

susDISH – a comprehensive method for measuring environmental, health and economic indicators in the catering industry

Working together with various catering companies Halle-Wittenberg University and DLG (Deutsche Landwirtschafts-Gesellschaft / German Agricultural Society) have developed over the past two years a method known as susDISH. Focusing on the management of recipes, energy and waste, the method can be used to measure the environmental, health and economic performance of menu offerings and to optimise them.

Because catering establishments purchase and process large quantities of food, they play a key role in identifying potential areas for improving people's health and reducing environmental impact. There is potential for optimisation not only in the processes of buying food and composing recipes but also in the food preparation phase and waste management. Moreover, the long-term success of any initiative depends on a comprehensive and consistent communication strategy with an adequate engagement of employees and possibly also customers.

susDISH (= sustainable dish) addresses environmental, health and economic impacts. The environmental performance indicators of each menu offering are captured by measuring corresponding greenhouse gas emissions and ecological impact points (eco-points). With the eco-points a broader set of environmental issues can be tackled (including biodiversity loss, pesticide and water use, etc.). The health impacts are assessed with reference to 16 different criteria. The assessment is based on the recommended daily allowances issued by the German Nutrition Society (DGE), with the addition of further critical nutrients.

Optimisation suggestions and cost considerations

susDISH is generally used to evaluate four- or six-week catering schedules. If any critical shortcomings are identified in terms of nutrition or environmental impact, the assessment include specific suggestions for recipe optimisation. In this case the aim is to improve the recipe in terms of health and environmental quality without compromising the culinary character of the menu.

At the same time, economic considerations are taken into account, covering purchase and sale prices of components and whole dishes as well as the management costs of food wastage. "We were surprised at the procurement savings that can be achieved with the optimisation," commented Dr Toni Meier from the Institute of Agricultural and Nutritional Sciences at Halle-Wittenberg University. "Although these savings may only amount to a few cents per recipe, the high turnover of a catering facility means they can add up to several thousand euros a year." Various players in the catering sector have so far used the method. Up to now around 1,000 recipes have been evaluated.

The development of the susDISH methodology was financed by the German Environmental Foundation (DBU). For further information and real-life examples visit www.nutrition-impacts.org.

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