

SUSTAINABLE FOOD ON CAMPUS
RESEARCH WEBINAR
20 OCTOBER 2021



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

Agenda

Introducing SOS-UK	5 mins
Our work on food and farming	5 mins
About the research	5 mins
Research findings	30 mins
Q&A	15 mins

Funded by:



Please add your questions using the Q&A function throughout the presentation and we'll respond to them at the end of the webinar during the Q&A session.

INTRODUCING SOS-UK

Introducing SOS-UK

- NUS has been at the **forefront of social change** since 1923. NUS has 550 students' union members representing **7m students**.
- We **engage, inspire** and **empower** students to lead on sustainability. Ours is a long term investment in education today for a **better future** tomorrow.
- UNESCO recognise us as **global leaders** of education for sustainable development.
- We're **not-for-profit**.
- SOS-UK launched as a new student-led sustainability education charity in response to the **climate crisis** in October 2019.



SOS-UK works to...

Enable more students to **lead on, and learn for**, sustainability.

Embed sustainability in formal education, **from early years to adult learning.**

Make sustainability **more inclusive**, for everyone.

OUR WORK ON FOOD AND FARMING

Our vision for the future is that campuses will be rooted in sustainable food and farming practices from catering to farmland and from growing sites to campus shops

Growing



nus
student eats

Enterprise



 **COMMUNITY**
FUND



Farming



ef Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION

Additional outputs from our Food and Farming work

Resources/handbooks

Grow to Sell
Growing Calendar
Cook to Sell
Preserve
Start a Social

Publications/articles

Whole Food Guide
Meat is Not The Answer
Waste on Campus
vs The Planet

Research!

SOS-UK Food
Farming newsletter

Training

Set up no-dig food growing site
Start a social enterprise

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

About the research

STUDENTS

ONLINE SURVEY

- Carried out in February 2021
- 1007 students in higher education responded
- Topics included:
 - Definitions and understanding of sustainable food
 - Current behaviours and practices
 - Awareness of existing action on sustainable food on campus
 - Expectations and aspirations for action on sustainable food on campus

ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

- 4 online groups with 23 participants
- Completed in May and June 2021
- Focus on unpicking key findings from survey research

STAFF

ONLINE SURVEY

- Carried out in June and July 2021
- 40 respondents working in roles with a responsibility or remit for food in institutions offering higher education
- Topics included:
 - Experiences of sustainability and food
 - Sustainability and food within the institution
 - Perceptions of students and sustainability
 - Support for and barriers to action on sustainable food

INTERVIEWS

- 5 interviews with staff in food-based roles
- Completed August and September 2021
- Focus on unpicking survey findings

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Student respondent demographics and identity

52%

are undergraduates

56%

identify as women

52%

are 1st year students

33%

live in the private
rented sector

87%

are studying full time

64%

identify as White
British

82%

are UK students
studying in the UK

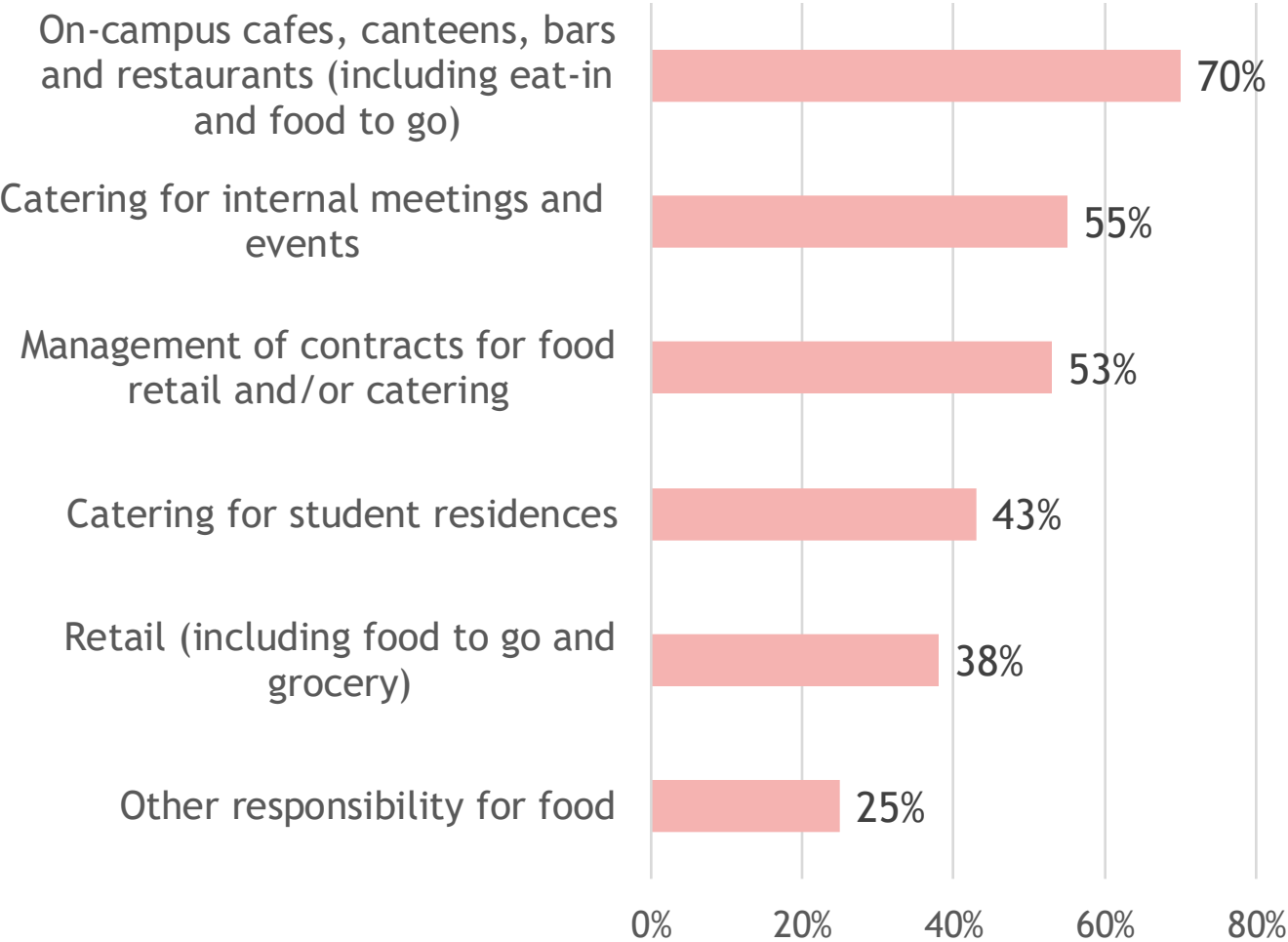
47%

are aged 18-22

Staff respondent demographics and identity

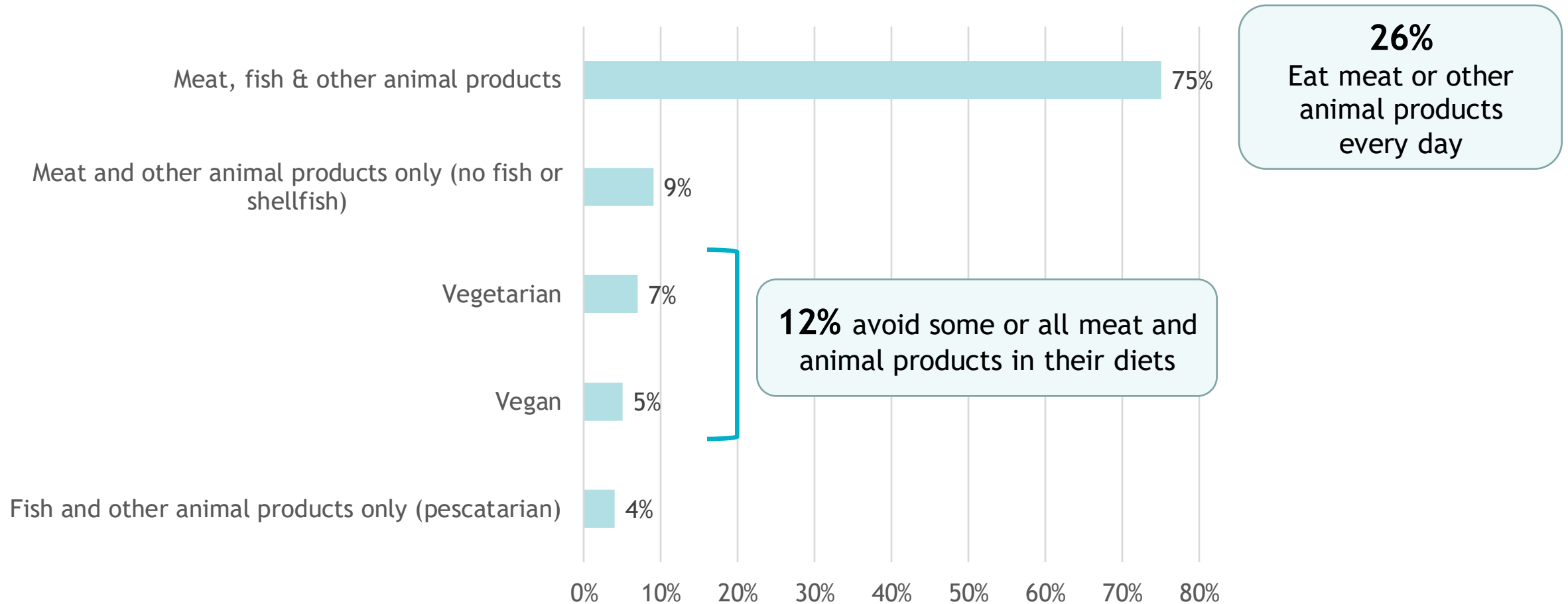
66%
work in HE only
institutions

62%
work for the
institution



General food and sustainability habits and attitudes

75% of respondents describe themselves as 'omnivores'



Food choices are important, and respondents aspire to positive behaviours around food and sustainability, however cost is shown to have a strong influence

15%

“I don’t think much about the food I eat. I often pick the first thing I come across when choosing what to eat.”

26%

“I want food and drink with an influence that reflects the seasons or area that it comes from.”

30%

“I want to know all about the food I’m eating. I look out for accreditations and information about the health, environmental or ethical credentials of my food and drinks.”

31%

“I choose my food based on how ethical it is. It’s important to me to eat food to help farmers, reduce waste and be a part of adapting to climate change in my eating habits.”

50%

“My diet is focused on my health by choosing food and drink that is better for me, such as enriched foods and lower sugar/lower alcohol drinks.”

50%

“The food I eat is limited by what I can afford. I always look out for the cheapest option, keeping an eye on offers and discounts.”

What factors do you think are most important to students when they're choosing which food products to buy?



Staff respondent perceptions of factors affecting student food product purchases include...

Most common



74% Price



69% Quality



46% Special offers

Sustainable choices



44% Healthiness of food



28% Impact on the environment



26% Animal welfare



23% Impact on climate change

Seasonality of food 10%



Organically produced 8%



Impact on producers 3%



The same trend is shown when asked to consider the factors affecting their choices when considering one food product over another

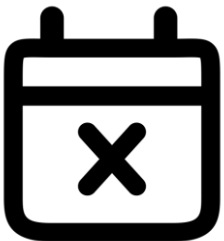
Most common



77% Price



61% Quality



55% Use by date

Sustainable choices



51% Healthiness of food



21% Impact on the environment



21% Animal welfare



10% Impact on climate change

Seasonality of food 10%



Organically produced 7%



Impact on producers 3%



Student reflections on their practices and preferences for buying food

“With limited income, its important to me to get good value in a meal. Normally I'd be more concerned about the nutritious value, but as a student I want to get as much food and as many meals as possible for my cash.”

“For me storage is such a massive issue. I only have one cupboard and a plastic storage box in my bedroom, but would buy in greater quantities if the space allowed.”

“I always think about how long its lasts because its a waste of money otherwise. I ended up spending money on fresh fruit and veg for it to only get wasted as I couldn't eat it quick enough.”

“As we are students, budget is important, therefore finding something that is good quality and good value for money is important. [quality means] Proper food, so for example, proper chicken and not reshaped mush.”

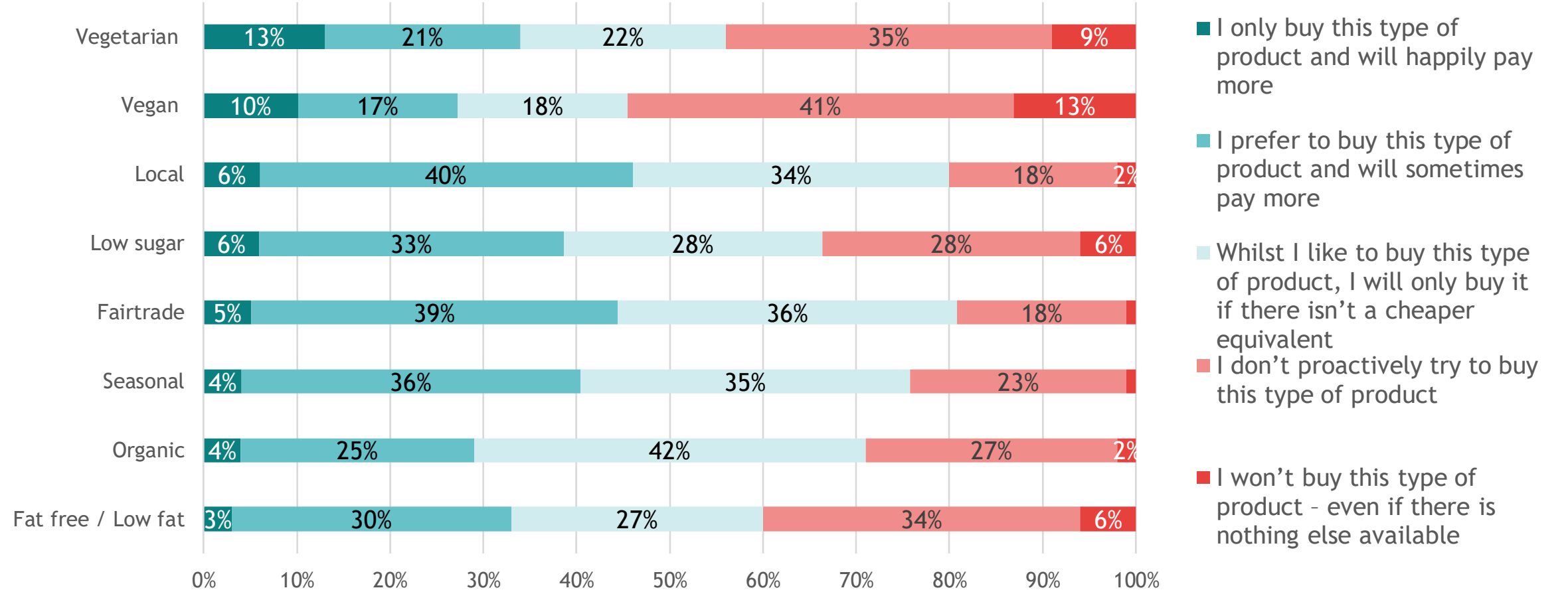
“I try to buy organic whole foods when I can but the cost was high so I will have phases.”

“Organic, helpful for farmers - sometimes, every now and then, I pay a little more for ‘better’ quality more natural foodstuffs.”



MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS TAKEN INTO
CONSIDERATION BY FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

Considering sustainability characteristics of products, respondents confirm a prioritisation of price



Student respondents report good general understanding of the impact of the food industry, but there is less certainty over specific foods. This translates to high levels of willingness to change their diets.

70% say they know at least something about the impact of the food industry on nature

69% say they know at least something about the impact of the food industry on climate change

48% say they know nothing or only a little about which foods are good for the climate

78%

Are willing to change their diet to make it more low impact on the environment and people involved in food production

Respondent understanding of 'sustainable food' is associated with provenance, quality and production



Actions identified by respondents that would support them to change their food choices include...



70%

If the price were similar to the food I usually buy

“The closest supermarkets for me are the generic UK stores. I know of one sustainable food store which is pricey.”



59%

If packaging on food told me the impact



51%

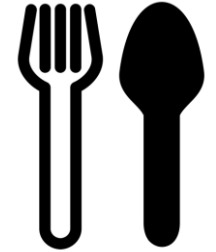
If I knew which products had lower carbon footprint / emissions



51%

If a larger variety of low impact options were available, so I have more choice

“Local availability, its a lot easier to buy junk food. Yes, local shops. Lots of fast food options. Lots of preserved ready meals in local shops.”



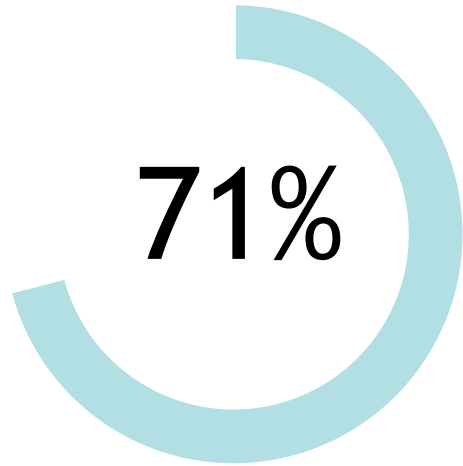
49%

If shops / cafes etc made it clearer which food had low impact

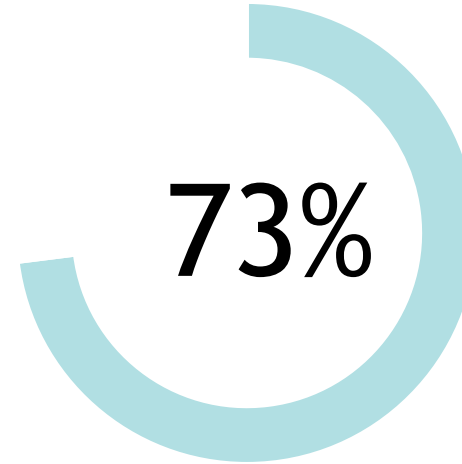
“For me perhaps knowing what is sustainable. I probably need to know what to look for other than the organic label.”

Sustainable food on campus

Willingness to take action to eat sustainably translates to high expectations for action on the issue by their institution

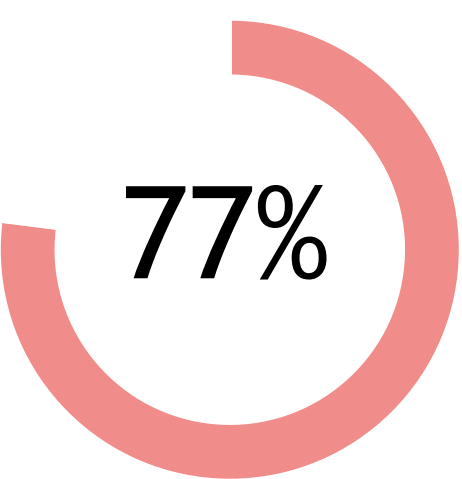


It's important to me that the food available on campus at my university contributes positively to health, the environment and producers.

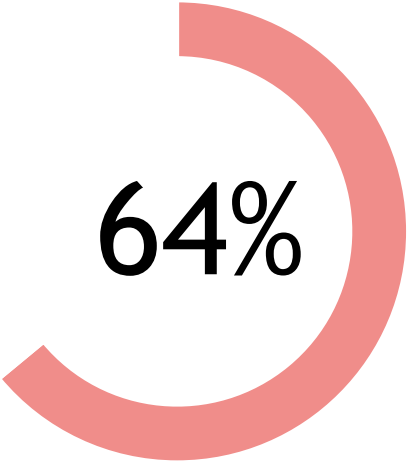


Having food on campus that contributes positively to health, the environment and producers would make me feel proud of my university.

The surveys show a discrepancy between staff and student perceptions of the action taken by the institution on sustainable food



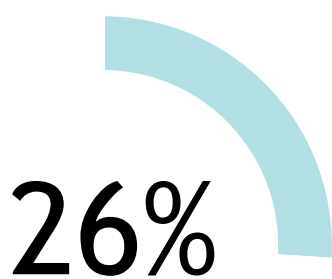
My institution helps students to eat food that positively impacts the environment (including the climate and nature)



My institution helps students to eat food that positively impacts people that work throughout the food production chain



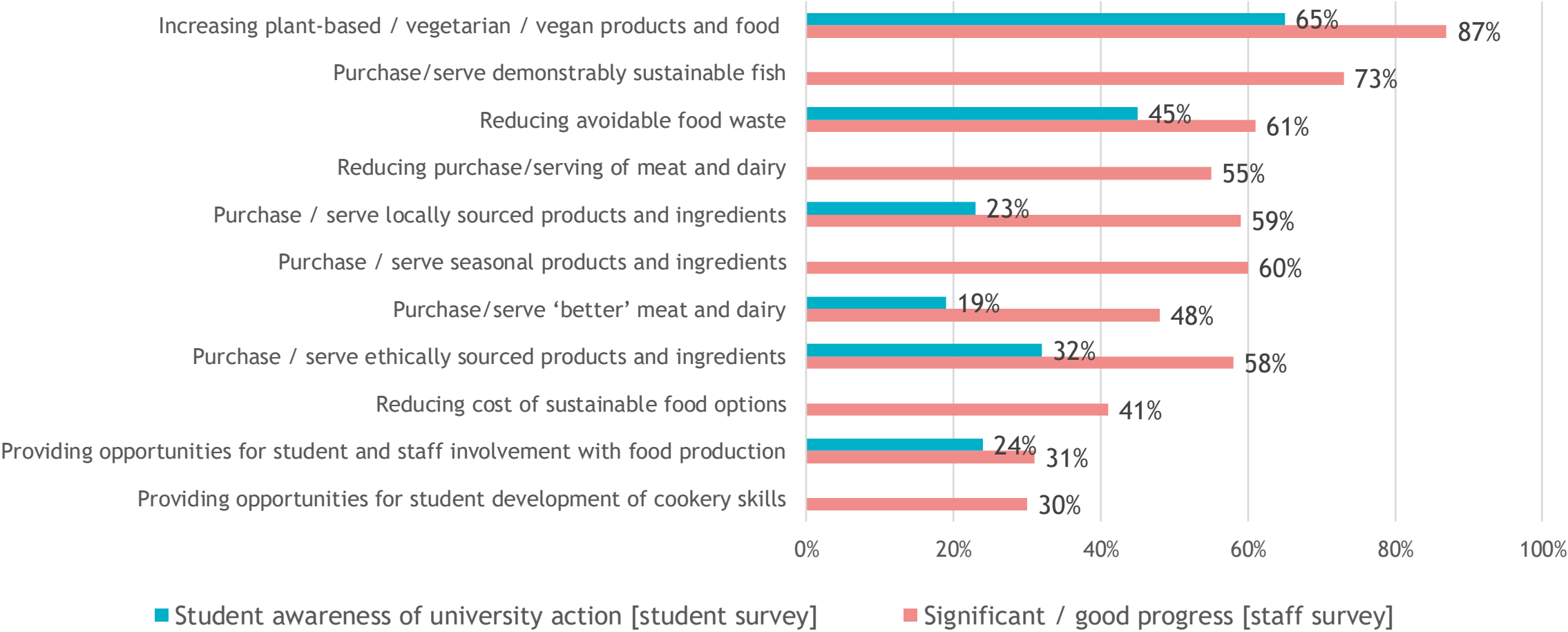
My university helps me to eat food that is healthy and that positively impacts the environment (including the climate and nature).



My university helps me to eat food that is healthy and that positively impacts people that work throughout the food production chain.

Over a third are uncertain about their university's performance in these areas

Staff report significant / good progress in a number of areas, however student awareness of action is not always aligned



Student respondents identify positive action at their institution on low impact and healthy food

Low impact food	Number of responses
Offering vegan food	115
Offering vegetarian food	114
Action on single use plastic / packaging	84

Healthy food	Number of responses
Providing healthy options	99
Providing vegetarian/vegan (equated as healthy)	55
Promotion of healthy living	48

“Good choices for vegetarian, canteen cooking smaller amounts of food and running out rather than having waste.”

“The SU shop has started selling package free dry food, and has always sold milk in glass jars that you can return for 5p off your next glass. There are always vegetarian options at every food outlet. They have the farmers market once a week that brings locally sourced food to campus. They also have a community garden.”

“The SU shop offers fruit with the meal deal which is really nice. Plus, there’s a salad bar which is always chock full and delicious and healthy. They vary the foods on offer so it never gets boring, just stays healthy and exciting.”

“Regarding the hot meals that they prepare, they only provide unhealthy options like chips once a week. There has also been a big push to switch a lot of snacks like chocolate bars for cereal bars and healthier crisp options.”

Student respondents identify recommendations for improvements at their institution on low impact and healthy food

Low impact food	Number of responses
More awareness-raising / information / initiatives on the impact of food	103
Take action to reduce packaging/plastic	80
Increase/improve vegan options	69

“There are not enough vegan options - and the options in halls catered foods is not appealing to those who are not vegan/vegetarian therefore does not encourage people to reduce their meat and dairy consumption. There is not enough fresh vegetables / food offered nor is it in season or organic.”

“Meat products should be advertised whether they are locally or ethically sourced, as currently I do not know. There is a variety of vegetarian and vegan food available, but there should always be more.”

Healthy food	Number of responses
More healthy options / less unhealthy options in general	117
More information and advice	77
Healthy is overpriced	62

“The cafe, shop and restaurant all tend to focus on fried unhealthy foods and even the veggie options tend to have a lot of mayonnaise, cheese or fatty foods. There are way too many unhealthy snacks in comparison to an actual meal available.”

“Offers and awareness. Cheap prices on healthy food and moving healthy food to the front so you see it first.”

In general, staff feel able to incorporate sustainability issues into their role, however report lower levels of knowledge in relation to specific foods compared to the food industry as a whole

ISSUE	% WHO KNOW A LOT ABOUT THE ISSUE	% WHO FEEL ABLE OR EXTREMELY ABLE TO INCORPORATE THE ISSUES INTO THEIR ROLE
Environmental issues associated with the food industry	60%	63%
Ethical issues associated with the food industry	50%	63%
Which foods are good for the environment	40%	60%
Which foods are ethically produced	38%	63%

Barriers to action and key support mechanisms related to sustainable food identified by staff include...

BARRIERS

- 53%** Lack of financial resources
- 40%** Lack of awareness/understanding amongst catering / food retail staff
- 38%** Lack of student demand in catering and / or retail on campus
- 35%** Lack of staff resources / capacity
- 15%** Lack of student interest

SUPPORT

- 58%** Encourage behaviour change amongst students and staff
- 55%** Improved flexibility in procurement contracts / frameworks
- 50%** Increase dedicated financial resources
- 45%** Increase collaboration between institutions
- 43%** Development and training for catering / food staff

Considering actions from SOS-UK's sustainable food guide

Sustainable food on campus...	2 Reduce consumption of meat and/or fish and/or seafood	4 Buy and eat food in general that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ethically produced• locally produced• seasonal	6 Develop or improve cookery skills
1 Buy and eat meat, fish, seafood and other animal products that has been accredited as being 'sustainable'	3 Reduce food waste	5 Be involved in growing or producing food / food products	7 Make sustainable food more affordable

General comments included:

“I'm sure our unis are doing a lot of positive actions but we seem to be largely unaware of what's going on. So maybe promoting more awareness would be a good thing.”

“I do think that a lot of students don't seem to care, so spreading more awareness would be great and advice on how to be both cheap and sustainable.”

“But so many people are looking to do their part so I can imagine on the whole there would be decent uptake of most of these if the options were available.”

Reduce consumption of meat and/or fish and/or seafood

Reflections:

“There is, I find, a fine line between cutting down on meat choices, and making omnivores feel like they are having their choices cut.”

“I would love to cut down my meat consumption but finding it hard.”

“It is not just that everything has meat, just the options that done are very dull and just don't feel like a more complete meal. I love cheese but not every vegetarian wants a cheese and onion sandwich.”

Suggestions:

- Labelling
- Improved choice and range of reduced meat / meat-free options
- Discounts and rewards for meat/fish-free options

“I would love clear labels on if things are sustainably sourced but its not easy to find out. I try reduce my consumption of animal products but at uni there isn't a great deal of choice.”

“Universities are giving different vouchers on meat free products...Marketing discount card for students to buy sustainable food.”

Buy and eat food in general that is: ethically produced, locally produced, seasonal

Reflections:

“I also think local farmers should be supported by the university but I don't know if they are currently.”

“We have local farmers etc come and sell at our campus once a month which is nice.”

Suggestions:

- Labelling and awareness-raising
- Supporting access to local produce

“I think again labelling the food and where it has come from/ if it is sustainable would allow us to make a much more conscious choice, and would probably make restaurant more accountable for their food choices...No they don't advertise, I just know from running some of the events at uni.”

“Bring local produce to campus and offer student discount.”

Make sustainable food more affordable

Reflections:

“Making things more affordable would definitely be the key factor in getting people to make a change.”

“I think they do well with the hot meals- being healthy and affordable, however there are limited and overpriced snacks and cold food which I would never get.”

“There is a small shop but I never go there due to not being very affordable and not much choice.”

Suggestions:

- Loyalty/reward schemes for sustainable choices
- Supporting local retailers

“A food points system for those who do choose sustainable food options. Could be something simple like and add on to a meal. a sustainable/fair trade snack or plant based meal half price, just a little incentive to maintain the switch to being sustainable goes a long way.”

“Perhaps vouchers for local ethically producers.”

“My uni gives out a lot of vouchers for Dominoes etc, maybe they should do it for more local and ethical outlets.”

“Like we used to have small food trucks or other events and they were reasonably cheaper than the restaurants that are always open on campus.”

Q & A

Please let us know your questions by using
the Q&A function in Zoom

Thanks for attending!

Download the report at:

<https://www.sos-uk.org/research/sustainable-food-on-campus>

Read more about our research at:

www.sos-uk.org/research

Contact Rachel.Drayson@sos-uk.org with any follow-up questions about the research, and get in touch with Tilly.Jarvis@sos-uk.org and Odette.Wills@sos-uk.org with any food and farming related enquiries