

Food Team

Scientists have agreed that food choices are among the most important environmental choices made by the average US citizen. Some food facts to consider:

- The average fruit or vegetable in the grocery store has travelled 1800 miles just to get to your plate. It takes many trucks, planes and boats to get the produce to you, and significant packaging to prevent it from being damaged during the trip.
 - Chemicals are saturating our food—from fruits and vegetables that contain pesticide residue, to antibiotics and hormones that remain in the meat we eat.
 - While many of us imagine bucolic family farms, most animals are in fact produced on industrial farms termed ‘factory farms’. These farms keep animals in confinement their entire lives—many times they never see the light of day—and lead to significant waste problems. Some industrial farms produce as much waste as a small city!
 - All across the country family farms are going out of business, due to the pressure of industrial and imported foods, which can typically be produced at a lower cost than a smaller farm.
 - The production of livestock produces more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transportation sector—meaning that eating meat is the biggest part of our carbon footprint (UN Environment Programme).
 - Many packaged foods contain processed, chemical ingredients, such as hydrogenated oils, white flour, dyes, corn syrup and added sugar. While these ingredients help the products to last longer on the shelves, they aren’t so good for our health!
 - Many cities experience “food deserts” or areas devoid of markets that sell healthy and fresh food; where people cannot access fresh or healthy food without a car or transportation.
1. For the food served at coffee hours and events, does the congregation use a vendor, or is it done as a potluck? Consider the implications of this answer on the ability for the congregation to serve healthier food.
 2. If the congregation orders food from a food service company/vendor, do they incorporate any sustainable food mandates into the contract? For instance, mandating that Fair Trade, Organic coffee must be served, or china must be used.

3. For potluck meals, does the congregation have any sustainable food guidelines for members who create dishes? For instance, tips for a vegetarian meal, or ideas for incorporating local ingredients?
4. What food limitation guidelines, if any, must the house of worship follow when ordering food? For example, allergies, Kosher, Halal, etc. How might these limitations affect sustainable food purchasing?
5. Does the congregation serve fruits and vegetables at every gathering?
6. Meat:
 - a. Are vegetarian options served at every meal or coffee hour?
 - b. Are there any gatherings or events the congregation holds that offer entirely vegetarian or vegan food options? If not, are there events where this might be a feasible decision? Think about common religious events or holidays.
 - c. As you look at the meat-based items in the refrigerator or pantry, are there opportunities to replace those items with vegetarian options? Consider more common vegetarian sources of protein such as beans, grains, vegetables or cheese. Please describe.
7. Does the house of worship serve organic, Fair-trade, bird-friendly coffee and Fair-trade organic tea and hot chocolate? **Clue:** look for the Fair Trade and Organic symbols



8. Look in the refrigerators, and pantry and talk with staff: does the house of worship offer organic food at coffee hours and during events? **Clue:** Organic foods will be labeled with the USDA organic symbol, above.
9. Does the congregation offer locally produced food at gatherings and events? **Tips:** Local foods are those that are sourced from within 150 miles. Look on the labels of packaged foods for the city of origin

10. For those foods you find that aren't local, can you think of any local substitutes?
For instance, local apples could supplant bananas.
11. Does the congregation act as a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) drop-off site, or host a farmers' market?
12. Does the congregation have a fruit or vegetable garden on its grounds, or is it connected to a community garden?
13. Look at the labels of the packaged food offered to members, and consider the caterer's menu, if available. What do you notice about the ingredients and nutritional content? Do they seem healthy? Do you notice any hydrogenated oils, high sugar content, bleached flour, etc?
14. Does the congregation post articles about healthy food, or healthy recipes in their newsletter or on their website?
15. Does the congregation compost food waste?
16. Does the congregation use disposable dinnerware? If so, what kind, and how often?

Questions to Consider?

1. Why is it important for congregations to serve sustainable food? Consider environmental impact and health.
2. What are key food opportunities you learned about through this audit?
3. What can this house of worship do differently to serve healthier and more sustainable food?