

# Nicole Reilly



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## Entry details

Entry Name: Local Meets Global: Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion Through Food

Institution Name: University of Vermont (UVM)

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Nicole Reilly, Sustainability and Strategic Initiatives Manager

Email Address: [nicole.reilly@uvm.edu](mailto:nicole.reilly@uvm.edu)

Phone Number: +18026567911

Address: 180 Carrigan Drive

City: Burlington

State: Vermont

Zip Code: 05405

Country: United States of America

## Essay:

Dear NACUFS Sustainability Award Committee,

Please accept this application on behalf of the University of Vermont (UVM) University Housing and Dining Services (UHDS) for the 2026 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion/Social Justice Award.

UVM UHDS is committed to creating a dining program that reflects the diversity of the campus community while supporting equitable economic opportunities within our regional food system. Through strategic partnerships, student-centered programming, and inclusive procurement practices, our team works to ensure that dining spaces serve as platforms for cultural exchange, representation, and community engagement.

UVM UHDS directly supports UVM's Inclusive Excellence Plan, specifically Goal 7: Expand and offer a robust internationally and multi-culturally inclusive dining experience for the campus community. The key objectives include "building partnerships with food vendors and food trucks to create globally inclusive dining experiences for students" and "developing programming frameworks that support internationally inspired cuisine and highlight diverse local businesses."

Local Meets Global Program

During the Spring 2025 semester, UVM UHDS launched the Local Meets Global program—an innovative initiative designed to bring local, women-owned, and BIPOC-owned food businesses directly into three all-you-care-to-eat dining halls. Through this program, local vendors are invited to prepare and serve approximately 500 portions of their featured dish during dinner service, allowing students to experience authentic global cuisines while providing paid opportunities and exposure for local entrepreneurs.

UVM UHDS leadership team members work with Food Fleet, a subcontracted company, to coordinate scheduling, vendor communication, and oversight of certification of insurance and appropriate compliance paperwork. Vendors must provide a vegetarian option, provide allergen information, and are encouraged to create custom signage and décor to bring their vision to life. We also encourage them to promote their off-site food trucks and restaurants to help build and strengthen their customer base.

In Spring 2025, UVM Dining welcomed seven businesses across three dining halls:

-Green Mountain Potstickers – Chinese dumplings

-Harmony's Kitchen – African American soul food

-Kismayo Kitchen – Somali cuisine

-Mahajara Spice – Indian curries

-The Caracas – Venezuelan soul food

-Sabah's House – Iraqi shawarma

-Zaytoona – Mediterranean grill

The program continued once per month throughout the Fall 2025 semester, with additional vendors that included: SamosaMan featuring African samosas, Sarom's Café highlighting Vietnamese cuisine, and Southern Smoke serving up BBQ favorites with Caribbean influences.

These events allow students to connect directly with local chefs and business owners while experiencing authentic cultural cuisines that are often underrepresented in institutional dining. The financial impact of this program totaled almost \$50,000 for the 10 events, directly benefiting these small, diverse vendors.

Meet the Chef: Chef Cara Tobin

In December 2025, UVM UHDS hosted special Meet the Chef events with Cara Tobin, a James Beard finalist and co-owner of two beloved Burlington restaurants Honey Road and The Grey Jay. The UVM UHDS culinary team brought Chef Tobin's Eastern Mediterranean culinary recipes to life at two on-campus events. The first was an intimate seated luncheon at Waterman Manor featuring à la carte specials. Later that evening, her recipes were served for dinner at one of the all-you-care-to-eat dining halls.

Students had the opportunity to meet Chef Tobin, learn about her culinary journey, and engage in conversations about food, culture, and community leadership. Featured menu items included: Caramelized Onion Flatbread with braised chicken and sumac, Baked Orzo with roasted tomato, olives, and herbs, and Stuffed Butternut Squash with rice and dried fruits. Since the culinary teams led the preparation and service of the dishes, Chef Tobin was able to focus on engaging directly with students, encouraging them to explore new flavors and expand their culinary horizons.

Catamount Culinary Showcase

On March 31, 2025, UVM UHDS hosted its Second Annual Catamount Culinary Showcase, an event celebrating student identity, culture, and culinary creativity. In Spring 2024, the annual Battle of the Campus Chefs event was redesigned to place students at the center of the experience with a focus on diverse and global cuisine to better support the UVM Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan. Throughout the spring semester, student groups submitted

culturally meaningful recipes and stories and the selected teams were paired with UVM Dining Executive Chefs to scale, prepare, and serve 300 servings of their dish.

During the event, guests sampled small plates from each team and voted for their Fan Favorite. Teams also decorated their tables with festive décor to help represent their cultural heritage and story. The event is free and open to the public, creating a welcoming space where students share food traditions and stories from their cultures.

Participating teams included:

-Cooking with Cash (SGA Finance Committee) – Fan Favorite Winner: Chicken Kebab (teriyaki chicken with tzatziki and tabbouleh in naan) with Passionfruit Spritz

-Rice Spice: Pork & Chive Gyoza with Caramel Milk Tea with Brown Sugar Boba

-Hye Voltage: Künefe (Turkish cheese pastry)

-Preppy Polycule: Carne Asada Tacos

Feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees sharing comments such as, “This is the best dining event of the year,” and “Getting to talk to the student chefs was a real treat—it was fun to hear about their dishes and the inspiration behind them.” Others noted how much they “loved tasting new foods from people who were clearly passionate about their creations.”

All student culinarians received a chef’s knife or a culinary-themed gift as a token of appreciation. The top three teams were awarded UVM catering credits—\$250 for first place, \$200 for second, and \$150 for third—to use toward hosting a special event or celebration. Beyond the competition, the event helps foster lasting relationships between our chefs and their student teams, with some participants going on to become UVM Dining Services employees and ambassadors for the program.

Expanding Diverse Suppliers

Sodexo’s Vermont First procurement philosophy emphasizes sourcing food locally and regionally. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are also woven into the program’s core values, including: “Support Vermont’s local economy through the creation of inclusive market opportunities accessible for local producers, including diverse-owned and small-medium scale farm and food businesses” and “Cultivate intentional collaboration and transparency to build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive food system and work to remove structural barriers in participation and decision-making.”

In addition to the 25% local food by 2030 goal, the UVM Comprehensive Sustainability Plan includes a secondary goal to prioritize purchasing from diverse (women/minority-owned) suppliers whenever possible. From July 2024 to 2025, UVM UHDS purchased ingredients from 42 minority-owned businesses, 14 of which were regional, meaning their products are grown or manufactured in New England. This data currently reflects only contracted food businesses or those we purchase from directly. Smaller regional producers are not yet captured, as this information is not readily available from our distributors. Expanding our ability to track this information remains an active area of focus.

In Fall 2025, UVM UHDS partnered with the Food Connects Food Hub, expanding access to allergen-friendly foods, local produce, and products from diverse-owned businesses. A standout collaboration is with Sherpa Foods, a Burlington-based company specializing in Nepalese momos, highlighting the region’s Nepalese and Bhutanese communities. The partnership with Sherpa Foods debuted at Farm Fest, where the catering team prepared \$1,000 worth of products for sampling. Their momos are now served monthly in all four dining halls and sold as ready-to-eat items in campus retail markets.

Through programs like Local Meets Global, Catamount Culinary Showcase, and new diverse supplier partnerships, UVM UHDS is redefining the role of campus dining. These initiatives provide students with authentic cultural experiences, support local and diverse entrepreneurs, and strengthen connections between the university and our

community. By intentionally integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into programming and procurement, we continue to create a dining program that celebrates culture and supports equity in the food system.

We thank you for your time and consideration for this award.

Sincerely,

Nicole Reilly, MS, RD

Senior Manager of Sustainability and Strategic Initiatives

University of Vermont University Housing and Dining Services

Nicole.Reilly@uvm.edu

Dawn Aubrey, PhD, MBA, CCA, CEC, FMP

Vice President of Hospitality

University of Vermont University Housing and Dining Services

Dawn.Aubrey@uvm.edu

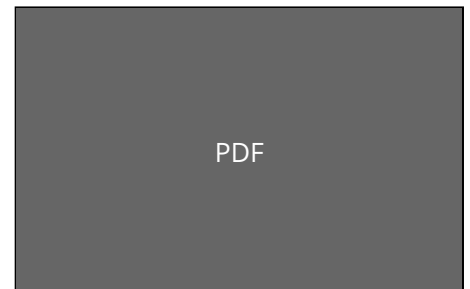
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1080x1050 Kis... 2.1 MiB



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Zaytoona Food... 2.3 MiB



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