

Food and Beverages

Objective

Provide healthy food and beverages in a just and environmentally responsible fashion.

How Tos

- Check out the food and beverage checklist to see where you and your caterer might improve.
- Serve fair trade products such as organic teas and coffees. (Many United Methodist churches use Equal Exchange products, which also supplies commercial accounts.)
- For meals and in event rooms, serve water in pitchers for people to help themselves, not individual plastic water bottles.
- Try to obtain an accurate meal count to avoid unnecessary waste.
- Eat low on the food chain, offering vegetarian and vegan options.
- Know the dietary needs of participants. Include a question on your registration form about this.
- When potluck meals make sense, encourage volunteers to try more environmentally friendly recipes (e.g., vegan and vegetarian). Offer recipes if needed.
- Offer healthy food choices, reflecting a nutritionally balanced meal. Watch the salt, sugar, fat, gluten, and red meat. Often the same preparation can meet the needs of several dietary concerns, so developing a sensitive menu need not be as complicated as it may seem.
- If possible, patronize local farmers for some or all ingredients (within 250 miles of your event).
- Create a menu that is based on in-season foods for your region and utilize certified organic options when possible.
- Patronize major food providers and sources with positive employment and labor track records and avoid those that do not. See resources section below for helpful websites. (This includes local caterers.)
- If you are considering seafood, check the Monterey Bay Aquarium's "Seafood Watch" list for best choices, good alternatives and species to avoid because they are being overfished or because of how they are caught or farmed: www.seafoodwatch.org.
- Incorporate social justice concerns into menu planning and food presentation. In addition to watching for boycotts or other actions, consider such things as offering prayers to farmworkers, program notes on hunger, an exhibit on sustainable agriculture, a film related to food or hunger, or introduce your group to a local farmer who grew something served on the menu.

- Pick at least one food item on the menu to serve as a “teaching moment.” Offer an advocacy or solidarity action during the event related to it (e.g., a postcard or petition to a company expressing concern for their impact on the environment or support for worker’s demands, etc.).
- Provide a list of local restaurants that offer organic food, vegetarian and vegan options, locally sourced, and/or culturally appropriate menus for events where meals are not shared by all.
- Enjoy the delights of creation! Aim for attractive, well-prepared food featuring local cuisines and the cultures of the participants. Beauty, taste and cost need not be sacrificed as we strive for responsible consumption.
- If you are having one or more centerpieces, consider making them out of local, in-season produce or packaged specialty items (e.g., fair trade coffee, tea, nuts, honey, jam) that participants can take home and enjoy after the event.

Helpful Resources

- To find local farmers, farmers markets and other local sustainable food resources, consult www.localharvest.org.
- To check on farmworker conditions and campaigns consult:
 - United Farm Workers of America: www.ufw.org.
 - Farm Labor Organizing Committee: www.supportfloc.org.
- Follow our partner, the National Farmworkers Ministry, on their website, their campaigns, action alerts and worship resources at www.nfwm.org.
- To check the track record of various food-related corporations and for ideas on advocacy actions related to food, consult: www.greenamerica.org/programs/responsible shopper.
- To check on responsible sea food selections consult the Monterey Bay Aquarium “Seafood Watch” list: www.seafoodwatch.org.
- To order fair trade, organic tea and coffee (and other products) visit Equal Exchange: www.equalexchange.coop/wholesale.
- Explore the Equitable Food Initiative’s website, learn their standards and certification, ask grocery stores you use to consider joining and get on their mailing list. www.equitablefood.org

If 800,000 women choose chicken instead of beef 10 times this year, we would save 2,000,000,000 gallons of water. If families change? Go ahead and multiply it!

Source: MeetGreen

Fast Facts

Three-quarters of all pesticides in the US are used in the agricultural industry, and nearly three quarters of all acute pesticide poisonings reported occur to farmworkers. Farmers experienced only 3 percent of the reported cases. (Source: U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)

United Methodist Women has been a part Actions of the Coalition of Imokolee Farm Worker Boycotts around just food worker policies over the years. To see what this farmworker advocacy organization is working on now, go to www.ciw-online.org.

The average American eats 270 pounds of meat per year, nearly four times the global average. “The single most effective choice you can make to lower the global warming emissions resulting from your diet is to eat less meat, especially beef. Meat causes more global warming emissions than almost any other type of food. ... In the United States, beef production accounts for more than one-third of all heat-trapping emissions from our agricultural sector.” (Source: Union of Concerned Scientists, *Cooler, Smarter*, Island Press, 2011).

► *Did you consider that the incidence of pesticide poisoning amongs U.S. farmworkers is an economic and racial justice issue? By choosing organic products you not only help keep yourself healthy but also the workers who plant, tend and harvest crops as well as those in packing and processing facilities.*

Glossary

Fair trade: An agricultural commodity (sugar, coffee, tea, chocolate, etc.) is bought and sold using certain principles and arrangements that enable small scale primary producers to receive a higher return (price or income) than normal free market forces would provide. Independent, third-party certification is best to guarantee that the product truly is being produced under fair conditions rather than corporate “green wash.” In the United States, the main fair trade certifying group is Fair Trade USA.

Local: When it comes to food, “local” can be a relative term. Event planning experts currently call something local if it is grown, raised or produced within a 250 mile radius.

Organic: Different countries and different groups in the United States define “organic” differently. As with a fair trade product, it is helpful to have independent, third-party certification to assure that you are truly getting an organic product. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) sets standards for a product to carry its organic seal. According to the USDA, produce can be called organic if it’s certified to have grown on soil that had no prohibited substances applied for three years prior to harvest. Prohibited substances include most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. As for organic meat, USDA regulations require that animals are raised in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviors (like the ability to graze on pasture), fed 100 percent organic feed and forage, and not administered antibiotics or hormones. When it comes to processed, multi-ingredient foods, regulations require organic ingredients and prohibit artificial preservatives, colors or flavors.

Sustainable seafood: Whether fished or farmed, the seafood comes from sources that can maintain or increase production without jeopardizing the existence of the particular species being caught or harvested, other species of marine life (“by-catch”) and the affected habitat and marine eco-system functioning. (Source: Seafood Watch)

Policy Foundation

The Book of Discipline “The Natural World” (§1160), “Social Community” (§1162) and “Economic Community” (§1163), the Social Principles.

The Book of Resolutions #1023 “Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future,” #1026 “Environmental Stewardship,” #1031 “Resolution on Global Warming,” #3083 “Eradicating Abusive Child Labor,” #4011 “Guidelines for Initiating or Joining an Economic Boycott,” #4022 The United Methodist Church Use of Fair Trade Coffee and Other Fair Trade Products,” #4051 The United Methodist Church, Justice, and World Hunger,” #4132 Environmental Health and Safety in Workplace and Community,” #4134 Rights of Farm Workers in the United States,” #4135 Rights of Workers,” #4136 Smithfield Foods Inc. and Union Organizing.”

Food and Beverage Checklist

Visual Concessions/Food Bar Check:

- Packaging
 - Minimal?
 - Renewable (paper-based)?
 - Compostable?

- Condiments
 - Packaged?
 - Bulk?
 - Dispensers?

- Serviceware (utensils, cups, glasses, plates, bowls)
 - Reusable?
 - Made of renewable resources (paper-based)?
 - Compostable?
 - Polystyrene, foam plastics or black plastic?

- Labeling
 - Fair trade?
 - Local?
 - Organic?
 - Vegetarian?
 - Vegan?
 - Kosher?
 - Sustainable seafood?

- Linens/napkins
 - Did the service use linens?
 - If paper, are they made from recycled content?
 - Are they compostable?

- Waste management
 - Do they provide recycling?
 - Do they provide composting?
 - Is there clear signage?

Source: MeetGreen