

Zeinab Mroue + Rob Trufant



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Entry details

Entry Name: Thrive - Dine Allergen Free

Institution Name: Michigan State University

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Zeinab Mroue - Event Operations Manager, Rob Trufant - Executive Chef

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Essay:

Michigan State University (MSU) is a national leader in collegiate food allergy dining, driven by a clear mission: one in six students has a dietary restriction, and each deserves the same safe, nutritious, accessible, and craveable experience as every other Spartan. Since opening Thrive, MSU's first certified free-from dining hall, in 2019, the university has expanded and evolved its programming to ensure inclusivity, innovation, and operational excellence remain at the forefront.

Rooted in the theme "Dine Allergen Free," the program is intentionally designed to meet customers' needs across every neighborhood and dining format. Allergen-free offerings are now available in every dining hall, complemented by the Thrive-to-Go retail location, and increased access to allergen-friendly coolers. The implementation of OrderIt, an order-ahead platform for students registered with disability services, provides safe, customized meal preparation in each neighborhood, especially for those with allergens beyond the Major Nine. Since launch, participation has increased 188%, demonstrating strong demand and measurable impact.

Accessibility and education are central pillars of the program. As an educational institution, MSU invests heavily in staff training and student support. The Opus allergen training application delivers content in more than 100 languages, significantly improving comprehension and pass rates by allowing learners to train in their preferred language. Nationally recognized, science-based programs such as AllerTrain further strengthen staff expertise,

empowering culinary teams to deliver both safe and innovative menu options.

Communication efforts ensure students clearly understand how to access services. The Eat at State website and social media platforms serve as comprehensive digital hubs for “Dine Allergen Free” resources. Outreach begins before students arrive on campus, with orientation surveys inviting them to self-identify dietary restrictions. Each student then receives personalized outreach from the dietitian team, reinforcing inclusion and building trust from day one. Once on campus, messaging is consistent and visible: table tents, print and digital signage, email campaigns, tabling events, and the MSUtrition platform ensure information is accessible in multiple formats. Students can filter allergens, review ingredients, and make informed decisions in real time, reinforcing transparency and independence.

Every dining hall features allergen-conscious stations with common substitutions, including gluten-free and non-dairy options. Point-of-service signage clearly identifies the Major Nine allergens plus coconut, beef, pork, and alcohol. Two dining halls and the campus bakery maintain nut-conscious environments, further reducing risk. Retail locations continue to expand allergen-friendly convenience options to meet evolving student needs.

Menu variety remains a priority. Thrive has grown to include new venues such as Pantry, featuring customizable grain bowls, and a station dedicated to Dole Whip. These offerings ensure students with dietary restrictions experience the same excitement, flavor trends, and culinary creativity as their peers.

Participation growth, expanded services, and positive student feedback indicate the program is achieving meaningful outcomes.

Through innovation, comprehensive education, strategic marketing, and unwavering commitment to inclusion, Michigan State University’s Special Diet Program sets the gold standard for collegiate dining, ensuring every student can confidently and proudly “Dine Allergen Free.”

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PDF
MSU - Nutrition... 2.1 MiB

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NACUFS - Speci... 3.8 MiB

Attachment name
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