



## What Your Tea Selection Says About Your Dining Program

### A Tufts University Case Study



What does your tea selection say about your university dining program? A lot, according to Tufts University's John Fisher, Procurement Manager of Tufts Dining. Especially when you're a university committed to offering students the healthiest menu choices, improving the planet and the lives of its people through sustainable practices, and eliminating waste from landfill.

"Teatulia Organic Teas plays right into our purchasing philosophy at Tufts Dining," explains Fisher. "They have a quality product and a great story. It's the just type of company we want to do business with," he continues.

Tufts University has been working for years on being leaders in sustainability. The types of companies Tufts Dining does business with are those who support this leadership role and provide innovative, healthy, and environmentally conscious products—the things that matter to their student body.

"We want to be on the cutting edge of dining trends," says Fisher. "We don't

want to be the ones chasing, we want to be the ones who are leading."

Tufts University is one of only 44 universities in the country to be Green Restaurant Association Certified, and they are proud to be the first college/university to be awarded 3 out of 4 stars for all dining locations at once for their sustainability efforts. To earn and keep these ranking Tufts must demonstrate efficiencies around energy usage, water, waste, and a commitment to buying sustainable products.

Tufts Dining is dedicated to sourcing sustainable food and beverage products that are good not only for its students

but also for the environment and those who grow it. For Fisher, Teatulia's sustainability certifications—Organic, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance—are an important part of the story. "It demonstrates that Teatulia's business practices are ethical and that farmers are treated with respect and are getting their fair share," Fisher says.

"The fact that the company is a minority woman-owned business is a great part of Teatulia's story too," says Fisher. That Teatulia has pulled more than 3,000 women in Northern Bangladesh out of poverty with an innovative cattle-lending program just adds to the fascinating story. Through a unique dairy farming co-op, Teatulia lends cattle to women in the community. The women are then able to sell dairy milk to make a living in exchange for cattle dung that



gets used as natural fertilizer in Teatulia's organic tea garden.

The fact that Teatulia's tea bags and packaging are compostable and recyclable fits right into Tufts no-waste goals. Tufts Dining is committed to stopping waste before it even starts. In fact, they've been composting and recycling for 15 years, reducing waste by 80 percent. Tufts also encourages less waste by offering reusable bottles and mugs across campus. Each incoming freshman class is welcomed to Tufts Dining with a reusable Nalgene bottle, which is honored with beverage discounts, including tea, at all dining locations.

To get students on board with tea, Tufts Dining posts Teatulia marketing materials around the tea service areas to explain the tea company's garden-to-cup story. Colorful posters help explain that Teatulia's tea is organically grown in its own garden in Northern Bangladesh.

"A woman in a field of tea is a powerful image that helps students connect the tea to its source," Fisher explains. "Simple explanations of Teatulia's story and images like these demonstrate the ethics of a business that is committed to getting more money back to the farmer. It's eye-opening."

How do students feel about the tea? Well, they buy a lot of it. Tufts serves Teatulia iced tea in its main dining centers, hot and iced teas are available in five retail locations across campus, and its catering program offers Teatulia on its menu.

Teatulia's organic green teas are the most popular variety of hot tea. Fisher thinks that's because students associate a health connotation with green tea, and Tufts' student body is very focused on healthy eating.

Teatulia's organic iced teas sell just as well in winter as in summer, even in the cold Northeast. "The iced teas are just as popular in January as in June," explains Fisher. Fisher's team prepares two fresh brewed iced teas a day, out of a selection of five. Fisher says the number one favorite is hibiscus. "It's my favorite, too," he admits.

The large tea selection supports Tufts dedication to offer healthy menu choices. "Our goal is to eliminate as much added sugar as possible," explains Fisher. In addition to tea, Tufts Dining offers other sugar-free drinks, carbonated filter water, and natural juices.

"I have seen significant change in 40 years," says Fisher of the Tufts Dining program, where he has spent most of his career. Soda consumption has plummeted for one, as students choose healthier beverage alternatives like tea. Tufts Dining now caters to students with food allergies and sensitivities in a way it never

needed to before, customizing meal plans and offering dedicated prep and service areas free from gluten and other allergens. And the need to keep up with food trends has the university offering modern dining pop-ups to explore new and healthy foods, like veggie burgers, jack fruit, dim sum, and street food.

Fisher has also seen a change in how purchasing decisions are evaluated. He says that while price is still an important factor, it is not the most important.

More important purchasing factors these days include the philosophy of a food and beverage company, the transparency of where and how the company's products are sourced and manufactured, and what the company is doing to support the health of consumers as well as the health of the planet. After all, the products a dining program chooses to add to its menu say a lot about a university's political and economic stance on food, health, and the environment.

