



Sustainable catering

Food accounts for over a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions so it is important that we make sustainable and ethical catering choices in our churches.¹ Using the five Rs – refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, rot – we can reduce our impact on the environment, reduce waste and save money.²

How to prioritise & save money

What is more sustainable? Conventional unpackaged produce, or organic produce that's packaged in plastic? Local, organic, or Fairtrade? Every parish will have its own priorities so do the best you can with the options available.

Sustainable food options

- 1. Refuse** – Ask before purchasing - will we eat all of it? Would anyone miss it if we didn't offer it? Is there a more sustainable option?
- 2. Reduce** – Consider buying less or choose items that can be frozen to limit leftover waste. Choose items with less packaging.
- 3. Reuse** – Reuse food and packaging where possible. Send leftovers home (in reusable containers) with volunteers or parishioners or donate them to a soup kitchen or community fridge/larder.
- 4. Recycle** – For food items that must be packaged, go with recyclable packaging wherever possible.
- 5. Rot** – Compost all food scraps that cannot be reused.

Easy steps to take:

- Locally grown food that is in season will have the lowest carbon footprint and may be less expensive.
- Support shops or farmers markets selling local produce. If supermarket products can't be avoided, look for certified Fairtrade foods.
- Reduce overall meat consumption but if you feel obliged to serve meat, support local farms and processors.
- Could you start a community garden with your church to grow your own food? Or ask congregation members with home-grown food to donate their surplus?
- Loose leaf tea and ground coffee will reduce packaging waste or, if you need to use teabags, choose compostable ones without plastic packaging.

Calculate the carbon footprint of your food [bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46459714](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46459714)

1. ourworldindata.org/greenhouse-gas-emissions-food

2. Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot is an expanded version of the traditional 3Rs from Bea Johnson zerowastehome.com

Better choices for dishware

The most sustainable and cost-effective choice for dishware will always be to use reusable dishes. Where disposable cups cannot be avoided, recyclable and compostable options are the best.

Find recyclable and compostable cups online or ask a local catering supply shop to source some. Check whether the provider offers to collect the cups, as not all waste collections will accept them.

- **Refuse** – ask before purchasing - Is this item necessary? Will it get used?
- **Reduce** – encourage people to only take as many dishes and napkins as necessary to avoid extra waste or washing up. Reduce usage of aluminium foil and plastic wrap by using reusable wraps or lidded containers.
- **Reuse** – Provide reusable dishes and containers whenever possible. If the parish does not own enough, purchase new dishes secondhand.
- **Recycle** – Try to purchase items that are made using recycled content where possible. Recycle packaging whenever possible, cleaning it first (soiled packaging cannot be recycled). Foil is recyclable if clean and crumpled into a large ball.
- **Rot** – Compost napkins and kitchen towels (choose unbleached). If disposable dishes are necessary, purchase compostable options and provide clearly marked bins for compost. (Compostable dishware needs industrial composting and will not break down in garden compost)

Questions for reflection

- Do we have enough reusable options?
- Do we make use of reusable dishes? Do we need a dishwasher? (Small, short cycle, counter-top, glass/cup dishwashers are available.)
- Are there situations when we must use disposable dishes? When, why and what?
- The top three foods/beverages consumed at our church are:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- We can provide a sustainable option for each of these by...
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- How can we implement these values while sticking to our budget?
- The nearest farmer's market/shop or green grocers is:
- We can buy the following local/unpackaged produce there:
- Does our parish have access to municipal compost? If yes, is it widely and correctly used by staff and parishioners? How could it be made more accessible?
- If no, is it possible to collect food scraps for backyard composting?

For hard-to-recycle cheese, crisps, coffee packaging, find a local terracycle drop-off location
[terracycle.com/en-GB](https://www.terracycle.com/en-GB)

Consider twinning your church compost bin and help fund community projects in underdeveloped nations
[bintwinning.org](https://www.bintwinning.org)

For a range of ethical and environmentally sustainable food shopping guides, visit
[ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink](https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink)