Stakeholder Interviews

Terry Baker, Executive Director of Dining Services

Members of the Dining Services team, led by Executive Director Terry Baker, understand the balancing act between fulfilling existing customer demand and redirecting it towards more sustainable alternatives. Baker, who joined the University of Richmond in Fall 2019 after a 30-year career in college dining, brings her expertise in engaging students and institutions with sustainability with her. In her previous role at Oklahoma State University, she had established a local foods program called “Made in Oklahoma,” which emphasized partnerships between local vendors and the university while emphasizing student learning opportunities. She cited multiple other initiatives, such as offering students reusable mugs and reducing plastic waste, as successful.

She sees the responsibility of Dining Services towards the environment and sustainability efforts is to “provide as much local food as we can, within our guidelines, to support the local economy and have less waste for travel [to reduce our] carbon footprint.” Baker believes that though she does not educate students inside the classroom, through her role as the Executive Director of Dining Services, she has the responsibility to “provide students with the tools to be successful outside the classroom.” Through sharing more healthful and sustainable practices with students, she hopes to encourage them to carry a greater consciousness with them not only on campus but after they leave college.

Accordingly, Baker doesn’t view a reduction or substitution of SPB as necessarily threatening to Dining Services’ revenue, as she believes consumers on campus can redirect their purchases to more sustainable alternatives. She sees the education of customers as paramount in directing them towards spending their “dollar votes” on SPB replacements. As Baker explains, “I think we have a dual responsibility in that respect to get those products here on campus, find out where we can get those products, as long as they meet our contractual agreements with our vendors, but also have the students to want to make those choices towards those products.”
Alternatives to SPB already exist on campus, such as the boxed water sold in ETC and promoted for catering events, and yet more appear to be in the works through UR’s contractual agreements. Baker referenced a recent conversation with Coca-Cola account representative regarding the development of their canned water, which could serve as a viable disposable, non-plastic alternative to SPB.¹ Like Dr. Andrejewski, Baker is concerned about the fallout surrounding and upfront ban on plastic water bottles—namely the potential for students to make a less healthy choice (i.e. sugary sodas) or venture off campus to buy in bulk.