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Sodexo Campus Services recognized

Summary: Sodexo Campus Services is being recognized as a leader in an area related to overall health and wellness, that of implementing a general diet of healthy eating for UMM's students, staff and faculty.

(April 11, 2007)-The University of Minnesota, Morris is proud to be a green campus. The campus community has advanced sustainable, environmentally friendly initiatives since the original Earth Day. Since 2000, these efforts have grown to levels of national leadership and touch nearly all aspects of the campus.

In addition, although UMM is a founding partner in the Pride of the Prairie Local Foods Initiative, which today is one of the longest running local food efforts in Minnesota higher education, what may be news to some is that the campus' food and catering service, Sodexo Campus Services, has been a leader in an area related to overall health and wellness, that of implementing a general diet of healthy eating for UMM's students, staff and faculty.

One of many initiatives by Sodexo was to eliminate the trans fat from foods that are eaten on campus everyday. Sodexo began the transition to trans fat free foods in September 2005, completing the long process in January 2006. "It was the right thing to do, so we did it and moved on to the next task," said Donna Bauck, Sodexo general manager.

In January 2006 the Food and Drug Administration mandated that trans fats should be listed on food labels. Trans fats are made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil to increase shelf life and flavor stability of foods containing fats. These fats can be found in almost any food, but are most evident in vegetable shortenings, margarines and cooking oils. Trans fats have been linked to high cholesterol levels and therefore lead to an increased risk of heart disease. Sodexo saw this as a problem for their consumers and immediately began changing frying oils to those without any trans-fat.

"The fryer oils were a big contributor to the trans fats in the foods. The truth is that fried foods are popular on college campuses so a lot had to be changed," explained Bauck.

Additionally, Sodexo dissected all of their recipes in order to rid most of their foods of trans fats. Currently they are working to purchase packaged foods such as chips and cookies that are trans fat free. "We are making a conscious effort to seek them out in package sizes applicable to single service. There has been a cost difference in switching to trans fat free cooking products. However, I think that more and more companies will start to make the change and the price will level off," said Bauck.

Addressing trans fat is not the first of Sodexo's efforts toward providing a healthier diet for their customers. Food served by Sodexo has been MSG-free for over eight years. Sodexo has also switched to Fair Trade coffee, a product from plantations where employees who work with the coffee are getting paid a living wage.

The bulk milk that is served in the Student Center's Turtle Mountain Cafe and in the Food Service dining hall comes from cows that aren't given added BGH-BHT - a hormone that stimulates additional milk production.

"We had the opportunity so we did it," said Bauck. Two dairies near Morris in central Minnesota were given the opportunity to bid on the milk contract."

Due to the efforts by Sodexo to provide healthful dining options and address similar issues for UMM, Bauck and the Morris campus have been selected to be a Sodexo cross divisional sustainability account. Bauck will attend the first divisional sustainability workshop in the World Bank, Washington, D.C., in April. UMM will be a test site for green initiatives and serve as a model to encourage other campuses to make the transition to green. "Modules" or areas of testing and research will be done at UMM with regard to green disposables green chemicals organic and natural meat and poultry local, organic and sustainable produce and sustainable seafood.

Sodexo Campus Services at UMM has always worked to bring healthy, local, and green to the heart of their work.

"Every opportunity to make a permanent change for the better is the best," explained Bauck.

In addition to its commitment to providing healthy eating options for UMM's students, staff and faculty, Sodexo Campus Services at UMM joined a national Sodexo campus food drive last fall to help support food banks during a time of low supply and also as an attempt to earn a title in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Nationally, the goal was missed by about 40,000 pounds, but few campuses did better than UMM. "It would be cool to hit the record, but ultimately, that is not why we did it," said Bauck. Sodexo plans to support this food drive again next fall and Bauck hopes that it will become an annual event at UMM.

[Theresa Novak '09, Coon Rapids, contributed to this story.]

Photo by David Nieves '10, El Paso, Texas: Service with a smile in UMM's Food Service

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