

# **Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System – Dining Services Call Notes**

February 26, 2008

Notes from the call are organized in the following categories:

- 1. Questions and comments that are relevant to STARS broadly.**
- 2. Questions and comments that are relevant to the Dining Services section in general.**
- 3. Questions and comments about specific credits in the Dining Services section**

## **1. Questions and comments that are relevant to STARS broadly.**

### ***Data confidentiality***

Someone asked if AASHE expects schools to make food purchasing amounts (dollar values) publicly available when STARS 1.0 launches in 2009. Since STARS doesn't require third-party verification, transparency and public accountability are essential to ensuring the strength and validity of a STARS rating. That said, AASHE is open to keeping some data confidential and would welcome feedback about what pieces of information schools would not want to share publicly.

### ***Competing certifications***

A participant asked how AASHE determines which certifications to include and exclude and noted that using one certification system serves as an endorsement that may influence the purchasing and other decision-making for schools seeking a STARS rating. In general, AASHE looks to feedback from the Technical Advisory Committee and STARS reviewers as well as input from the broader sustainability community in determining which certification systems to allow. AASHE welcomes feedback on additional certification systems to consider.

## **2. Questions and comments that are relevant to the entire Dining Services section.**

### ***On-site franchise operations***

There were differing opinions as to whether or not franchisees operating on campus should be included for these credits. Excluding franchisees could create an incentive to bring in more franchise operations. Someone responded that this wouldn't change an institution's decision whether or not to allow franchisees on campus. From a student's point of view, there's no way to distinguish between franchisees and residential dining halls. Community colleges likely won't have residential dining halls and so these credits won't apply to them, but they could still take initiative to bring local food to campus (work with franchisees, seek franchisees that do use local and/or organic food, for example). It may be better to use dining options for which students can use their meal cards as the boundary for what to include for these credits.

For the STARS pilot, AASHE is not asking schools to include franchises because the data would be difficult if not impossible to gather and institutions have little to no control over franchisees' purchasing decisions. AASHE is open to changing that boundary as we move forward. Likewise, AASHE is open to creating new credits (possibly tier two) to address franchised food service operations. Please feel free to suggest credits by emailing [stars@ashe.org](mailto:stars@ashe.org).

Someone suggested asking schools to report the composition of their on-campus food service (portion that is from franchisees versus residential dining halls). This will help AASHE and STARS reviewers understand the scope of the issue. AASHE will ask pilot participants for that information.

Someone asked for information about how schools have incorporated sustainable food procurement into on-site franchise operations. Portland State University included sustainable food procurement in their dining services contract, but acknowledged it's harder to influence franchisees than contractors.

#### ***Data availability***

AASHE asked if participants expect the data will be available for these credits and how difficult it will be to gather the data. Several institutions replied that gathering and reporting the data shouldn't be a problem.

#### ***Seafood***

A caller noted that the pilot version of STARS doesn't include any credits for preferable seafood, which is an important issue. AASHE will look for a widely available and accepted standard and will consider adding a credit around this issue. Feel free to send suggestions to [stars@ashe.org](mailto:stars@ashe.org).

### **3. Questions and comments about specific credits**

#### **OP Credit 5: Local Food**

For this credit food must be both grown and processed within 150 miles of the institution. If you have information about one component but not the other (e.g., processed but not grown) AASHE would like to hear about it.

Likewise, for schools that are using another boundary in their efforts to source and purchase local food, or if you have an alternative definition to suggest, AASHE would like to hear about it. The most common alternative boundary mentioned on the call was in-state. For STARS, classifying food grown in-state as "local" would penalize schools in small states. Likewise, it may be preferable from a pure distance perspective to purchase food from a farm just across the border in a neighboring state than a farm that's located on the opposite side of the same state.

USDA plant hardiness zone is included in the documentation section in recognition that climate differences significantly impact institutions' abilities to source local food. At this point STARS doesn't make adjustments based on climate, but AASHE wants to gather that piece of information in order to better understand the data. It may be incorporated in future versions of the credit. The USDA plant hardiness zone map covers Canada. We want to use the same standards for US and Canadian schools in order to enable comparison. However, if there are Canadian alternatives that are better, please send them to [stars@ashe.org](mailto:stars@ashe.org).

A caller asked if products sold from the on-campus farm and dairy count. For this credit, products purchased for use in residential dining halls and on-site catered events for the institution count. Products sold elsewhere do not count for this credit. There will likely be separate tier two credits that address on-campus farms and gardens.

A participant is starting an on-campus garden, but they haven't started selling products yet. Things that haven't been sold yet shouldn't be included, but let AASHE know about such projects when submitting information.

Several callers mentioned that the benefit of buying local food is not strictly distance-related; a major benefit is supporting small and mid-sized family farms. The credit does not address this social aspect of sustainability. This is something that should be addressed in a separate credit or incorporated into this credit for future versions.

### **OP Credit 6: Food Alliance and Organic Certified Food**

A caller raised concerns that Food Alliance is a regional program, Food Alliance-certified food isn't widely available in the southeast, and a similar regional certification body doesn't exist. Food Alliance was included because there are schools that are working with Food Alliance. The credit could be changed so that it only includes organic food (though organic is different than Food Alliance-certified), but even though organic is a national program, there are regional disparities in the availability of organic food too.

### **OP Credit 7: Fair Trade Certified Coffee**

Even though the documentation section asks for information about Fair Trade certified bananas, sugar, rice, and other products, this credit applies only to coffee purchases in recognition that coffee is the most widely available Fair Trade certified product. Other food categories may be part of the credit in future versions of STARS and the information provided will help inform whether or not to include them.

A participant asked if other schools or organizations have looked at Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee. Rainforest Alliance certification is based on different standards than Fair Trade certification. For example, Rainforest Alliance requires workers receive the local minimum or average wage, whichever is higher. Fair Trade certification requires that farm workers receive living wages and that coffee is purchased for at least a minimum price.

A caller mentioned that there are concerns because Fair Trade certification isn't a legal certification (unlike organic certification, which is regulated by government agencies in the US and Canada). While it isn't a government certification, Fair Trade certification is conducted by independent third-party groups and is a widely recognized and accepted standard.

A caller asked if people have experience locating suppliers of Fair Trade certified products other than coffee. A couple of institutions mentioned having worked with vendors who have been able to provide products upon request, though at slightly higher cost.

Instead of requiring that 100% of coffee purchases are Fair Trade-certified, a participant asked if 95% would be a better threshold to allow for some marginal pieces that are falling through the cracks. Another participant responded that 100% is reasonable, given that it applies only to residential dining halls and on-site catered events for which the institution is the client. AASHE is open to considering different thresholds. Please feel free to suggest alternatives.