

FoodManagement

Whole Earth Campus

At Maharishi U., it's all veg and all organic all the time...

Many college dining programs boast about the number of organic ingredients they incorporate into their menus, and about the number of meatless dishes available to students.

But it's quite likely that none can come close to matching the commitment to organic and vegetarian dining practiced at Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, IA. At MUM, new dining services provider Aladdin Food Management Services menus and serves a meal program—including board, retail and catering—that is composed exclusively of vegetarian dishes made with 100 percent organic ingredients.

Those ingredients are sourced locally as much as possible, including from the school's own extensive farm and greenhouse operations. This includes milk, yogurt and ice cream, which come from local organic dairy farms (MUM is vegetarian but not vegan).

Aladdin, a wholly owned subsidiary of TrustHouse Services Group, landed the account earlier this year and took over at the beginning of July. "The dining program had been self-operated previously, but as their enrollment expanded, the

BY MIKE BUZALKA



(from l.) Aladdin Regional VP Dr. Jim McKee, Maharishi Organic Farm Manager Dr. Steven McLaskey and Aladdin Regional Chef Greg Hunt at the campus greenhouse, which provides some of the dining program's organic fruits and vegetables.

university decided it needed more professional management that could bring efficiencies and industry-standard practices to bear," says Dr. Jim McKee, Aladdin's regional vice president of operations.

While the all organic/vegetarian requirement is nearly unique in the onsite dining world, what makes MUM even more challenging for a dining services provider is the ayurvedic requirements of the meal program. Ayurveda is a system of natural medicine and dining originating in India that prohibits certain common vegetables and spices, most prominently garlic, onions and mushrooms.

The Aladdin team took ayurvedic classes to prepare for the assignment and the company also hired an executive chef, Richard Hackett, who had overseen dining operation at a vedic resort and knew the culinary restrictions. In addition, Aladdin retained the dining staff from the previous self-operated department, retaining a reservoir of experience with the unusual requirements.

In addition to ayurveda, the MUM menus also follow the vedic seasons, a twist on conventional seasonal menu strategies.

The scope of the operation is considerable, with a dining staff

of around 50, led by Foodservice Director Bob Hicks, preparing more than 1,600 meals a day in the school's Annapurna Dining Commons. Aladdin also manages the school's retail outlets, on-campus catering and foodservices for an onsite K-12 private school that accounts for up to 120 meals a day.

The meals, aside from the strict vegetarian/organic and vedic requirements, sound fairly conventional: pizza, stir fries, Mexican and, of course, authentic Indian dishes. Everything is made from scratch, including the breads and pastries.

Some of the ingredients not sourced locally come from Chicago-based Sustainable Foods, which also supplies the Whole Foods retail grocery chain. Aladdin is able to procure lesser-grade remnants of high-quality organic products that may not look "perfect" enough for retail display at Whole Foods but fit perfectly in MUM's cafe operations.

Aladdin plans to leverage its experience with the MUM account to extend organic offerings at its other accounts. A pilot slated to launch in January will bring organic component to salad bars and organic entree choices to four of the company's university and private school accounts.



Diners line up for the all-organic/all-vegetarian offerings menued in Maharishi U.'s Annapurna Dining Commons.