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Johnson & Wals University

Entry details

Entry Name:	JWU 3 Pillar Procurement Model
Institution Name:	Johnson & Wals University-Providence
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Nico SanFilippo-Executive Chef of Auxiliary Services

JWU-Providence, The Three-Pillar Procurement Model

Program Overview

As the Ocean State, Rhode Island is defined by its coastline, long-standing fishing traditions, small-scale agriculture, and a dense network of independent food producers. The region is known for products such as clams, oysters, fresh seafood, dairy, and regional baked goods like Portuguese sweet bread that reflect its coastal and culinary heritage. At the core of Johnson & Wales University (JWU) Dining’s sustainable procurement strategy is a commitment to reflecting that identity and creating a sense of place and belonging for students. By prioritizing local purchasing, JWU transforms everyday dining into a direct connection to the surrounding community, connecting students to the people, products, and culture of the region. To operationalize this vision, JWU has developed the Three-Pillar Procurement Model, a structured framework that focuses on three high-impact sourcing categories: coffee, seafood, and produce. These categories were intentionally selected because they are foundational to daily dining operations and represent the greatest opportunity to drive environmental, economic, and social impact through local sourcing. The Three-Pillar Procurement Model is informed by established sustainability frameworks across key food categories, including ethical sourcing standards in coffee, sustainable seafood guidelines, and regenerative agriculture principles. By aligning procurement decisions with these best

practices while prioritizing local partnerships, JWU has created a model that is both grounded in industry standards and reflective of its regional identity.

Overall Impact of the Program

In calendar year 2024, JWU directed \$362,091.75 of its \$2,970,969.16 total food purchases to local vendors, representing 12.19% of procurement. In 2025, local purchasing increased to \$411,234.83 of \$3,101,062.95 total spend, representing 13.26% of procurement and a year-over-year increase of \$49,143.08. By concentrating efforts within coffee, seafood, and produce, JWU was able to build deeper partnerships, identify new sourcing opportunities, and integrate local products more consistently across dining operations. To ensure sustained progress, JWU has established a long-term goal of reaching 25% local procurement by 2030. This goal is supported by incremental annual targets for steady, manageable growth. This structured approach demonstrates that sustainable procurement can be scaled over time through measurable goals, strategic focus, and strong vendor partnerships, without compromising operational stability.

Evidence of Environmental Sustainability

JWU's Three-Pillar Procurement Model reduces emissions across the supply chain by shortening transportation distances, prioritizing regenerative agriculture, and integrating hyperlocal food production into operations. The transition to Providence-based New Harvest Coffee reduces transportation while strengthening transparency through a Source Direct model emphasizing traceability and responsible production. JWU partners with Farm Fresh RI as a regional food hub while deepening impact through a direct relationship with the Ayers Foundation and Hillandale Farm Cooperative, supporting soil health, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration.

JWU refined its seafood strategy by shifting purchases to Dune Brothers Seafood, a Providence-based supplier sourcing from small-boat fisheries, while continuing its partnership with Reds Best for traceability and support of independent fishermen. JWU activated this partnership through a campus dining takeover featuring the Dune Brothers team, connecting students directly to locally sourced seafood. Combined sustainable seafood purchases in 2025 were \$6,345.89.

On campus, JWU reduces its environmental footprint through a Fork Farms Flex Farm, producing approximately 425 pounds of leafy greens annually. This system reduces transportation emissions, packaging waste, and reliance on external suppliers. It complements JWU's partnership with Gotham Greens, located 1.7 miles from campus. In 2025, purchases increased to \$47,672.83 after converting all salad greens across two all-you-care-to-eat locations and the Boar's Head deli. JWU's regional sourcing extends beyond core partners to include New England producers such as Blount Fine Foods, Piantadosi Baking Company, and Cabot Creamery, strengthening the regional food system. These strategies collectively shift procurement from a transactional function to a lever for reducing environmental impact at scale.

Social Responsibility and Economic Impact

JWU's procurement strategy intentionally redirects institutional food dollars into Rhode Island's regional economy, strengthening small businesses, fisheries, bakeries, and cooperative farms. In 2025, JWU directed \$411,234.83 toward New England-based vendors, supporting a diverse network of producers including Annawa Sushi, Wayland Bakery, Gotham Greens, New Harvest Coffee, and Farm Fresh RI. This investment generates a measurable economic multiplier effect by supporting local employment, sustaining small-scale food businesses, and reinforcing regional supply chains. By prioritizing small and mid-sized producers, JWU advances social equity by creating opportunities for businesses that are often underrepresented in large-scale institutional procurement systems. The shift to local seafood sourcing further supports Rhode Island's maritime economy, while partnerships with cooperative farms strengthen regional agricultural resilience. Procurement decisions are treated not only as operational necessities, but as intentional investments in community sustainability, economic vitality, and long-term food system resilience.

Creativity and Innovation

JWU Dining redefines procurement as an experiential and visible component of the student dining experience. At the April Sustainability Fair, JWU activated its procurement strategy through a live, interactive dining experience. The event featured a Fork Farms hydroponic system, Bootstrap Compost education, and sustainable seafood sourcing through Reds Best. Dining leadership prepared Mini Smoked Fish-of-the-Day Tacos, allowing students to directly engage with traceable seafood sourcing. Approximately 340 students attended the event, transforming procurement into a hands-on educational experience. Students saw, tasted, and understood how sourcing decisions connect to sustainability outcomes. This approach demonstrates a shift from traditional procurement models toward experiential engagement, where students are not passive consumers but active participants in the food system.

JWU also hosted “Taste of the Ocean State,” showcasing Rhode Island’s local food system and reinforcing a strong sense of place through procurement. The event featured partners including Jody King, a well-known Rhode Island clammer, Top Shelf Pizza, and Blount Fine Foods, alongside an Asian-inspired lobster roll developed by the student club Cooking Asia. Dining also highlighted regional favorites such as Rhode Island-style wieners and pizza strips, demonstrating how local sourcing translates into the student dining experience.

Culinary execution further reflected JWU’s waste reduction approach. From the 60 pounds of live Maine lobster used during the event, remaining shells were repurposed into broth and later developed into a lobster bisque featured on the winter menu, demonstrating full product utilization.

Student Engagement and Involvement

JWU integrates students as contributors to procurement decisions, making their involvement central to the Three-Pillar Procurement Model and connecting student-led initiatives to real-world impact. A graduating student funded the expansion of campus greenhouse infrastructure, demonstrating direct investment in sustainability. In collaboration with Students Activists Supporting Sustainability (SASS), students grew approximately five pounds of basil, later transformed into pesto during a production event with JWU Dining. This pesto was incorporated into 300 arancini served at the Good Life Expo, creating a direct link between student-grown ingredients and dining operations. Student engagement also influenced vendor partnerships. In collaboration with Green Line Apothecary, 196 students voted to select a signature ice cream flavor for the Senior Sendoff event. The chosen flavor, Lemon Blueberry Cheesecake, is now produced locally and sold both on campus and regionally. This Senior Sendoff event also featured a New England clam boil with local mussels, clams, and Portuguese sausage, as well as steak tips and lobster mac and cheese, showcasing how regional sourcing can be translated into a high-impact dining experience. Campus Dining in the Wild further extended engagement into non-traditional spaces. A Harvest Fest pop-up featured a Smithfield caramel apple activation, highlighting one of Rhode Island’s most well-known apple-growing regions while creating an approachable, place-based sustainability experience. In addition to student engagement, JWU Dining emphasizes staff education as a critical component of sustainable procurement. The campus dining leadership team participated in a field visit to the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation to better understand the state’s waste challenges and the urgency of reducing landfill dependence. Experiencing these constraints firsthand reinforced the importance of intentional purchasing decisions, waste reduction, and building a more sustainable and localized food system.

Low Start-Up Costs and Return on Investment

JWU’s procurement strategy was implemented with minimal capital investment, relying instead on strategic vendor realignment and incremental purchasing changes. The Fork Farms was paid for in 2024, so everything grown in 2025 was value added. The hydroponic system produces approximately 425 pounds of greens annually, offsetting externally sourced products and reducing the need for approximately four distributor deliveries per year. This contributes to reducing reliance on frequent distributor deliveries. Local procurement increased by \$49,143.08 year-over-year without a corresponding increase in total food spend, demonstrating that sustainable sourcing can be achieved without financial disruption. JWU implemented this initiative through small, controlled changes rather than large-scale operational shifts. New vendors were tested before expanding purchases; pricing was maintained to avoid budget impacts, and multiple suppliers were utilized to ensure reliability. This approach allowed JWU to increase local purchasing while maintaining operational stability.

Applicability of the Initiative

JWU's Three-Pillar Procurement Model is a scalable framework that can be adapted across institutions of varying size and complexity. It focuses on high-impact categories such as coffee, seafood, and produce at JWU, where local sourcing can strengthen regional partnerships and create a sense of place. The pillars are flexible and can be adjusted to reflect regional strengths. For example, landlocked institutions may prioritize beef, dairy, or grains in place of seafood. This structured approach demonstrates that sustainable procurement can scale over time through measurable goals, strategic focus, and strong vendor partnerships without compromising operational stability.

Effectiveness of Measurement

JWU Dining utilizes structured procurement tracking through annual spend analysis, vendor categorization, and percentage-based benchmarking to monitor progress and identify opportunities for growth. Key metrics include total food spend, New England-based vendor spend, percentage of local procurement, year-over-year growth, and in-house hydroponic production output. Student engagement metrics, including participation at events such as the Sustainability Fair, are also tracked to measure outreach effectiveness. These metrics provide a clear framework for accountability and support JWU's long-term goal of achieving 25% local procurement by 2030.

Education, Outreach, and Behavioral Impact

JWU integrates procurement into highly visible and immersive dining experiences that connect students directly to sustainability initiatives. At the center of this approach is the Radius station, a concept within Snowden Dining featuring a seasonal, locally driven menu. Radius serves as a living example of JWU's procurement strategy in action, translating purchasing decisions into daily student experiences. As a culinary institution, JWU Dining operates in an environment where students have a strong foundation in food systems and sustainability, creating a higher standard for transparency and execution. As the university expands its Sustainable Food Systems and Environmental Science programs and attracts students who value these principles, Dining is expected to align procurement and operations with the same level of commitment. Events such as the Sustainability Fair provide additional opportunities for students to interact with local vendors, observe production methods, and experience sustainable sourcing through menu offerings such as smoked fish of the day tacos. These activations are reinforced daily through Radius, where local procurement is consistently visible and accessible. JWU also extends this approach through "JWU Local," a retail café featuring locally sourced products such as PVD Bagels, Yacht Club sodas, and a house New Harvest "Wake Up Wildcat" blend. On JWU's Harborside campus, Liberty Market reinforces this model with a dedicated cooler stocked with local groceries and produce, making procurement visible in everyday student purchasing decisions.

Forward Thinking

Rooted in the identity of the Ocean State, JWU Dining has redefined procurement as a strategic tool for sustainability, education, and community engagement. Through its Three-Pillar Procurement Model, the university has established a clear path to 25% local procurement by 2030 while investing in regenerative agriculture, expanding hyperlocal sourcing, and embedding student involvement into every stage of the process. What was once a back-of-house function is now visible across campus, from the coastline to the dining table, where local seafood, regional produce, and student-driven products tell the story of Rhode Island's food system. Procurement at JWU reflects the region it serves by strengthening local economies, reducing environmental impact, and creating a meaningful sense of place for students. JWU does more than purchase locally. It invests in its community, grows alongside its partners, educates its students, and helps shape a more resilient regional food system.

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Liked by lya_mean_it_promise and others
jwupvdcampusdining Today members of @jwupvdeco and @jwuprovsass joined Executive Chef Nico SanFilippo to make pesto - pesto that was made from the basil grown right here on campus at the Green Collaborative 🌱
Chef Nico will use this pesto in a dish she'll be serving The Good Life Expo - so make sure you stop by and give it a try!
September 15, 2025

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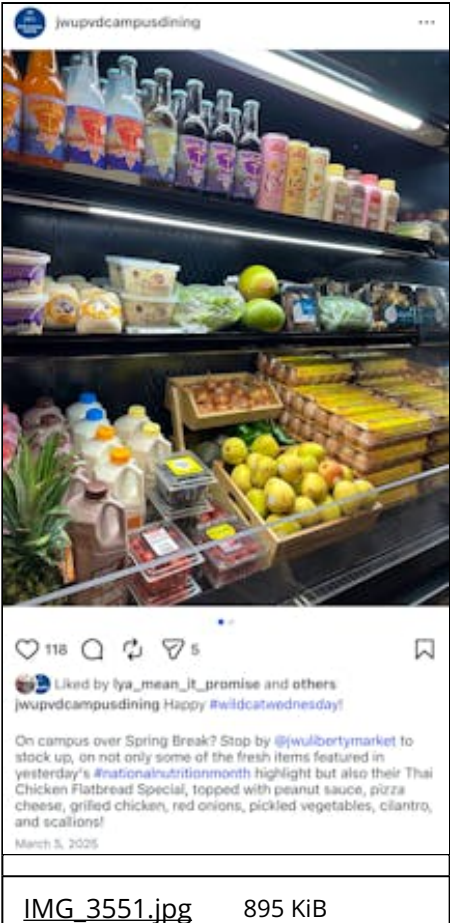


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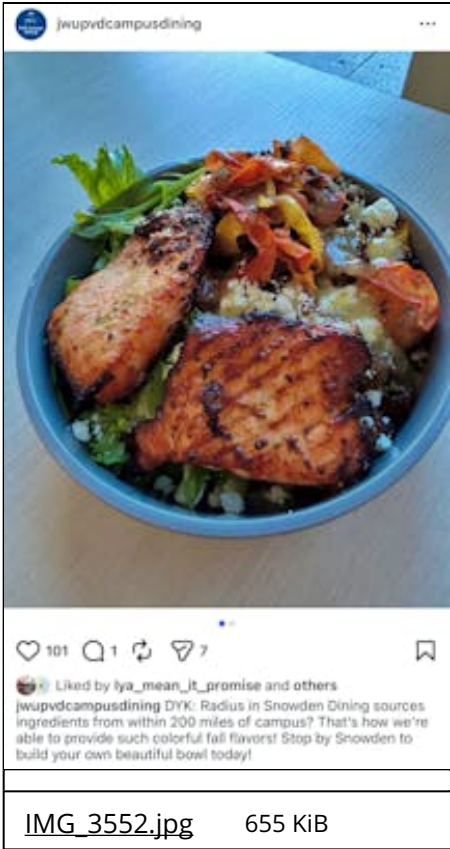
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Sustainability Fair

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Taste of the Ocean State

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