

University of Kentucky Expands Dining and Facilities Options — Contributes Millions to Local Lexington Food Economy



PARTNER SINCE:
2014

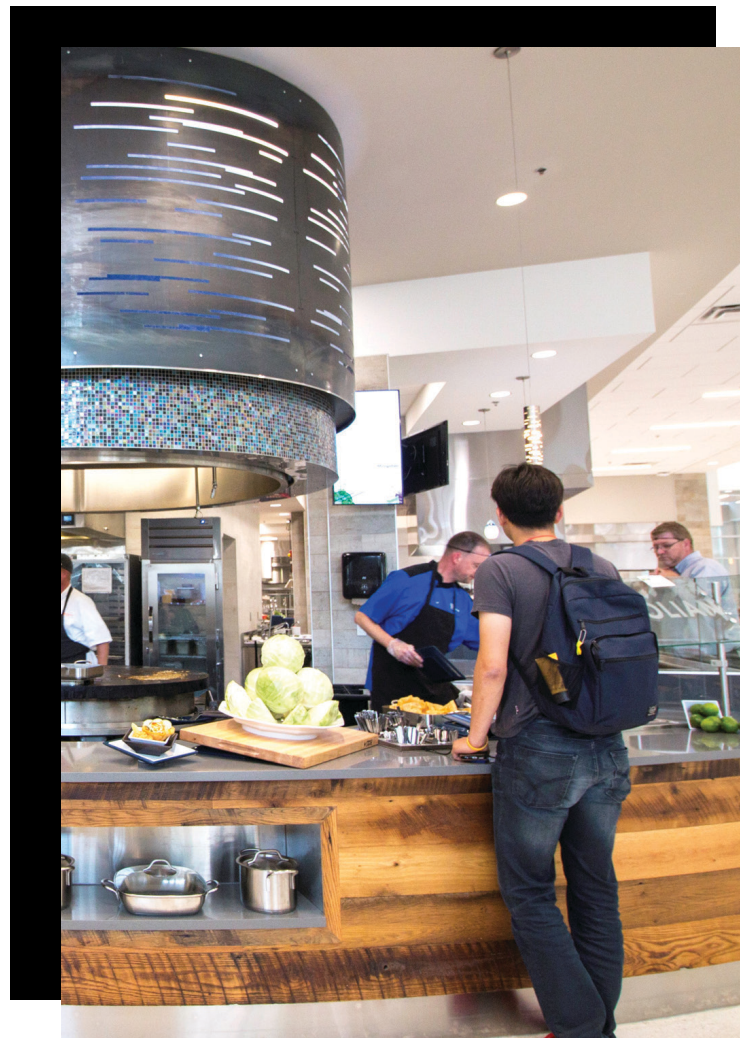
LOCATION:
Lexington, KY

In 2014, the University of Kentucky re-envisioned its entire dining program from the ground up—literally. The campus's main dining facility used to be a 22,000-square foot residential dining facility called The Commons. But university officials wanted to build something bigger, grander and more multi-purpose. At the same time, the university had conducted a student survey to discover what students wanted in food options on campus. Their answers included sustainable and local food options, healthy ingredients that meet their individual dietary and health needs, and more variety, including ethnic foods and brand-name cafes.

To realize its dream, UK partnered with Aramark to oversee construction of a new facility and overhaul its dining program. The result is a 378,000-square-foot building that includes a café called Champion's Kitchen, along with retail, offices, a cinema, and a gym. As part of the partnership, Aramark contributed a substantial capital investment to the building's \$221 million budget when UK signed a 15-year contract. The contract was extended to 20 years in late 2018.

Within the partnership, Aramark is responsible for everything within the dining program, including cafés, food courts, convenience markets, athletic venues, coffee shops and catering. They also joined forces with UK to rebuild the school's other residential dining facility called The 90, a project that features a 1,000 seat dining area, multiple retail locations, counseling services and classrooms for students interested in Living and Learning Programs. Also under Aramark's management is the university's sustainability and local food program. The program is designed around UK's desire to create a much stronger relationship with local food producers in Kentucky and especially those close to its Lexington location. During the 2021 academic year, Aramark contributed \$4.18 million to Kentucky's food economy.

UK also identified an underserved population that needed special attention: students with dietary restrictions. Campus services now include a variety of options for students, including "worry-free zones," which are food service areas where all of the foods in this station are made without common food allergens, including peanuts, tree nuts, gluten and shell fish. A registered dietitian helps students navigate the institution's food options to meet their specific needs. Food is a differentiator and recruitment tool, and anecdotally many students have selected UK based largely on its attention to their dietary needs.





4 BIG UK-ARAMARK

Partnership Wins

NEW **STATE-OF-THE-ART DINING** **AND MULTI-PURPOSE BUILDING**

For years, the student center was the central hub of the UK campus. But at only 22,000-square-feet, it had long since stopped serving the needs of the ever-growing university. When UK decided to expand the facility, the administration chose to go big, including size, functionality and design. The result is a \$221 million student center that includes a 700-seat Champion's Kitchen, a gymnasium, fitness center, movie theater, offices, lounges and retail spaces for Starbucks and Nike. There is also a large ballroom for banquets, meeting rooms, a UK-Barnes & Noble bookstore and student organization offices.

LOCAL FOOD SOURCING

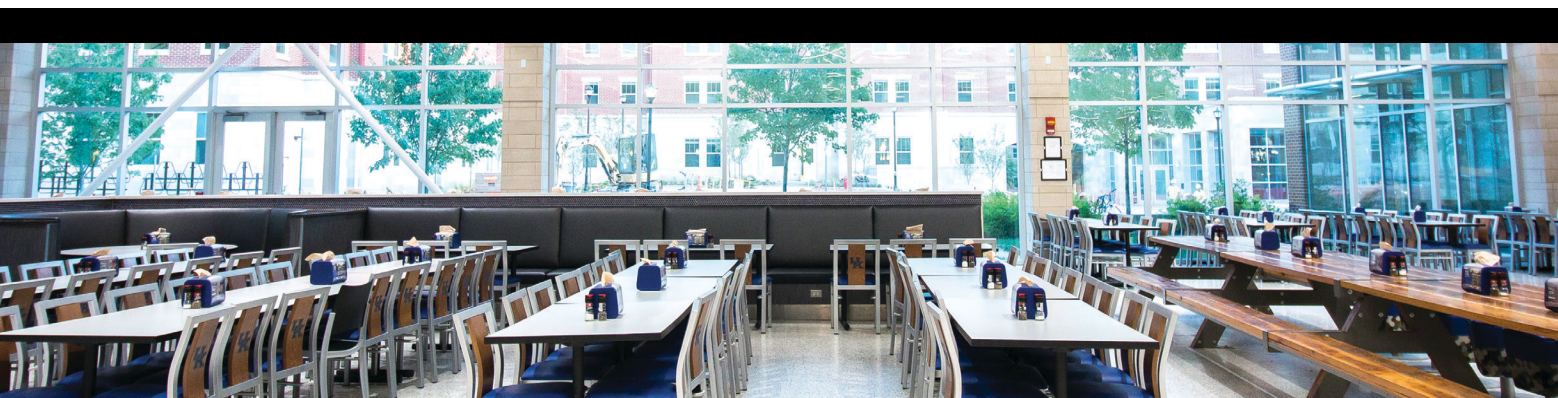
A big part of UK's dining program is its commitment to Kentucky farmers and businesses through local purchasing. The campus's Food Connection department works in collaboration with Aramark to identify potential farmers and food businesses and then provide the resources necessary to make the leap into institutional wholesale. Aramark has a full-time Director of Sustainability at the university who coordinates the purchases of over \$4 million in food products from Kentucky, including over 100,000 lbs of sustainably-raised Kentucky proteins and 35,000 pounds of Kentucky-grown produce.

SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS **PROGRAM**

Today, students with special dietary needs have access to a wide selection of food options, as well as dietary support from counselors to help them manage and access safe food choices. One of the food zones in both of the new dining facilities is called the "worry-free zone." These zones cater to students who need to avoid peanuts, tree nuts, gluten and shell fish by offering greater selections of food prepared for specialized dietary needs.

STADIUM FOOD INNOVATION

After the success of adding local food vendors to stadium food options in 2018, innovation at the stadium has been supercharged. There are now several local food vendors providing global favorites such as Greek and Mexican fare and a host of locally grown and produced products offered through concessions. Hot dogs are purchased from a KY producer and chili is manufactured by a local business using locally raised produce and beef. A hallmark of Aramark's innovation, even the classic game-day nachos are now made locally, with over 10,000 pounds of corn purchased from KY farmers, then sent to a local food business to be turned into tortilla chips, and finally distributed using yet another local business! A true example of local food economics at its finest.



BEFORE ARAMARK

- Limited-service dining facilities
- Minimal local food sourcing
- Minimal health component to meet students' special dietary needs
- Shrinking meal plan sales year-over-year
- Minimal national retail food offerings on campus
- Minimal local retail food offerings on campus
- Only traditional food choices at the campus football stadium and baseball field



AFTER ARAMARK

- Two new, large dining facilities
- Extensive local food sourcing program, spending over \$4 million in 2021
- Significantly expanded dietary needs program covering a wide range of allergies
- Uptick in meal plan sales and voluntary meal plans since opening
- Opened new national retail venues on campus, including Starbucks
- The success of local restaurants on campus led to the creation of the hallmark program, Local Restaurant Row, which now features a rotating selection of the areas favorite restaurants, including Thai, Japanese, Greek, Indian, Mexican, and Vegan fare.
- Expanded food offerings in sports facilities, including Greek, which performed better than neighboring pizza booth



If your campus wants to reinvision the student experience, contact Aramark to learn how we can collaborate.

CONTACT US

For more information visit us at:
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