

Institutional Catering Update

Through policy and literature review, expert interviews, call for contributions, and participation in industry expo and forums, we have deepened our understanding of the institutional food service sector. By comparing domestic and international practices, we have identified gaps and potential directions for action.

Currently, we are focusing on institutional food service in educational settings, especially in higher education institutions. Students are experiencing growing health issues, such as obesity and diabetes, as diets shift toward less healthy patterns. At the same time, mostly outsourced campus catering often prioritizes affordability over nutrition and sustainability.

Based on policy and research literature review, we have identified the following key points:

- Although China's institutional catering sector has significant impacts and considerable potential for improving public health and sustainability, there is a lack of concrete and supportive policies to drive its transition toward healthier and more sustainable dietary patterns.
- For stakeholders in institutional catering, initiatives are often policy-driven first, followed by practical exploration. Institutions demonstrate limited proactivity, with weak internal motivation for voluntary transformation.
- Within the limited relevant literature, we observe that researchers have paid some attention to nutritional aspects of institutional catering, but the evaluation dimensions remain narrow and lack specific indicators. Environmental sustainability receives considerably less focus, with minimal attention given to plant-based diets, farm animal welfare, and other related issues.

Through interactions with industry practitioners and participation in catering exhibitions and forums, we have gained further insight into the actual conditions of the sector. This segment experiences rapid policy changes, and group catering suppliers operate on very thin profit margins, struggling to remain viable. Due to the absence of strong policy requirements and incentives, as well as low consumer awareness and demand for healthy and sustainable diets, institutional caterers do not prioritize shifts in procurement or menu planning. Instead, their main focus remains on optimizing management and reducing costs while improving efficiency.

We have engaged with several domestic institutions that have already initiated transitions in their food services, and have completed drafts of two case studies. Additionally, we have finished drafts of four international case studies.

Completed domestic case studies include:

- Peking University: An integrated approach combining awareness campaigns, dish supply adjustments, and food experience redesign.

- Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University: Using nudge strategies to promote plant-based protein consumption in canteens.

We are also in active communication with Dr. Yang Min from Zhejiang University and the university's catering service center, with the aim of facilitating another case contribution from Zhejiang University. In addition, we have established contact with faculty at New York University Shanghai and hope to document their practices in the future.

Completed international case studies include:

- Yale University: Showcasing university culture through campus dining—demonstrating that good food is part of good education.
- UMass Amherst: Behind-the-scenes success factors that led to nine consecutive years of being ranked among the “Best Campus Dining” in the U.S.
- University of Cambridge: Systemic reforms driven by the university's Sustainable Food Policy.
- Wageningen University & Research: Transforming dining halls into real-world labs integrating research, education, and practice.

We plan to organize an in-person round-table in mid-October to build consensus among stakeholders, launch a University Dining Research and Innovation Network, and secure commitments from core partners. So far, UMass Dining and Researcher Lu Honggang (an expert of the National Center for School Planning and Development under the Ministry of Education) have confirmed to become the co-founding partners of the Network, with more partners to be confirmed soon. The concept note of the round-table is as below.

Institutional Food Service Round-table at the 9th Good Food Summit

concept note

13:30-18:00, October 15, Nanjing

1. What is Institutional Food Service (IFS)?

Institutional food service refers to large-scale meal services provided in settings such as schools, universities, companies, government offices, and hospitals. In China, by 2023, the sector's market size reached RMB 2.1 trillion, accounting for more than 40% of the entire food-service industry and demonstrating enormous capacity to serve public needs.

2. Why Focus on It Now?

Institutional food service plays a pivotal role in shaping dietary habits, public health outcomes, and environmental sustainability. However, current practices often prioritize efficiency and cost over nutritional quality and ecological impact, presenting both challenges and opportunities for systemic transformation.

Promoting diets that benefit both people and planet is urgent—and institutional dining is the most strategic arena for research and intervention. Despite the challenges, pioneering institutions have already begun exploring actions and have achieved certain successes, accumulating valuable experience in the process.

For years, Good Food has championed this sector by cultivating leadership among food service providers, supporting evidence-based studies, surfacing best practices, and designing training systems that steer institutional food service toward healthy, sustainable meals.

3. Workshop Objectives

Build common ground: The workshop aims to create shared understanding and alignment among diverse stakeholders on why and how transforming institutional food service is vital—and urgent—for public health and environmental sustainability.

Explore solutions: Participants will share motivations, challenges, barriers, opportunities, drivers, and practical entry points for transformation. The workshop will facilitate exchange of proven approaches and help map future paths for multi-stakeholder collaboration, with particular focus on scalable innovations.

Create a lasting platform: The event will establish an enduring channel for dialogue between practitioners and researchers, laying the groundwork for continuous innovation and sector-wide change. This platform will enable ongoing knowledge sharing and collective problem-solving beyond the workshop itself.

4. Expected Deliverables

The launch of a Healthy & Sustainable Institutional Food Service Transformation Initiative and a compendium of best-practice case studies. These materials will provide actionable guidance and inspiration for institutions at various stages of their transformation journey.

The launch of an Institutional Food Service Collaborative Network. The network will unite practitioners and researchers from Chinese and international institutions, and serve as a hub for co-initiating research projects and pilot programs.

5. Target Participants

The workshop will bring together food-service directors from major institutions, representatives from leading catering companies, frontline practitioners with hands-on experience, academic researchers specializing in nutrition and sustainability, and educators developing future talent for the sector.

6. Workshop Format

The event will combine keynote presentations from renowned experts, panel discussions with diverse stakeholder perspectives, and solution-oriented breakout groups. Ample networking time will be scheduled to foster new collaborations, and site visits may be arranged to showcase exemplary implementations.

7. Contact

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Draft Agenda

13:30-13:34	Opening introduction
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	OUYANG Huiyu	Food Policy Officer, Good Food China Food Systems Action Hub
13:34-13:40	Opening remarks (3 minutes each)	
	XU Hao	Deputy President and Secretary-General, Jiangsu Catering Industry Association
	HUANG Zaiyu	Deputy President and Secretary-General, Jiangsu Association of University Campus Management
13:40-13:55	Keynote speech: Transforming IFS for improved nutrition and health	
	SUN Guiju	Department Head, Department of Nutrition and Food Hygiene, School of Public Health, Southeast University
13:55-14:15	Keynote speech: International trends and best practices	
	Ken TOONG	Assistant Vice Chancellor of Auxiliary Enterprises, UMass Amherst
14:15-14:55	Panel discussion: Practical experiences in university IFS	
	CHEN Jin	Chairman, Logistics Group of Nanjing University
	PING Yuqin	Vice General Manager, Logistics Group of Zhejiang University Director, Catering Service Center of Zhejiang University
	XU Dandan	Deputy Director of the General Office, Catering Service Center, Peking University
	Eunkyung LEE	Assistant Professor, Department of Intelligent Operations and Marketing, International Business School Suzhou, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

	OUYANG Huiyu (moderator)	Food Policy Officer, Good Food China Food Systems Action Hub
14:55-15:35	Panel discussion: Multi-stakeholder participation in IFS transformation	
	ZHU Xiaocun	Associate Professor, College of Design and Innovation, Tongji University
	DENG Fei	Founder, Free Lunch Initiative
	RAO Wubin	Student Soymilk Channel Manager, Joyoung Soymilk & Food
	SHA Chunyan	Assistant to the Councilor in charge of youth affairs (mainly responsible for the management of kindergartens and primary school canteens), Municipality of Orgères, Ille-et-Vilaine, Brittany Region, France
	Melinda HOU (moderator)	Executive Director, Good Food China Food Systems Action Hub
15:35-15:50	Break	
15:50-17:00	Group discussions <i>Discussion flow:</i> - Participant introductions: Briefly state your role and share ongoing/planned practices, research, or initiatives. - Key exchange topics: Motivations, challenges, opportunities, and entry points for advancing transformation; proven practices and lessons learned. - Future collaboration: Explore multi-stakeholder action plans and mechanisms. <i>Participants (in three break-out groups):</i> - WU Guoxue, Director of Catering Service Center, Office Service Center of Jiangsu Provincial Administration for Market Regulation	

- HANG Zhong, Former Deputy Chief Planner and Director of Assets Department, No. 716 Research Institute of China State Shipbuilding Corporation Limited (CSSC)
- REN Jun, Chairman of Nanjing Meihua Catering Management Co., Ltd.
- MA Subei, Deputy General Manager of Nanjing Kate Catering Management Co., Ltd.
- RUI Junli, Chairman of Jiangsu Xiangruida Food Group Co., Ltd. and Chairman of Nanjing Tianci Agriculture Co., Ltd.
- YU Kangkang, Professor, School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, Renmin University of China
- ZHANG Man, Associate Professor, School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, Renmin University of China
- SU Dingding, Professor and Deputy Director, Institute of Advanced Agricultural Sciences, Peking University
- YANG Min, Associate Professor, Department of Nutrition and Food Hygiene, School of Public Health, Zhejiang University
- Pavel CASTKA, Associate Dean for Professional Engagement, International Business School Suzhou, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
- Lilly ZHAO, Associate Professor, Department of Strategic Management and Organisation, International Business School Suzhou, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
- Clara PI, Senior advisor to board of PAN international
- ZHANG Min, General Manager of Nanjing Puyu Ecological Technology Co., Ltd.
- CUI Xue, Founder of Fooducate
- And all guests featured in opening remarks, keynote speeches and panel discussions.

Facilitators:

Doris LEE, LIANG Chen, and TANG Xiaojuan

17:00-17:15	Break
17:15-17:45	Reporting back and joint discussion with all participants
17:45-17:50	Closing remarks: final reflections and next steps
17:50-17:55	Signing the initiative of “University Dining Research and Innovation Network”
17:55-18:00	Group photo