcing, expanding the opportunities for local businesses on campus through storefronts, pop-up concepts, and food trucks.

Our events regularly include representation from farmers, entrepreneurs in the culinary space, and sustainability organizations. By bringing the community onto campus, we have created new engagement points for students and opportunities for small businesses to gain visibility.

Events:

- UNCW Dining Farmers Market: An event created in collaboration between the Student Government Association (SGA) and UNCW Dining Sustainability. This combined market during Family Weekend allowed families to spend time outdoors together. Attendees explored 30+ vintage vendors, 34 local partners, 12 farm stands, and 3 local food trucks, creating a fun and mindful shopping experience. With over 291 sales, the total income generated from the market was over \$2000.
- Farm to Feast: In celebration of Earth Day, students participated in a full-day event in partnership with the UNCW Office of Sustainability. They started at Earth Fest, exploring the 30+ offices and organizations and the initiatives they are leading to make campus more sustainable. Students ended the day with an outdoor dining experience with 8 stations featuring local products on campus and led by the producers themselves, interactive tabling, and furry friends. This event saw 957 attendees, with an 89% increase in meal swipes from a typical dinner period, and showcased 23 local farmers, producers, and businesses.
- NC Taste Local: In celebration of National Eat Local Day, the UNCW Dining team presented a menu of iconic North Carolina staples, sourced almost entirely from local producers. The event allowed North Carolinians to enjoy familiar flavors while introducing out-of-state students to the culinary traditions of their new home. This event saw an 83% increase in meal swipes, bringing total attendees to 926 patrons. 15 local farmers, producers, and businesses were showcased.
- Oyster Roast: Our second annual Oyster Roast kicked off the Spring 2025 semester with a vibrant celebration of community, coastal heritage, and local food. In partnership with the UNCW Center for Marine Science and the Shellfish Research Hatchery, we sourced half of all oysters served directly from their facilities. These oysters are grown through sustainable aquaculture practices that support both environmental health and local ecosystems. After the event, 100% of our oyster shells were recycled through the same partners, contributing to ongoing research and coastal restoration projects that strengthen our shoreline and marine habitats.

- Rustic Roots: Rustic Roots is an intimate, five-course dining experience designed to bring students together around exceptional food and meaningful connection. Hosted on campus, each dinner features a menu crafted by our award-winning chef, Ryan Address, highlighting seasonal ingredients and the work of local farmers. For many students, this event offers a rare opportunity to experience a chef-driven, farm-focused meal; one that deepens their appreciation for sustainable food systems and the people behind them. In 2025, we proudly hosted four Rustic Roots dinners, each offering a unique and memorable culinary journey.

Student Involvement:

Students play a key role in shaping the program through internships, tabling interactions, surveys, and event engagement. Feedback gathered directly from students influences menu development, event themes, and local partner selection. Additionally, we established a dining committee composed of a diverse group of students representing all years and backgrounds. This committee provides ongoing insight into student priorities, with sustainability consistently ranking as a top focus area. Incorporating student feedback has allowed us to build a program that students enjoy and that our team takes pride in delivering.

Low Start-Up Resource Costs/High Return (10pts)

- The development of our internal local-purchasing tracking system requires no direct financial investment beyond staff labor. While initial setup and ongoing data entry require time and coordination, the system delivers a high return by improving accuracy, supporting transparent reporting, and enabling data-driven decisions that strengthen vendor partnerships and purchasing efficiency.

- Notably, as we have increased our local purchasing numbers, we have not seen a significant change in cost per meal (CPM) across our dining locations. From 2024 into 2025, the average CPM rose by \$0.65. This demonstrates that prioritizing local sourcing can be achieved without notably increasing operational food costs, reinforcing the financial viability and scalability of the initiative.

The most significant risk within our sustainable purchasing efforts is the rising cost of food. In recent years, steady increases have created fluctuations in our data and added pressure to maintain both affordability and sustainability within our operations. To navigate these challenges, we work closely with our partners to develop mutually beneficial purchasing agreements and long-term strategies that help stabilize costs while preserving our commitment to responsible sourcing.

We strengthen this work through proactive risk management and continuous refinement of our local-spend tracking system. Our campus-specific tracking approach has increased confidence in our reporting, allowing us to identify gaps, improve accuracy, and adapt as purchasing practices evolve. When sharing data, we remain transparent that the system grows alongside new information and changing market conditions, ensuring integrity and accountability in every stage of our process.

Applicability of Initiative:

This initiative is highly transferable to other Aramark universities, as financial data and purchasing reports can overlap. For other institutions, the framework can be replicated or adapted to fit their operations. The template created for this system can be shared with other universities to support the launch of their own tracking efforts.

While some components of the program include proprietary concepts, the foundational framework, processes, and best practices can be shared with anyone of interest. For campus and community events, we have developed detailed event guides and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that clearly outline messaging, logistics, and sustainability goals. These materials are designed to support consistency and can be replicated or adapted by other operations upon request.

Additionally, building relationships with local producers and purveyors is the core component of this initiative. While these relationships are inherently tied to geographic location, the approach to relationship-building, prioritizing transparency, communication, and community engagement, can be applied universally. Local producers often connect us with additional farmers and businesses, allowing our network to expand organically. By sharing resources, templates, and lessons learned, this initiative supports scalable growth and inspires like-minded efforts across diverse operations.

Effectiveness of Measurement:

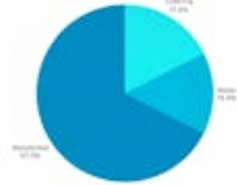
The effectiveness of our work is demonstrated through a combination of strong data collection, consistent outreach, meaningful feedback, and growing social media engagement. Together, these elements show not only how well our initiatives are performing, but also how deeply they are resonating with our campus community.

Education, Outreach, and Marketing/Communications:

At UNCW Dining, we believe that telling our story is central to everything we do, and our partners are the backbone of our success. Our marketing team is actively engaging students through our social media channels, digital ads, and signage to ensure they never miss one of our events. At the same time, our sustainability intern team is out on campus speaking about our initiatives and why they contribute to our sustainability plan.

Our teams collaborate to create successful dining events focused on connecting students to their regional food system and the producers who grow and make the products they enjoy. The most important piece is that our students believe in and engage with our goals. Through tabling, events, social media campaigns, and newsletters, we aim to create an open line of communication so we can continue to stay aligned with our community.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



Local Vendors

The chart displays the contribution of local vendors to the total food service at UNCW Dining. It shows that 71.9% of the food served is sourced from local vendors, while 28.1% is sourced from other providers. This highlights the significant role of local vendors in supporting the university's sustainability goals.

[Local Vendors.j...](#) 113 KiB



[Taste of NC_Ca...](#) 4.3 MiB



[Taste of NC_Stu...](#) 4.2 MiB



Farmers Market...3.0 MiB



Oyster Roast1.j... 1.6 MiB



Oyster Roast 2.j... 1.4 MiB



Oyster Roast 3.j... 1.4 MiB



Farmers Market...1.3 MiB



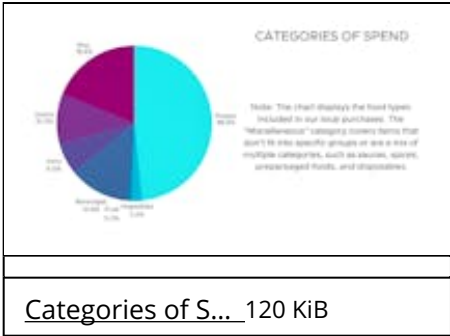
Taste of NC Pie....966 KiB



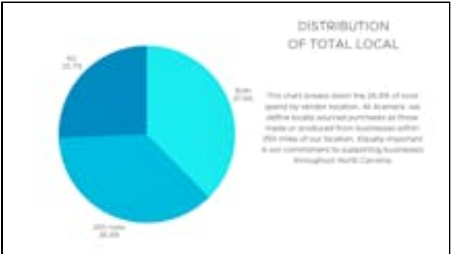
FDE Farmers M... 261 KiB



Four Families of... 186 KiB



Categories of S... 120 KiB



Distribution of ... 115 KiB