



A GUIDE TO CONDUCTING AN EARTH CHARTER MEAL

PREPARED FOR THE CENTER FACULTY AND STAFF ASSOCIATES GATHERING

EARTH CHARTER LUNCH

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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

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NOTE ON CONTENT

This guide is a draft based on the experience of hosting several Earth Charter Meals. The content will be expanded and the process descriptions will be further developed before we decide upon a final version of the guide. We are particularly interested in further developing the Earth Charter Meal as a pedagogy and methodology for understanding the Earth Charter. We invite comments and feedback on this draft from Faculty and Staff Associates of the Center. Many of our Associates actively use the Earth Charter in their classrooms and their lives, making your remarks especially valuable to our project.

We appreciate the support of The Humane Society of the United States and the Center for Respect of Life and Environment (CRLE) in inviting us to co-host with them several Earth Charter Meals. We acknowledge CRLE Director Rick Clugston's inspiration for the concept of the Meal. We value his collaboration in this creative endeavor.

The Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education's Food Working Group continues to reflect on how this guide can be useful to those working with the Earth Charter. A final guide to conducting an Earth Charter Meal may be arranged quite differently than the draft text we present here. We envision a booklet in which text would be interspersed with images, fact boxes, and enlarged quotes from the text. In addition, we plan to include a number of resources for conducting an Earth Charter Meal, such as table tents with Earth Charter principles, illustrative images, and samples of handouts and brochures from past programs. These will be made available for electronic distribution with the final guide.

Please feel free to send us your ideas at cese@fgcu.edu.

Joseph Weakland, on behalf of the Center Student Assistants

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

GUIDE TO CONDUCTING AN EARTH CHARTER MEAL

In the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace

Earth Charter Preamble, Paragraph one

The Earth Charter is a universal declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful future. It emphasizes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and democracy, nonviolence, and peace. It seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world. It is an expression of hope at a critical juncture in Earth's history.

A growing number of individuals, organizations, and communities are finding that there are a variety of interrelated ways to interpret and use the Earth Charter. The concept of an Earth Charter Meal is one such interpretation. It seeks to ground the Earth Charter vision in what and how we eat. The Earth Charter Meal is a beginning exercise in linking the Earth Charter to sustainable living in our everyday choices and as a tool to educate for humane and sustainable ways of life.

Earth Charter values and principles point to a smaller-scale, locally-based, organic, humane, and fairly-traded agriculture—not the food system being pushed by the dominant interests in economic globalization. The rapid industrialization and global economic integration of food production is promoted as bringing quality, affordable food to more people. The increasing agribusiness control of food systems in more and more countries brings monoculture, genetic engineering and pesticides, and intense confinement of animals. While beneficial to some, industrial agriculture is creating major environmental and public health problems. The welfare and livelihoods of the rural poor and of agricultural workers are undermined. Stewardship of

food systems and food security shifts from communities to corporations. Biological and cultural diversity, soil fertility, and ecosystem services are all diminished. Both industrial agriculture workers and farm animals in confinement suffer.

As the Earth Charter states, “These trends are perilous—but not inevitable” (Preamble, paragraph three). Several of the Earth Charter’s sixteen ethical principles can be interpreted as a model for a new kind of food system. The document calls for ecological integrity (such as energy consumption in the growing, refrigeration, and transportation process), social and economic justice (such as Free-Trade and Free-Made markets), and democracy, nonviolence, and peace (such as purchasing locally to strengthen communities or preventing cruelty to animals). We believe the Earth Charter Meal demonstrates how we can live humane and sustainable lifestyles and eat in ways that support farmers and food system workers, protect the environment and public health, treat animals humanely, and provide food security for all.

Choosing a Theme for an Earth Charter Meal

Like the Earth Charter itself, an Earth Charter Meal can be utilized for many purposes. It can be seen as an educational tool for developing an understanding of the critical choices facing humanity and the urgent need for a commitment to a sustainable way of life; as an introduction to the Earth Charter and an invitation to individuals, institutions, and communities for reflection on fundamental attitudes and ethical values; as a catalyst for multi-sectoral, cross-cultural, and interfaith dialogue on global ethics; and as a call to action and guide to a sustainable way of life that can inspire commitment, cooperation, and change.

An Earth Charter Meal can be conducted in a variety of settings and take place in many contexts. Many Earth Charter Meals have been offered as educational exercises in linking the Earth Charter to sustainability in our everyday lives. They have been conducted at international conferences, in the homes of local, grassroots organizations, and in classrooms on college campuses. An Earth Charter Meal can be a social event, such as the meal held at the Earth Charter+5 conference in Amsterdam, The Netherlands in 2005 as a celebration and gathering for members of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative, many of whom were meeting face-to-face for the first time. Earth Charter Meals have been integrated into other events, such as a “World Café”

discussion on food systems on a university campus and at an international conference on education for sustainable development. Descriptions of five Earth Charter Meals can be found later in this Guide to Conducting an Earth Charter Meal.

What to Eat at an Earth Charter Meal

An Earth Charter Meal should seek to ground the Earth Charter vision in what we eat. Recognizing that all Earth Charter principles are interconnected, below are suggestions for humane and sustainable food options and the related Earth Charter Principles and Subprinciples.

1. *Food that is organically grown and free of genetically modified organisms*

Earth Charter Principle 5, “Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concerns for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life” and Earth Charter Subprinciple 5.d, “Prevent the spread of genetically modified organisms harmful to native species and the environment.”

Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to preserve environmental integrity for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation. Before a product can be labeled "organic," a government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet organic standards (USDA online). The standards for what can be considered organic vary from government to government. In addition, private organizations offer organic certifications that often have higher standards than national requirements. For example, in the United Kingdom, the private United Kingdom Soil Association has stricter organic labeling standards than government and European Union certifications.

2. *Food that is fairly traded and that supports agricultural and food system workers*

Earth Charter Subprinciple 7.d, “Identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards” and Earth Charter Subprinciple 10.c, “Ensure trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards.”

According to the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, Fair Trade is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development and social justice by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers—especially in the global South. Fair Trade's intent is:

- to work with marginalized producers and workers in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to security and economic self-sufficiency
- to empower producers and workers as stakeholders in their own organizations
- to actively play a wider role in the global arena to achieve greater equity in international trade. (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International online).

In the context of agricultural commodities, "fair trade" is a voluntary program practiced by some importers and food companies to create an alternative market for traditionally disadvantaged producers in developing countries, usually small-scale farmers. The components include direct purchasing from those who are poorly served by the conventional markets, specifically small farmers and their cooperatives; agreed upon commodity floor prices that provide for a dignified livelihood; a promise by importers to make affordable credit available to the farmer cooperatives; a world-wide network of non-profit certifying organizations; a fee paid by the importers and wholesalers to cover the cost of certification; and a seal that assures consumers that a product was fairly traded. (Equal Exchange online).

3. *Appropriate in quantity*

Earth Charter Principle 7 and Earth Charter Subprinciple 7.f, “Adopt patterns of production and consumption... and lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.”

In general, celebratory meals include large quantities of food. You might consider making the point of moderate consumption in the presentation of an Earth Charter Meal. Also, encourage participants to take home food that is left over so that it is not wasted.

4. *Locally grown and seasonally harvested and grown, processed, and prepared celebrating cultural diversity*

Earth Charter 8.b, “preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being” and Earth Charter Subprinciple 13.f, “Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments”

The practice of community supported agriculture (CSA or CSAs) is one way in which individuals are reimagining the relationship between communities and the food systems upon which they rely. Community supported agriculture consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or metaphorically, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Typically, members or "share-holders" of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season, as well as satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land and participating directly in food production. Members also share in the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests. By direct sales to community members, who have provided the farmer with working capital in advance, growers receive better prices for their crops, gain some financial security, and are relieved of much of the burden of marketing their foods (USDA online).

In addition to supporting local communities, individuals can reduce their impact on climate and environment by eating local and regional foods processed and transported with less fossil fuels. The transportation of food on a global scale emits large quantities of greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere. The climate impact of this transportation is sometimes measured in "food miles," which refers to the number of miles food travels before it reaches your plate. According to the United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, "the rise in food miles has led to increases in the environmental, social and economic burdens associated with transport. These include carbon dioxide emissions, air pollution, congestion, accidents, and noise. There is a clear cause and effect relationship for food miles and these burdens—and in general higher levels of vehicle activity lead to larger impacts." Not all food miles are the same, however, as modes of transportation vary greatly in terms of energy efficiency.

5. *Free range, humanely-handled animal products or vegan and vegetarian options*

Earth Charter Principle 15, "Treat all living beings with respect and consideration" and Earth Charter Subprinciple 15.a, "Prevent cruelty to animals... and protect them from suffering."

According to The Humane Society of the United States, 10 billion land animals are raised and killed for meat, eggs, and milk in the United States alone. Just like the cats and dogs we welcome into our homes, pigs, turkeys, and cows have their own personalities, inquisitive natures, likes and dislikes, and—most importantly—the ability to feel pain, suffer from boredom and frustration, and experience joy. The welfare of farm animals often loses out to the economic interests of factory farmers, who can make larger profits by intensively confining animals and breeding them for rapid growth with little regard for the animals' suffering (HSUS online).

An Earth Charter meal emphasizes respect and care for the community of life by featuring vegetarian and/or vegan food options produced without violence towards animals. A vegan diet is free from animal products and byproducts, such as meat, flesh, milk, eggs, and so on—including lard, gelatin, and even honey. A vegetarian diet is generally less strict and many variations of "vegetarianism" exist. In general, a vegetarian diet abstains from consuming

animal meat or flesh. Eating vegetarian and vegan foods are an effective and positive ways to help farm animals. Indeed, any reduction in the amount of animal products we consume makes a difference for animals (HSUS Guide to Vegetarian Eating online).

An Earth Charter Meal does not have to be vegan or vegetarian, however. One held in Costa Rica, for example, featured a non-vegetarian entrée of humanely-raised chickens in accordance with local traditions. Another meal on Sanibel Island, Florida, included locally-caught fish. What is important is that the meal emphasizes care and respect for animals used in human agricultural systems.

Non-food considerations of an Earth Charter Meal

Some program elements to consider include reading selections from the Earth Charter throughout the course of the Earth Charter Meal. Another idea is to conduct a group reading of the Earth Charter if the size of your group permits. Create time and space for participants to share songs, poems, music, and prayers that reflect the Earth Charter and Earth Charter Meal. Whatever your theme or context, you may find it useful to distribute a handout or small program guide to distribute to participants. An electronic version for you to modify is included with this Guide to Conducting an Earth Charter Meal.

An Earth Charter Meal seeks to ground the Earth Charter vision in how we eat, not just what we eat. This might be as simple as recognizing the symbolism and metaphor of the table; just as we are invited to the table for an Earth Charter Meal, so too are we invited to the Earth Charter to help realize the dream of a sustainable and peaceful future. The Earth Charter drafting process and Earth Charter activism are open to a diversity of cultures and participants, so the Earth Charter Meal should be open to all; leave a symbolic place setting open to represent all who are invited to the Earth Charter itself. Other elements can include mindfulness of the act of consumption, the importance of silence, and the inclusion of indigenous and multicultural food traditions.

Below are suggestions for other non-food elements and related Earth Charter Principles and Subprinciples:

Give blessings and gratitude for the food

Earth Charter Preamble, paragraph five, “The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.”

Give blessings and gratitude for friendship and fellowship

Earth Charter Subprinciple 16.f, “Peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part” and The Way Forward, paragraph five, “Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

Recognize and honor the community of life

Earth Charter Preamble, paragraph one, “In the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny... Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.”

Include children and youth

Earth Charter Subprinciple 4.b, “Transmit to future generations values, traditions, and institutions that support the long-term flourishing of Earth's human and ecological communities.” and Earth Charter Subprinciple 12.c, “Honor and support the young people of our communities, enabling them to fulfill their essential role in creating sustainable societies.”

Use reusable plates, utensils, and linens

Earth Charter Subprinciple 5.e, “Manage the use of renewable resources... in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration.”

Earth Charter Meal aesthetics

In order for an Earth Charter Meal to ground the Earth Charter vision in what and how we eat, it is necessary to clearly demonstrate the Earth Charter's connection to humane and sustainable food and lifestyle choices. One way to do this is to set "table tents" with Earth Charter Principles and values printed on them around the table and food. Label the food to be served and include descriptions of how it demonstrates Earth Charter Principles—if the blueberries come from a local farm or backyard, say so. Likewise, label your Fair-Trade coffee and tea that supports farmers in the Global South. Electronic resources and examples of table tents are included with this guide. Images of farmers, food workers, and animals are included to encourage mindfulness of their role in producing the food we eat at an Earth Charter Meal.

Examples of Earth Charter Meals

Earth Charter Youth Initiative

The first Earth Charter Meal was held with the Earth Charter Youth Initiative at the Earth Charter +5 conference in Amsterdam, The Netherlands on November 5, 2005. It was co-hosted by The Humane Society of the United States and the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education. Since this was the first time most representatives of the Earth Charter Youth Initiative met face-to-face, the meal was a celebration of the friendships and fellowships that had been forged in the group's online discussions and interactions.

Since this was a conference setting in a hotel, the hosts worked with the dining room manager and chef of the Arena Hotel on the menu. They were able to provide two delicious vegetarian options and one vegan option which included organic ingredients and local food. The presentation was at three long banquet tables, decorated with Earth Charter principle table tents, in the hotel's intimate candlelit dining room. The program included blessings in many languages and from several faith traditions. This was followed, after the main course, by several sets of brief remarks on the symbolism of the meal.

Florida Gulf Coast University

An Earth Charter Meal was held at Florida Gulf Coast University on September 22, 2006 to launch a new initiative by the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education on humane

and sustainable food ethics at FGCU. Student leaders and faculty advisors of environmental, social justice, and progressive clubs and organizations were invited to the meal to learn about the Center, food campaign, the Earth Charter, and to seek their participation in the new food initiative. In this way, the Earth Charter Meal served as an educational introduction of the Earth Charter to a new audience. This introduction was enhanced by an invocation and brief comments by the hosts.

The meal was catered by the then new-to-campus food service provider, Aramark, as a token of their willingness to work with the Center. Food was sourced from Southwest Florida growers and distributors. The menu had only vegetarian and vegan options. Following the meal, a representative from the California Student Sustainability Coalition led a World Café discussion based on the theme of envisioning a humane and sustainable food system at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Side-bar item: World Café

As a conversational process, the World Café is an innovative yet simple methodology for hosting group dialogues about questions that matter. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, or community. The World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims. Consider integrating such an activity into your Earth Charter Meal.

Amsterdam Dashima

An Earth Charter Meal was held in Amsterdam on October 2, 2006 as part of the meeting of the Earth Charter International Council. It was co-hosted by The Humane Society of the United States and the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education. All participants were quite familiar with the Earth Charter—many even helped draft it. This Earth Charter Meal, then, was used as a demonstration of “engaged endorsement” of the Earth Charter. It deepened understanding of the values and principles of the Earth Charter as they relate to ethical, humane, and sustainable lifestyles and food choices. This was enhanced by the presence of Earth Charter

Principles in large type on the tables. The meal was catered by Dashima, a Dutch macrobiotic restaurant that responded enthusiastically to the challenge of serving food inspired by Earth Charter ethics. The program of the Earth Charter Meal was enhanced by the blessings of the food offered by several participants—sharing the blessings they offer in their homes.

Costa Rica

Earth Charter USA, Humane Society International, the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education, and the Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable Development held an Earth Charter Meal at the Latin American Launch of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) in San Jose, Costa Rica on November 2, 2006. This was a large hotel conference room setting, made more inviting by the use of round tables with centerpieces of fresh tropical flowers. Participants were greeted with traditional Costa Rican music, including a song written for the occasion. They were also greeted by waiters with trays of local, fresh fruit juices. Earth Charter Center staff made a considerable effort to use food that was locally sourced. This included a non-vegetarian entrée of humanely raised chickens. Participants were from twenty-two nations in the Caribbean, Central, and South Americas. The blessing for the meal was given by two young people selected to represent the importance of rising generations.

ECOSanibel

ECOSanibel (Earth Charter of Sanibel) hosted an Earth Charter Meal to introduce local community members to the Earth Charter and to celebrate the end of a successful season of activities on April 18, 2007. Advance publicity in the three local newspapers served to educate members of the community about the purpose of the Earth Charter. We believe this was the first Earth Charter Meal to include children. Students from “The Green Team” of the Sanibel School presented the results of their activities during the school year. The meal included Sanibel Island harvested fruits and vegetables and fish caught in local waters. Parts of the meal were shared “pot-luck” style with each participant bringing a food or beverage that represented an Earth Charter Principle to her or him. The meal was held picnic-style out of doors at a Sanibel Island home. Participants informally shared the significance of the food they had brought for them.

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