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WHITE PAPER:

# FOOD SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS COMPLICATED BY COVID-19

PREPARED BY

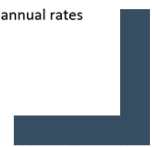
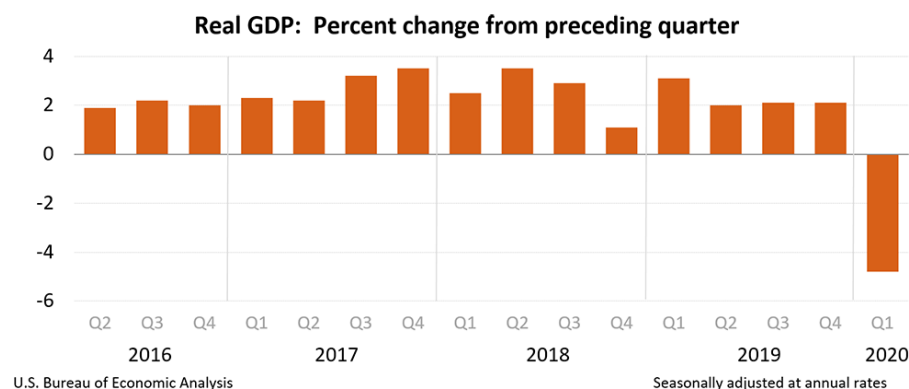
 **unidine**<sup>®</sup>



# ABSTRACT

January 2020 marked the beginning of the first reported cases of COVID-19 in the United States, followed by sweeping government-enforced shut-downs, fourteen-day quarantine mandates, mask protocols and six-foot-apart social distancing measures. With these precautions ensued panic buying and stockpiling, resulting in supply chain instability – making it increasingly difficult for consumers and businesses to obtain essential items. The COVID-19 pandemic draws harrowing similarities to the ongoing sustainability crisis.

Eight months after the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the United States, the world continues to grapple with the pandemic and its effects. The U.S. economy alone contracted by 9.5% in the second quarter of 2020, along with record-high unemployment and thousands of bankruptcy filings.[i] Coming out on the other side of the pandemic as a proponent for diversity, equality and sustainability, will be essential in demonstrating stakeholder allyship and maintaining demand. The compounding threats of climate change have the capacity to similarly undermine the planet and the economy’s ability to survive. Sustainable efforts will speak for themselves in terms of risk management, corporate reputation, vendor qualification and social responsibility



# INTRODUCTION:

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The first celebrated Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970.[ii] Now, fifty years later, amidst an unprecedented global pandemic, sustainability and corporate social responsibility issues are conflated beneath the endless news cycle. As the rampant effects of COVID-19 come into focus, it is apparent that many organizations are ill-prepared and lack contingency protocols to lessen the aftermath of such unexpected turbulence.

Future-proofing businesses for financial stability and normal business operations entails building a sustainable-focused recovery with plans and policies to ensure economic security. Unlike the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis has long given warning signals that the planet is heading towards environmental collapse, with consequences beginning with an economic recession and many other scenarios that have the capacity to surmount that of a global pandemic.[iii]

Without immediate and sizable efforts to reduce carbon emissions, the planet is on track for a 3.2-degree global temperature rise at low estimates. Higher-than-normal temperatures link to an increased likelihood for similarly severe pandemic outbreaks, extreme weather events, droughts, flooding and widespread destabilization of global food, economic and security systems.

Organizations need to commit to multifaceted sustainability measures within a broader global effort towards waste avoidance, waste reduction and renewable procurement to ethically do their part for a sustainable future. Sustainability in food acquisition, supply chain and overall methods and management can come together to collectively make a difference in maintaining the world as we know it – and a future we do not.



## SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND DIET:

Sustainability takes form in many dimensions within the environment, nutrition and the economy. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines sustainable diets and sustainable food as:

"Sustainable diets are those with low environmental impacts that contribute to food and nutrition security and a healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable, nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy while optimizing natural and human resources. [iv]"

Sustainability is ingrained in every aspect of society because there are a finite and interconnected number of resources on the planet creating more of a complex issue to resolve. Sustainability exists in the "food mileage" it takes for produce to reach your kitchen counter. It exists in the packaging of your favorite bag of chips, whether it is recyclable, compostable or single-use. It exists in the type of vegetables that you purchase and whether they contribute to biodiversity, organic demand and soil fertility.

Foodservice businesses that promote diverse, seasonal, local and plant-forward options act to empower their clients with food that is both nourishing for the environment and their health.

**Ellen Lowre, the Senior Director of Nutrition, Wellness, and Sustainability at Unidine**, asserts,

“Whole, minimally processed foods are typically slow to metabolize, preventing sharp increases in blood sugar while increasing satiety to aid in achieving and maintaining healthy body weight. At Unidine, we have a program called The Fresh Food Pledge that promotes sustainability by choosing healthy fresh foods and ingredients vs. processed, prepackaged and precooked ingredients. When working with this foundation, the ingredients are typically higher in micronutrient value and less likely to contain high levels of added sugars, saturated or trans fats and sodium. All of which act to promote overall health and wellness.”



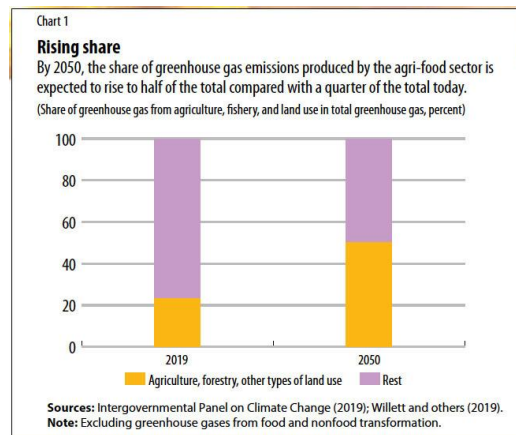
# WASTE REDUCTION:

Some of the negative environmental impacts of growing, processing and transporting food come from the massive quantity that goes uneaten and ultimately wasted. A 2016 study done by ReFed found that the United States spends over \$218 billion or 1.3% of GDP on food that is never eaten.[v] That amount of food waste is an opportunity to reduce cost expenditure and divert food from landfills to hungry mouths. Even more alarming, it is estimated that by 2050, the agri-food sector will produce half of all greenhouse gas emissions, along with a high-carbon, water and ecological footprint.[vi]

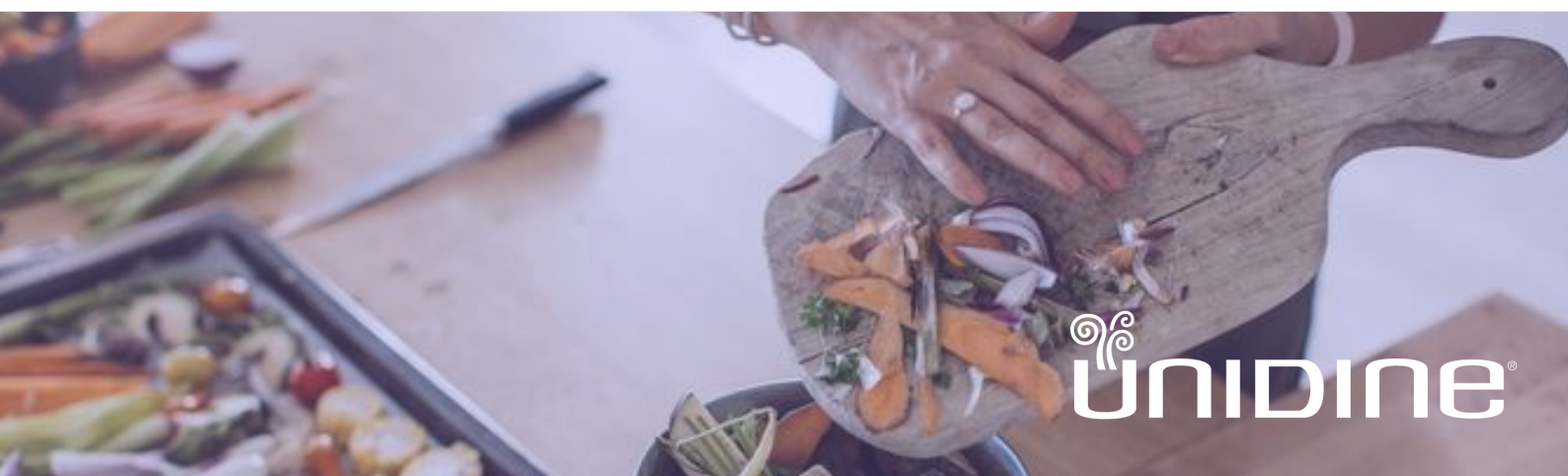
While disposable single-use products are not considered food waste in silo, they are associated with food consumption. Adopting compostable, biodegradable products and on-site processing will aid in diverting waste and increase its life cycle. Restaurants, hospitals and many senior living communities are embracing disposable single-use products to lessen the risk of transmission. Disposable items like plastic bags, face masks, gloves and plastic cutlery are potentially hazardous during COVID-19 and are filling municipal waste systems at unprecedented rates. Some estimates of to-go type materials state increases of over 25% since the beginning of the pandemic.[vii] Such hazardous waste puts both municipal workers and the supply chain in danger.

Unidine Dining Services Director Kerry Gold of New Milford Hospital utilizes a “Plow to Plate” model to grow his own vegetables on-site. Gold uses aeroponic growing towers on the roof of New Milford to grow everything from herbs to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Gold exemplifies just one of the many ways kitchens can adjust to be more healthful and sustainable. Jill Kuntz, District Manager at Unidine, explains, “Many of our partners are already composting leftover scraps and sourcing products locally. They are finding ways to repurpose food trimmings into things like salad dressing and getting rid of plastic straws and other disposable items like Styrofoam.”



Unidine Dining Services Director, Kerry Gold



# SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT:

The Department of Agriculture reports that food waste is already tracking above its staggering 30-40% per year with universities, schools and restaurants shutting their doors, leaving suppliers with thousands of pounds of food and nowhere to divert it. [viii] The nation’s largest dairy cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America, estimates that farmers are dumping as many as 3.7 million gallons of milk each day.[ix] Efficient food management practices can take shape in many ways, including reducing plate waste, unused byproducts like kitchen trimmings, instances of spoiled food and repurposing excess food.

## 6% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from food losses and waste Our World in Data

Emissions from food that is never eaten accounts for 6% of total emissions



Note: One-quarter of food emissions comes from food that is never eaten; 15% of food emissions from food lost in supply chains; and 9% from consumer waste. Data source: Joseph Poore & Thomas Nemecek (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. Science. OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems. Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie.

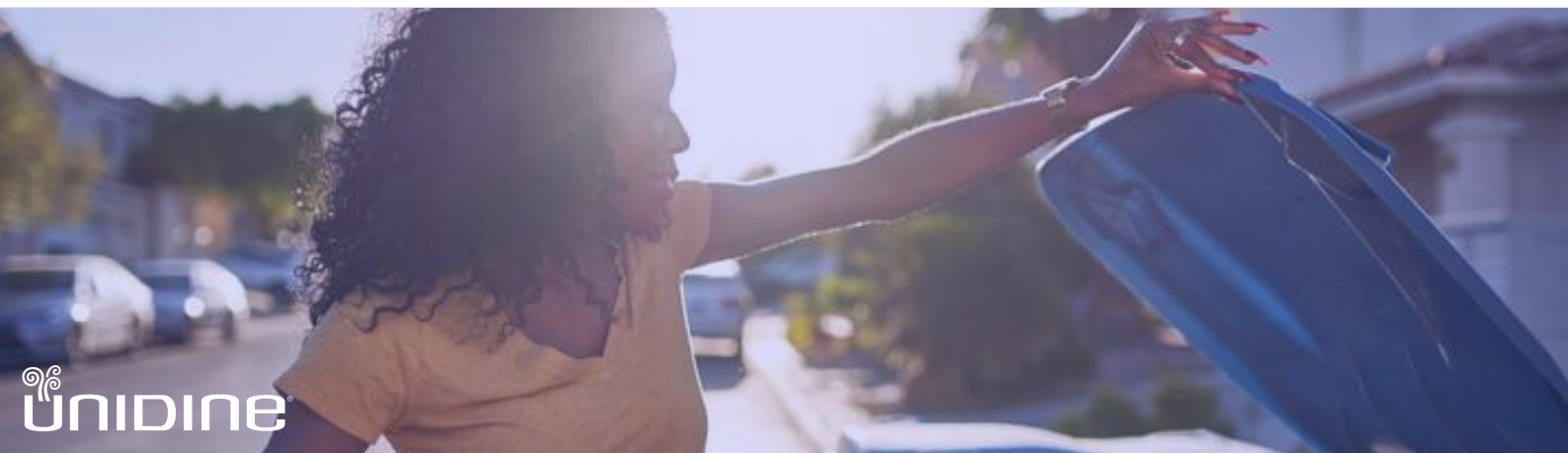
Long-term commercial viability cannot exist without social and environmental sustainability. Suppliers and their clients must practice proper food storage, meal planning and general education surrounding how to minimize food waste so they can ultimately “feed people, not landfills,” as the EPA touts. A collection of simple actions like date-stamped food labels, proper preservation of food, and a detailed inventory can aid in both climate efforts and minimize costs.

# SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS:

No large organization within foodservice and consumer-packaged goods can operate independently. Getting products and services into the hands of clients requires navigating the complex web of the supply chain, procurement and transportation networks. Developing a supply chain with both sustainable distribution and procurement systems based on renewable forms of agriculture is vital in creating long-term resiliency.

Like sustainability itself, supply chains are constituted with many different touchpoints. A sustainable supply chain envelops locally sourced and seasonal goods to support the viability and diversity of urban economies and sourcing goods from land with sustainable management for optimal usage of resources like soil, water and biodiversity.[x] Seasonal and locally sourced food ensures freshness, optimal nutrient quality and reductions in produce waste.

Sustainable supply chains and sustainable food procurement – when done right – can aid both the bottom line and the environment. As consumers continue to demand sustainable business practices, a sustainable supply chain will be invisible to consumers but aid in the larger picture of resilience.



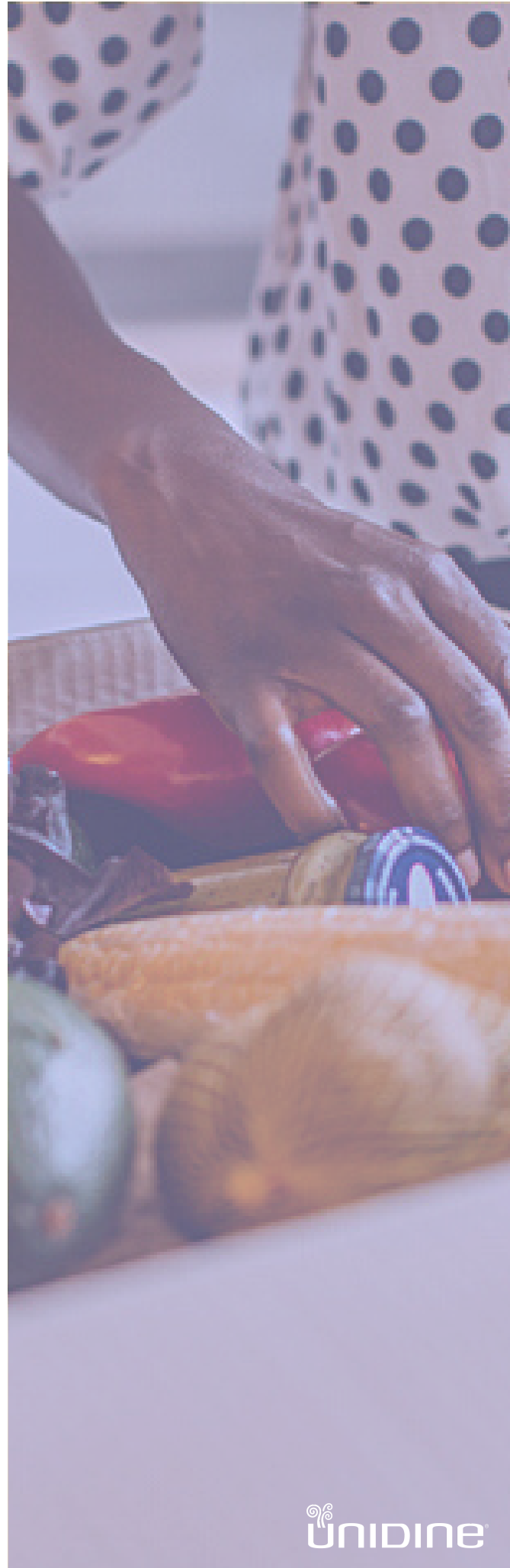
# CONCLUSION:

As many organizations step away from sustainability efforts amidst this adverse economic landscape, it is increasingly paramount to buckle-down and internally restructure to lean into sustainability. Climate change poses significant and looming risks for our environment, health and society. The climate phenomena and global pandemic are strikingly similar. Intentional efforts to both prevent and minimize waste will build stakeholder trust, build resiliency for your organization and reduce cost expenditure.

The opportunity presented to foodservice organizations to contribute to climate change is both ethically and economically vital. A combination of responsible food management, sustainable supply chain procurement and waste reduction through recycling will act to form a multifaceted front against the sustainability crisis.

# ABOUT UNIDINE:

With operations in over 400 facilities, Unidine Corporation is a leading provider of food and dining management services for clients throughout the United States. Since 2001, Unidine's success derives from consistent execution in four key areas: an exclusive focus on food and dining management services; a commitment to scratch cooking with fresh, seasonal, responsibly sourced ingredients; exceptional customer service; and a corporate culture enlivened by each team member's passion for culinary and service excellence. It is our company standard to create menus that include a minimum of 25% plant-forward recipes. Through this initiative, we are organically decreasing the usage of animal proteins. Through plant-forward choices, we are promoting both sustainability while increasing the health and wellness of our customers. Unidine's network of nutritionists and culinarians leverage the latest research to support cultural enrichment and wellness strategies for senior living residences, hospitals and behavioral health facilities, and corporations. For more information, visit <https://www.unidine.com>.



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