



IMPERIAL
Hospitality Department

Sustainable Food and Drink Policy

Greener eating: ambitions,
practices and continued
successes for 2026 - 2031



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INTRODUCTION

**THE HOSPITALITY TEAM
AND OUR OPERATIONS**

What is the Hospitality Department?

Imperial’s College London’s Hospitality Department sits within the Property Division and runs all things related to the catering and events delivered at the university – sourcing and cooking the food, managing events from bookings to tech, and managing the maintenance, logistics and disposal around these operations.

Our catering for events ranges from sandwiches and salads for working lunches to canapes and prosecco for graduations.

We serve food in more than 30 cafés, bars and restaurants across all our campuses for tens of thousands of staff, students and visitors every day of the academic year.

Sustainability in catering operations

Imperial is committed to creating sustainable environments for learning, teaching, researching and working, with the goal of becoming a net zero institution by 2040 for scopes 1 & 2, and reducing scope 3 where possible.

You can read about sustainability at Imperial and the journey to net zero on the Sustainable Imperial webpages.

The Hospitality Department is dedicated to ensuring our operations are as sustainable as possible, contributing to Imperial’s Net Zero by 2040 goal.

We are committed to maintaining sustainable practices in every step of our operations; how we source, cook and dispose of the food we make.

While the emissions from the fresh food that we serve is less than 1% of Imperial’s total carbon footprint, our potential impact is far greater than this. *

Everyone has to eat! Staff and students interact with us daily, and food is something that inspires emotion, interest and delight.

This gives us an opportunity to engage people about sustainability in an arena they are passionate about.



| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Worried about biodiversity loss? | Focus on food. |
| Worried about freshwater supply and quality? | Focus on food. |
| Worried about deforestation? | Focus on food. |
| Worried about overfishing? | Focus on food. |
| Worried about climate change? | Focus on energy, and food. |

Richard Waite, World Resources Institute, 2011

SUSTAINABLE EATING: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The food we eat and the systems that produce it are damaging our planet.

Food is the biggest contributor to biodiversity loss, deforestation, drought, freshwater pollution and aquatic wildlife damage.

Food’s contribution to climate change is second only to the energy industry, and is one of the industries most threatened by changes to our environment.

In order to reach the UK Government’s net zero by 2050 pledge, the UK’s animal and crop farmers, fisheries and food scientists have a lot of work to do to change the way food is farmed and produced in this country.

Alongside that, consumers have a big part to play. Food systems contribute 23–42% of global greenhouse gas

*Lewis, C. (2021) UROP 2021 – Catering Carbon Footprint 2019. Unpublished report. Sustainable Imperial.



emissions.* It’s also one of the areas where individuals have the most control over their buying, eating and disposal habits.

We all need to reduce meat consumption, move our spending power towards sustainably farmed and produced food and reduce our food waste.

So while sustainable catering at Imperial starts in our kitchens and in our offices, we hope to embed practices and arm our community with information that ripples far beyond our own operations.

OUR POLICY: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

What is the policy for?

This Sustainable Food and Drink Policy outlines our ongoing journey; our ambitious goals for the next five years, existing achievements and continuing commitments.

We aim to be transparent about our operations, practices and the reasoning behind them, setting them out in this policy.

What does it cover?

This policy maps out our plans and goals for academic years 2026/2027 to 2030/2031; a pathway to an even more sustainable model of catering.

It pertains to all the operations managed by Taste Imperial including kitchens, in-house outlets and events catering.



*Stewart, K., et al (2023). Changes in greenhouse gas emissions from food supply in the United Kingdom. Journal of Cleaner Production, [online] 410, p.137273. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.137273.



Aside from the food itself, it covers our procurement, equipment and disposal, as well as our marketing and community engagement.

To make sure our policy feels digestible and relevant, we've split it into five categories rooted in our community's experience of our operations; What We Serve, Where We Source It, How We Serve It, Making Greener Choices and Tackling Food Waste.

How was it created?

This policy has been created by the Hospitality Department, in consultation with the Sustainable Imperial team.

Using our previous sustainability policy as a jumping off point, our department's sustainability leads worked with Hospitality Heads of Department to create a list of intended goals and policies.

We consulted the Sustainable Imperial team to ensure that our rationale was accurate and up-to-date, and that our goals were ambitious but achievable.

In the summer of 2025 we circulated a first draft of the sustainable food policy document to all staff and students as well as academic experts for feedback. By consulting our community, we engaged interest in

our sustainability work and wider principles of sustainable eating, and gathered useful feedback on which elements of the policy are popular and well understood, with the view to increasing our explanation of the areas that might not have been.

This document represents the final version, following this comprehensive circulation of the initial draft. Feedback received during this process was carefully considered and integrated, resulting in the current iteration.

- The Taste Imperial Team



La Cantina
The Bakery
Roots Café
Lumen Café
Eastside Bar
Library Café
The Pantry
The Works
Loud Bird
Feast
Pizza Pi
Hào Chī
MRC Café
The Roastery
Ex Libris Café
Taste Al Fresco
Reynolds Café
SCR Restaurant
Chemistry Café
170 Queen's Gate
Wolfson Restaurant
Queen's Tower Rooms
RCM Bar and Restaurant
The Business School Café
Royal School of Mines Café
Essentials Convenience Store

1. WHAT WE'RE SERVING

The catering department serves our Imperial community every day from as many as 30 outlets.

We run all of these in-house, ranging from a burrito bar to a fine-dining restaurant, as well as delivering the tech and catering for hundreds of Imperial events each year.

In this policy are our key standards and goals, but sustainability is also embedded in our day-to-day work.

We're always looking for new ways to reduce our emissions, minimise waste and increase transparency around our food and its impact.



We ensure that plant-based options are affordable and accessible everywhere.

All our outlets serve a plant-based option daily, and we've expanded our Plantworks brand to clearly label them with recycled paper stickers and digital roundels.

We commit to keep vegan meals the same price as non-vegan.

We encourage our community to eat more plant-based food, regardless of their usual diet.

Meat Free Monday: for Veganuary we turned our highest footfall outlet vegan every Monday.

'Cheat On Meat' Disloyalty Cards: during Veganuary and Sustainability Fortnight, stamps were given for buying vegan lunches, with your sixth free!



We've made more of our options 'vegan by default'.

We've quietly swapped some of our highest volume products to great quality vegan ones.

All plain croissants at our cafés are vegan. When we ran blind taste tests, 80% of participants wrongly guessed our new vegan croissants were butter ones!

We changed our catering menu structure so only proteins can be swapped; all sides and sauces are vegan by default.



Currently just under 30% of our offer is plant-based, we aim to increase that to 40% by 2031.



We don't serve beef.

In 2024, we removed beef from all menus, well ahead of our 2026 deadline.

In popular dishes, we've swapped beef for Scottish wild culled venison, which is less impactful on the environment than farmed beef.

We don't purchase lamb from outside the UK, and will maintain our use levels.

We purchase British lamb only, reducing food miles.

In outlets currently serving lamb, we will keep dishes to one a week, and commit to not add it to new menu concepts.

*Eshel, G. et al (2025). US grass-fed beef is as carbon intensive as industrial beef and ~10-fold more intensive than common protein-dense alternatives. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 122(12). doi:https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2404329122.

Our 'Beef with Beef' - why cow's off the menu

Beef is more carbon intensive than any other commonly consumed protein.*

When we created our first Sustainable Food and Drink policy in 2022, we analysed the emissions associated with the all the produce we bought in large volumes.

We found that fresh meat made up 8% of purchases, but 40% of our carbon emissions. Beef was by far the largest, responsible for 38% of total meat CO2e.

By eliminating beef from our operations, we've reduced our total CO2e emissions as a department by 15% in just two years.

We will review and seek to reduce meat per portion.



We will review existing recipes to identify opportunities to increase plants per portion, and areas we can reduce meat per portion.

We will review our current menus and create recipe guidelines by 2027.



2. WHERE WE SOURCE IT

Procurement is the core of our operations - even with the most sustainable practices in place, if our sources aren't sustainable, then we've fallen at the first hurdle!

All our orders are made by our procurement team, ranging from fresh fruit and veg, to chocolate bars and canned drinks, as well as cleaning products, uniform, cups and more! They keep sustainability

at the centre of their day-to-day decisions, conducting rigorous audits on all new products to ensure the food we serve, and suppliers we engage with align with our sustainability goals.

Procurement is also crucial to our overall mission, as it contributes to scope three emissions, which make up the largest proportion of Imperial's emissions.

DELIVERIES



We're reducing the emissions associated with our regular food deliveries.

One of the targets in our previous policy was to assess and reduce the number of product deliveries to our campuses, reducing the emissions required to deliver the ingredients we need.

Over the last few years we have worked to coordinate suppliers and deliveries across different outlets and business areas, reducing the overall number of deliveries to campus by 18%.

We will consider the delivery impact in ordering, storage and menu decisions to continue to reduce deliveries to the absolute minimum.

Food production will always require regular deliveries, as we need our ingredients to be fresh!

We can, however, further reduce the vehicles delivering to site each week by aligning orders to designated delivery days, consolidating suppliers, and maximising our storage efficiency.



We regularly review the sustainability credentials of our suppliers and products.



When we spot a straight swap for a more sustainable product, we action it as soon as we can.

Over the last few years, we've changed cleaning supplies, pre-packaged products, ingredients, disposable containers, and more.

Where products are not as simple to swap, either due to price or operational considerations, we have created projects to explore more sustainable alternatives.

SUPPLIERS



SUPPLIERS



We will embed sustainability considerations further into our supplier tender process.

We will evaluate all new suppliers using the criteria in Imperial's Sustainable Procurement Policy, which places an emphasis on sustainable sources, re-use where possible and requires that sustainability criteria make up 20% of the scoring on all major contracts and a minimum of 10% on all others.

We have created catering-specific guidance for all staff involved in procurement.

Review all supplier policies and engage with them on change.

We will work with suppliers to create goals to improve operations, and give them appropriate time to do so before we eventually end relationships and contracts.

We will encourage outsourced outlets to align with our no beef policy, and seek to ensure that all new suppliers adhere to our sustainable food policy.

By 2026 we will have created internal guidance documents for our procurement team to use. By 2027 we will have reviewed all supplier policies and engaged with them on change.

Our catering operations represent a huge amount of business. We handle a vast amount of food, and the decisions we make about what equipment we use to make and serve your food, the products we use to maintain our kitchens, and what we do with the waste when you're done have a big impact too.

Every year the Taste Imperial team:

- Serves tens of thousands of hot meals, sandwiches and coffees from outlets ranging across five different sites.
- Manages hundreds of both internal and external events, from serving prosecco at graduation to providing wraps and salads for your working lunch meeting.
- Plus, over summer we turn empty student accommodation into one of the biggest hotels in London, complete with a hot breakfast!

HOW WE

Imperial Wines-green from source to bottle

With our wine, we've taken our scrutiny of suppliers a step further.

We've gone straight to the source to produce our own Imperial wine directly with a small family vineyard, Château Canet, who hold the highest level of environmental certification for French wineries.

From replacing pesticides with insect pheromones, to swapping sulphites for self-produced nitrogen, they consider their local ecosystem at every step.

Our labels are made from post-consumer recycled paper and discarded grape pulp from the wine-making process.

Our bottles are made from thinner and lighter glass than usual, so require less emissions to transport. We use plant-based organic cork that's carbon negative to grow, and we don't use metal bottle closures.

Keep your eye out for our wine in our restaurant, bars, and events and enjoy a more sustainable choice!



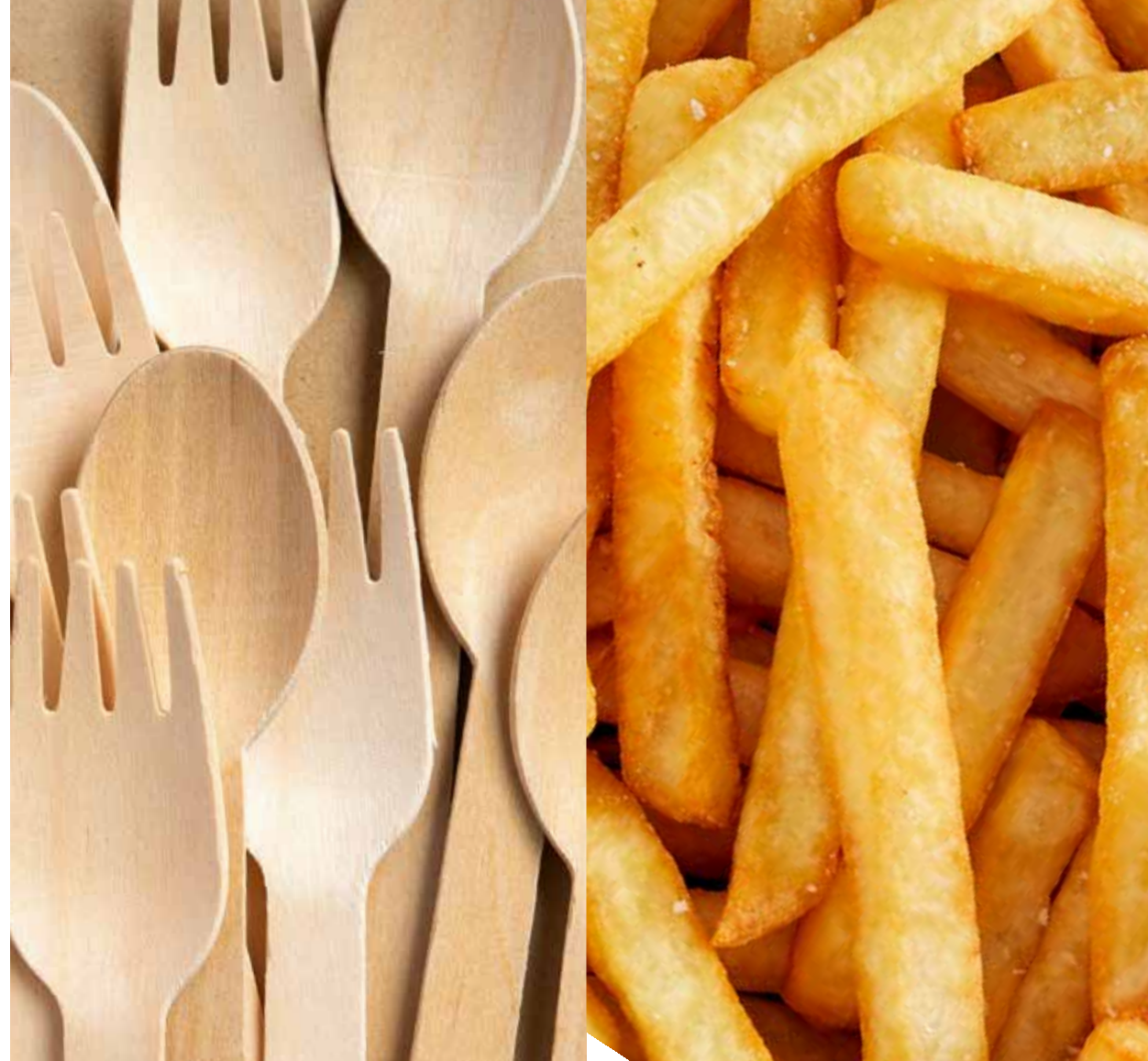
SERVE IT 3.



In all areas of our operations, we are working to reduce disposables and single-use plastics.

Here are just some of the ways how:

- In 2022, we introduced a 30p cup levy for all drinks served in takeaway cups, encouraging our customers to bring their own reusable cups.
- We've removed plastic cups from water fountains. Events catering no longer provide plastic cups.
- We use crockery as standard, and will only provide disposables if it is not feasible to use ceramics.
- We're encouraging customers to bring their own container - all our outlets will serve your food in any clean reusable container you bring!
- We're running awareness campaigns and loyalty schemes to help people get in the habit.



We've issued all catering staff and agency workers with reusable boxes for the staff meals they get on shift.

Our meal policy now states all staff meals must be served in reusable containers or on plates, eliminating thousands of disposables per week.

Where we still have to rely on disposables, we've upgraded to more sustainable materials.

Our coffee cup lids are made of sugar cane pulp waste and our takeaway boxes are Notpla – a seaweed coated takeaway box containing zero plastic. This means all our disposables are biodegradable.

Launch reusable cup trial

We are a large university over multiple sites, so the logistics of how to collect, clean and distribute containers are more complex than many businesses already using these reusable systems.

We are working with potential suppliers to create a bespoke solution to fits our business model that is genuinely sustainable, cost-effective, and convenient for customers to use in practice.

We aim to launch a six month reusable cup trial by the end of 2026 and explore the possibility of launching a reusable cup and container system by the end of 2027.



Disposable free at the White City Hub

If you've been over to the White City Professional Services Hub, we can tell you one thing you won't have seen - any of our disposable coffee cups or takeaway food containers!

Setting up our newest outlet - Roots Café - from scratch gave us a great opportunity to build sustainability considerations into the foundations of its set up.

This meant we could plan a space with zero disposables!

We factored in enough equipment to use exclusively crockery plates and mugs, and the self-contained nature of a café within an office makes it easy for us to recover reusables not returned.

We are using the opportunity to learn about the snags in a reusable-only system, and observe customer behaviour, so that we can feed it back in to our plans to introduce a reusable container scheme campus-wide.



Changing your eating habits is one of the most impactful things you can do to reduce your personal carbon footprint.

For the average person, it has a bigger impact than shopping second hand, changing travel methods or even turning the heating down.

We are always trying to find new ways to engage our community about sustainable food.

Alongside keeping our staff and students up-to-date with our own actions, we want to provide the information our community needs to make more sustainable decisions.

Through social media, events, posters, loyalty schemes, articles and more, we aim to create digestible, informative content and make sure more sustainable eating is easy to understand and crucially - fun!

4. MAKING GREENER CHOICES

NUDGES & SIGNPOSTS



We signpost sustainable choices and explain the impact they can have.

Our previous policy included a target of developing a consistent visual identity for advertising and signposting plant-based options.

In 2024, we expanded our vegan brand, Plantworks, to mark plant-based options across all outlets.

We've taken this even further with our 'sustainable choices' badge, used to highlight menu items with specific sustainability credentials, like our wild culled venison burgers, MSC-certified fish or our Imperial Wine.



We will display the carbon impact of dishes on our menus.



We have started calculating the CO2e emissions of our dishes using MyEmissions Carbon Calculator backed by TUCO (The University Caterers Organisation).

This information will enable our chefs to plan lower-emission menus, and will empower our community to make informed choices about what they eat.

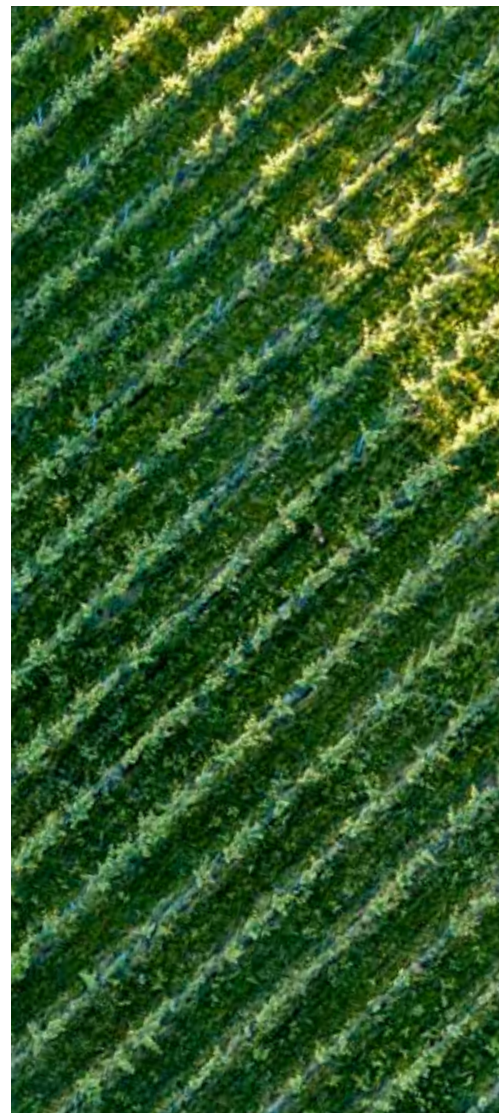
We aim to begin labelling our permanent menus by the end of academic year 2025/26, with the goal of labelling all menus by the end of 2026/27.



We run greener eating campaigns throughout the year.

We have run multiple initiatives in the last year to increase awareness, educate and engage our community and raise the profile of our department's work.

We are also working more closely with the Sustainable Imperial Team, and the new Head of Sustainability for the Property Division, to link our work in with Imperial's wider goals and foster new ideas through collaboration.



We will engage with existing sustainability networks.

There are many existing groups passionate about sustainability at Imperial, like staff networks and student societies

Connecting with those already invested in Imperial's sustainability journey will help boost our messaging, test ideas and create forums to discuss future plans.

In 2026 we will begin to collaborate with students and academics in relevant areas.

In reaching out to students and academics, we hope to make use of the vast banks of scientific knowledge around us, and encourage new partnerships between non-academic staff, researchers, and students.



ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNITY

EDUCATION



We're keeping our community up-to-date with what we're doing.

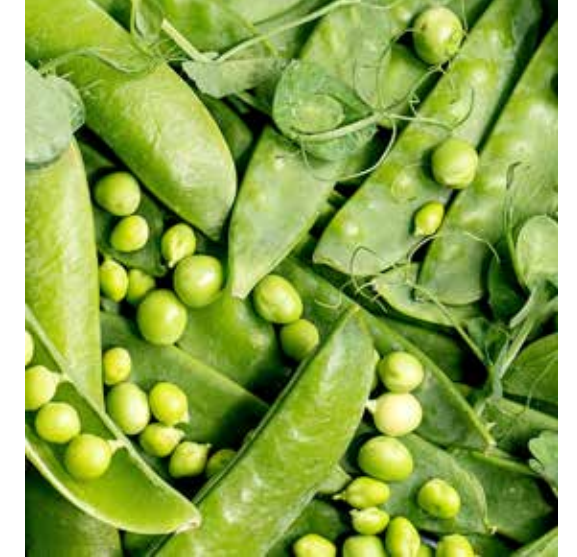
Alongside one-off campaigns, we have created a sustainable food web page, which is regularly updated with information on our policies and initiatives.

We regularly utilise other communication channels including social media and newsletters to provide information about our sustainability journey.

In 2026 we will begin to train our workforce to be more knowledgeable about sustainability.

To make sure a sustainable workplace is created, we will both informally, and formally train and upskill staff through Imperial's training providers.

This will extend from decision makers to those handling our food and waste day-to-day like our chefs, porters and baristas.



We will set up regular termly sustainable food update webinars.



These events will allow us to engage with our community, communicate where we are in our journey, answer questions and get feedback from staff and students.

We will increase our focus on educating our community about sustainable eating as a whole.

While educating our community about our sustainable options is important, we want to help people to make sustainable decisions in all their eating and buying habits.

We will encourage the community to think more innovatively about the food we choose, where we buy it, and how we store and dispose of it.

This will complement the Imperial Class of 2030 strategy initiative, encouraging students to consider their personal climate impacts, and giving them the tools to become more responsible global citizens.

5. TACKLING FOOD WASTE

Food waste is one of the most urgent sustainability challenges in catering. It contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and represents a loss of valuable resources - from the energy used to grow and transport ingredients to the labour and care involved in preparing meals.

At Imperial, we are committed to reducing food waste across all our outlets and operations, while carefully balancing this with our commitment to delivering an excellent customer experience.



WHAT WE HAVE DONE

CONTINUING COMMITMENTS

Ask for Less

We launched a campaign called 'Ask for Less', encouraging our community to take a moment before ordering and consider how much food they really need. Whether you have had a big breakfast, are not feeling too hungry, or know you never finish your rice - just ask for less.

Food waste bins

We have also placed food waste bins across campus and encouraged customers to take leftovers away if they cannot finish their meals. This initiative has helped raise awareness and empower individuals to take control of their own food waste.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

We are building on our progress with a set of ambitious but achievable goals:

- **Recycle all coffee grounds** produced by Taste Imperial outlets by the end of academic year **2026**.
- **Reduce plate waste collected in the Senior Common Room by 10% by the end of 2026**, followed by a further **2% reduction by the end of 2027**, then review and set SMART targets to tackle the remainder.
- **Partner with the Dream Team** – an Imperial student led professional design consultancy - to implement **pop-up notifications** on the **My Imperial app**, alerting users when food is reduced at the end of the day in the **Library Café**, by the end of **2025**.
- **Explore partnerships with external charities to collect leftover food**, if feasible and operationally sustainable.

**GOV.UK. (2024). United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024: Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources. [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2024-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources?utm_source=chatgpt.com#food-waste.
**WWF (2024) Driven to Waste Global Food Loss on Farms, www.panda.org. Available at: https://www.panda.org/discover/our_focus/food_practice/food_loss_and_waste/driven_to_waste_global_food_loss_on_farms/.



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

The UK bins approximately 6.4 million tonnes of perfectly edible food every year* – that is the equivalent of 32 billion apples or 12.5 million cows, alongside that, new estimates indicate that of all the food grown, approximately 40% goes uneaten.**

We know that as a five-day operation, not seven, we will naturally generate more food waste than industry averages. Our priority is also to maintain a high-quality customer experience, which means keeping counters full and appealing. This is a balance we are constantly working to improve.

OUR GOALS - A FIVE YEAR PLAN

