



2025 SUSTAINABILITY REPORT



University Housing
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

BADGERS LIVE SUSTAINABLY

The Division of University Housing at UW–Madison is committed to sustainable practices. Our work in sustainability is focused into four priority areas to meet campus-wide goals: landfill waste reduction, resource conservation, sustainability education, and sustainable dining. This report details how these priority areas were carried out as new initiatives and standard operating procedures throughout our facilities in 2025.



IN OUR RESIDENCE HALLS:

- Water bottle filling stations throughout halls prevent over a million plastic bottles every year
- Paper towels, toilet paper, and plastic bags are all made from recycled materials
- Green Cleaning practices use only sustainable products, including onsite-generated Aqueous Ozone and other products that meet EPA standards for human and environmental health
- Over 85% of our spaces have been upgraded to energy-efficient LED lighting
- Energy Star-rated washers and refrigerators in our buildings use approximately 20% less energy and 35% less water compared to conventional counterparts
- Dual-flush and low-flow toilets and sinks use around 60% less water compared to older models



IN OUR APARTMENTS COMMUNITY:

- The Eagle Heights Community Gardens (located within the Lakeshore Nature Preserve) is one of the oldest and largest community gardens in the country, hosting 500 plots for residents and community members
- Chemical-free lawns are maintained throughout the grounds to protect local wildlife and waterways
- Paint is VOC-free to protect human and environmental health
- Staff develop sustainability curriculum in Eagle’s Wing childcare center
- Two rain gardens and four bio-retention basins protect Lake Mendota and surrounding habitats by reducing runoff and pollution



IN OUR DINING FACILITIES:

- Reusable to-go containers produce 19x fewer greenhouse gas emissions and consume 25x less water than disposable containers
- Back-of-house food waste is tracked and reduced with Leanpath technology at all Dining Markets
- Dining’s Nutrition Access Program packages unserved food into microwavable meals available to any UW–Madison student
- A large batch kitchen and centralized bakery prepares and packages bulk food orders at one time to increase efficiency and shelf-life while decreasing waste
- A 3-acre Dining Campus Farm grows produce for use in the Dining Markets
- Vegetarian and vegan options make up over 50% of our menu options to offer healthy, low carbon choices





2025 BY THE NUMBERS

From waste diversion to student engagement, Housing works hard to decrease the impact of our operations on the environment.

99.5%

of all waste recycled or composted at the annual Convocation Lunch event serving 8,000+ first-year students

150,000+ lbs

of food waste composted at Gordon, Carson's, and Four Lakes Markets

3,084 plates

measured for plate waste through student outreach efforts.

100,603 lbs

of food waste avoided across all Dining Markets using Leanpath food waste tracking software

82,638

disposable containers prevented from landfill through the Ticket to Takeout reusable to-go container program



6,400+ meals

recovered and distributed to students through the Nutrition Access Program

174,994 lbs

of material diverted from landfill during Sustainable Move Out through donation and recycling efforts

3,845 lbs

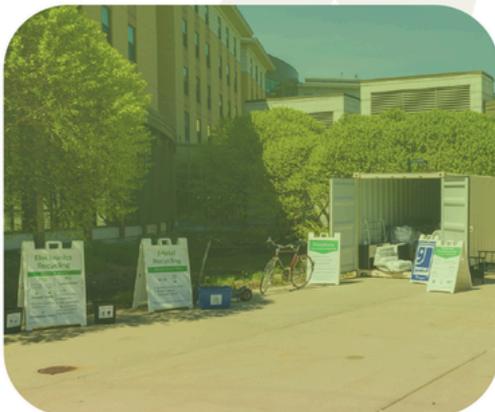
of vegetables grown at the Dining & Culinary Services Campus Farm and served in the Dining Markets

48,499+ lbs

of surplus or renovation material diverted from landfill through Housing donation and recycling efforts

672

volunteer hours helping with Housing's Sustainable Move In & Move Out programs



WASTE DIVERSION



SUSTAINABLE MOVING

When it comes to moving in and out of the residence halls, Housing offers additional recycling and donation options for residents. A new record high of **74%** of all Move In waste was recycled in 2025! In total, **234,424 pounds** were prevented from entering landfill during the resident Move In and Move Out events this year. A new partnership with [Badger Reclaim](#) also helped keep around **6,000 pounds** of Move Out donations on campus and in the hands of new residents. Check out the [Sustainable Move Out website](#) for more info about the program!

RECYCLING

Housing uses a single-stream recycling system and continues to optimize recycling practices throughout our operations. Audits show that about 17% of our campus recycling stream is made up of items that do not belong in the recycling. Reducing this contamination rate will increase funds generated from recycling and ensure that items get properly recycled. To learn more about what's recyclable in Housing, watch a quick video or take a 10-minute canvas course [on our website](#). You can also practice on your own with the two [Oscar Sort](#) AI Recycling Assistants in Gordon and Dejope!



SPOTLIGHT:

RECYCLING AUDITS LEAD TO COST SAVINGS

University Housing uncovered an increase of about \$12,000 annually in additional recycling rebates with the help of the Office of Sustainability and FP&M Waste & Recycling. Over the last few years, University Housing Resident Sustainability Ambassadors (RSAs) have teamed up with the campus Zero Waste team to conduct audits of Housing recycling bins. These hands-on learning opportunities uncovered significant financial savings due to the composition of high-value materials and identified areas for improving recycling efforts through education.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION



Housing works closely with the Office of Sustainability Green Fund, a valued partner in improving efficiency and sustainability throughout our facilities. In addition to sponsoring new initiatives, the Green Fund connects Housing with student leaders who want to learn about and improve operations on campus.



GORDON HOOD CONTROL UPGRADES

With help from the Green Fund, Dining upgraded the aging controls for the kitchen ventilation systems that were installed when the building was first built in 2013. This upgrade will save an estimated 220 MWh in energy usage and over \$60,000 in operating costs per year.

SPOTLIGHT: GEM 6 ELECTRIC VEHICLE

The Green Fund also helped offset the cost of a new electric vehicle for Housing Facilities, a GEM passenger van that arrived to campus in 2025. The vehicle drove 210 miles around campus this year, which saved an estimated 185 pounds of CO₂ compared to an average passenger vehicle. Expanding Housing's fleet of multi-use electric vehicles supports the campus-wide goal to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2048.



SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

RESIDENT SUSTAINABILITY AMBASSADORS

The Resident Sustainability Ambassador (RSA) Program is a peer outreach and leadership opportunity with a cohort of twelve volunteer residents. They meet weekly to learn from campus experts in sustainability and take part in hands-on learning opportunities, then share their knowledge with fellow residents through outreach events and educational campaigns. This fall, they conducted food waste audits in the Dining Markets, packaged surplus meals with the Nutrition Access Program, analyzed the contamination rate of resident recycling, promoted the [UW-Madison Zero Waste Compass](#) with the Zero Waste team, took a behind-the-scenes tour of Gordon Dining & Event Center, and designed a sustainability-focused social media campaign.



GREENHOUSE LEARNING COMMUNITY



GreenHouse residents make up an intentional living community in the LEED-certified Leopold Residence Hall. This year, residents participated in frequent workdays at the Dining Farm, hosted baking & cooking competitions, took a field trip to the Leopold Shack, and got a behind-the-scenes visit with bison at the Henry Vilas Zoo. They explored Ho-Chunk Nation land restoration efforts and participated in **Our Shared Waters**, an annual UW program that celebrates Indigenous craft and knowledge about water, food, language, and ecology. Students learned about birchbark canoe making and paddled the Dejope Birchbark canoe in Lake Mendota.

Another highlight from the year was the inaugural Great Wisconsin Fruit Tour, with stops at Warren's Cranberry Festival, Ecker's Apple Farm, and Elmaro Vineyard to learn about sustainable fruit farming across the state of Wisconsin. They even got to participate in a grape stomp!

EVENTS

SUSTAIN-A-BASH

Sustain-a-Bash is an annual collaboration between University Housing and the Office of Sustainability to celebrate sustainability on campus and in our community. This year, Sustain-a-Bash featured exciting activities all week long, including the Green Fund kickoff picnic, sustainability walking tours, campus-wide scavenger hunts, and more. The week ended with a Sustainability Showcase on the DeJope lawn which welcomed nearly 40 student organizations, campus departments, and community organizations, drawing over 250 attendees.



EARTH DAY MEAL

Diners experience a diverse, environmentally-friendly menu in the marketplaces every Earth Day. In 2025, sustainability was highlighted at each station with local, seasonal, low-carbon, Indigenous, plant-forward, and water-friendly choices available at all dining market locations.

CHANCELLOR'S WELCOME LUNCH

Dining & Culinary Services supports the Chancellor's Office in welcoming nearly 9,000 first-year students for a picnic-style lunch before New Student Convocation. This September, 99.5% of all waste from the event (over 1,200 pounds!) was diverted from landfill through compost and recycling efforts, a first for the campus at an event of this scale. It was also a Certified Green event through the Office of Sustainability Green Events Program.

DINING FARM DINNER

The Dining Campus Farm completed its third growing season in 2025, expanding to a second location at the West Madison Agricultural Research Station and a total of nearly 3 acres. The harvest was served at Rheta's, Carson's, and Lowell Markets all season long and shared with the on-campus Open Seat Food Pantry. Rheta's Market celebrated the harvest with its first Dining Farm Produce Dinner in October, with all stations highlighting vegetables from the farm.



SUSTAINABLE DINING

Dining & Culinary Services prioritizes sustainability throughout operations. Efforts to reduce waste, decrease climate impact, and purchase sustainable food continue to be guiding principles.

MATERIAL WASTE REDUCTION

Over the last few years, Dining has worked with distributors to reduce or eliminate disposable packaging and shipping materials arriving in our facilities. Reusable produce crates were purchased for suppliers to ensure fruit and vegetables can be delivered without cardboard packaging, and a new reusable pallet wrap was piloted with US Foods that decreases plastic film by about 50%. These small switches save time, reduce waste, and save on costs associated with waste management.

Reusability is standard practice in our marketplaces, too. Dining has phased out plastic disposables like straws and utensils within the marketplaces and reusable plates, mugs, bowls, cups, utensils, and to-go containers are the norm in all-you-care-to-eat facilities. Sustainability volunteers even help wash dishes at larger events, like the Late Night Breakfast in December, to prevent the use of disposables.



FOOD WASTE REDUCTION & RECOVERY

Reducing food waste in Dining continued to be a priority in 2025:

1. **Back-of-house food waste** was reduced by 20% overall using Leanpath technology
2. **Surplus meals were recovered** through Dining's [Nutrition Access Program](#), which packaged a record 6,400 microwavable meals in the '24-'25 academic year.
3. **Food scraps were recycled** at Gordon, Four Lakes, and Carson's markets through the campus-wide composting pilot with FP&M Waste & Recycling.

SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING

Dining has committed to serving sustainable ingredients and reducing our carbon impact over the next few years through the following goals:

- Increase purchases from the state of Wisconsin
- Increase sustainable purchases
- Reduce climate impact through menu offerings

The next two pages highlight a few of the products and partnerships that are helping us reach those goals.

BADGERS EAT SUSTAINABLY



TRACTOR BEVERAGE

Our Dining Markets are now serving Certified Organic, non-GMO Tractor Beverage! These craft beverages feature sustainably-sourced ingredients and support regenerative agriculture. They are available by the glass in our dining markets and by the can at our Flamingo Run convenience stores. Students had an opportunity to sample new Tractor flavors and learn about their sustainability commitments at the Mad Farmer pop-up across from Gordon this fall.

ODYSSEY YOGURT

Odyssey is a local manufacturer out of Monroe, WI using natural agricultural practices, water conservation techniques, and waste reduction strategies in their dairy production. Residents are loving the local Greek yogurt and consumed 163,500+ pounds in 2025.

BETTER BLENDED BURGER

In fall 2025, Dining replaced all-beef burgers with the Better Burger Blend, a Halal angus beef burger with 40% jackfruit. The jackfruit plant is nutrient-rich and sustainably harvested. When combined with beef, it results in a burger that is rich in fiber, high in protein, low in saturated fats and has a 40% lower carbon footprint than traditional burgers. Diners consumed 11,520 pounds of Better Blended Burgers this fall, resulting in a lower carbon impact than previous years.





LOCAL DINING PARTNERS

Dining & Culinary Services has a goal to increase purchases from the state of Wisconsin by 10% over the next few years. This map highlights some of the local food, ingredients, and manufacturers that we already work with to serve fresh, healthy food to residents daily.



GET INVOLVED



Volunteer for a Sustainable Move In or Move Out shift: Lend a hand by helping to break down cardboard or sort through donations with Sustainability during resident transition periods.



Become an expert on Housing recycling guidelines and be on the lookout in your area for recycling issues or challenges. Connect with Housing Sustainability for advice or updated signage when needed.



Volunteer with the Dining Campus Farm: Sign up for volunteer hours or a tour of the Dining Farm on our website! We welcome large groups in the summer and fall to weed, plant seedlings, and harvest vegetables for the dining markets.



Represent your area and help improve Housing Sustainability efforts. Staff can participate as Housing Sustainability Committee members or Dining Sustainability Champions and are appointed representatives by their department. Students can participate in the Resident Sustainability Ambassador Program which welcomes applications each fall.

Learn more or get involved on our website: housing.wisc.edu/about/sustainability or contact sustainability@housing.wisc.edu

Do you have sustainability ideas for University Housing? [Let us know!](#)



2025 IN PHOTOS



Photos featured in this report were captured by University Housing Marketing, Housing Sustainability, and the Office of Sustainability