



PROTECT THE PLANET

Suggestions for Sustainable Food at Centres



PURPOSE OF THE CENTRE GUIDE

This guide has been designed to assist centres and groups of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO) to consider all resources that go into providing food and reducing food wastage at Sai events as well as any service events which provide food to the community, such as *Narayan Seva*.

"Man should exercise his discretion and discrimination in regard to food habits."

- Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 27.3: January 21, 1994)

Take Action and Inspire

From the perspective of the 'Ceiling on Desires' programme, how do we approach the provision of food at Sai events and at service events, which provide food to the community? The underlying three-stage plan is to consider:

- Forward planning – assessing venue facilities from an environmental and waste management perspective
- Menu and contingency planning
- Sourcing and purchasing food in an environmentally-friendly way

PLANNING FOR AN EVENT

Carry out the following assessment when planning for an event. Consider forming a Go-Green Team or similar, consisting of go-green lead(s) and service or food coordinator(s), to help plan and execute an environmentally friendly event in a coordinated manner.

Key questions

For a Sai event, is food provision necessary?

- Probably Not
- 'Yes', it might be better to serve food because of the following possible reasons:
 - Special centre event (e.g., Sathya Sai Baba's birthday celebration, Global Akhanda Bhajan, etc.)
 - Extended event (E.g., a one-day mini retreat)
 - Regional retreat
 - Devotees travelling from far off locations to attend centre or regional programme

If 'Yes', what is the scale of the event or food service activity in terms of anticipated or confirmed attendance?

- Small scale event – serving anticipated <25 people
- Medium scale event – serving approximately 25–100 people
- Large scale event – serving a minimum of 100 people

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What is the event timing?

- Breakfast: for any event that may start between 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM, plan for a breakfast type menu
- Lunch: for any event that may end around noon or continue through the day, plan for heavier meals as a general rule, as people tend to eat more at lunch
- Dinner: for any event that may end around 6:00 PM or later, plan heavier meals in comparison to brunch, but lighter than lunch
- Snack time (in-between meals):
 - Light snacks to munch on, such as healthy bites and fruits; nothing heavy, probably served with tea and coffee
 - Get interested volunteers to make healthy bites such as muffins, cupcakes, cookies, granola bars, etc.
 - If buying snacks, buy in larger portions or economy size (less packaging per weight of the product) instead of individually-wrapped items

Demographics:

- Consider the health-giving aspect of food and plan a satwik food menu, avoiding extremely spicy foods and excessive desserts
- For a children's only event, prepare items and use ingredients that are more child-friendly to avoid wastage, and bear in mind that children have a tendency to eat less than adults, when estimating the quantity of food that is required

Environmental considerations

Selecting a venue for an event

- When selecting a venue for an event, schedule a site visit and assess:
 - availability and access to drinking water
 - availability and access to washing facilities to clean reusable items
 - existing waste segregation and disposal practices at the venue and the process and fee involved for recycling/waste processing, composting, hauling recycling/waste, products and services
 - the number of existing bins for organic and food waste and recycling, and the locations of those bins
- Identify the local composting and recycling facilities, if none exist at the venue
- Prepare a plan of the venue for your event with go-green station locations and create signage for each bin
- Prepare a poster display or signage with quotes on avoiding food waste for display at food and go-green stations
- Identify product vendors for items necessary for preparing and serving food, such as food items, plates, cups, cutlery, etc. (see below section '**Food Sourcing and Product Purchase**')

Assessing a pre-selected venue

- This is particularly important when providing food services to the community, as the venue is often predetermined and cannot be changed (e.g. a regular soup kitchen or charity for homeless people).
- Undertake an inventory of the facilities and equipment for cooking and serving food as well for cleaning up
 - Find out if:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There is a source of clean water for serving, food preparation and cleaning; if not, prepare to bring these provisions with you ○ The facility provides reusable items for serving food. If it does not, see below sections on 'Minimising other waste' and 'Food Sourcing and Product Purchase' ● When using reusable items for serving food, locate sinks and put in place a cleaning station to manage dirty dishes and utensils
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Menu and contingency planning

<p>Factors to think about when deciding the menu</p>	<p>For food being served onsite, consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparing individual items (e.g., pilaf/pulao rice, pasta), to help mitigate food wastage in comparison to coupled items (e.g., chapati and curry or rice and curry). Whatever food is preferred, the menu should be wholesome 2. Heating facilities: Certain food items require heating prior to consumption; food wastage can occur if this provision is not available (alternatively, bring your own food heating appliances if appropriate and if allowed to do so by the venue) 3. Storage facilities: Check if there is a freezer/refrigerator at the location to store food until it is needed? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Perishability quotient: If storage is not available, choose food items that can stay out longer than others (e.g. avoid potatoes, garbanzo beans, yogurt, icecream for full-day events where no refrigerator is available) 4. Estimating food quantity: Consider using a food calculator to decide how many items to make and the required quantity of each. Also, take into account the experiences of previous event coordinators or older devotees who have managed food provision previously, for an accurate estimate
<p>In the event of excess food at the event</p>	<p>Sometimes despite the most meticulous planning there will be food leftover. In this instance, consider the following options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serve the food at a homeless shelter close to the event location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Perform prior research on whether the identified facility accepts food prepared outside of their premises ○ If yes, find out what sort of food is usually served at the facility, and align your event menu accordingly ● Locate any nearby Sai events or Sai centres that may require the food within the next day or two. If found, store and deliver the food so that it stays fresh. Avoid using plastic and styrofoam containers for storage ● Package any leftover food for devotees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aim to avoid using plastic and styrofoam products while

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> packaging foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage devotees to use or bring green kits to take food away ● Take forward any learning points to the next event
Minimising waste	
Food preparation and serving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freshly prepared food saves energy used at the processing plant, as well as packaging and transportation costs on canned and frozen food ● Using a pressure cooker cuts stovetop energy use by 50–75% ● Don't let the faucet run while you clean vegetables. Just rinse them in a stoppered sink or a pan of clean water to save on water ● Run the dishwasher on full load and avoid pre-rinse of dishes ● Avoid single-serving water bottles for an event or service activity. Prior to the event, inform all to bring their own reusable water bottle for refilling. Consider using a water filter jar for tap water. If a water filter option is not feasible, purchase spring water in bulk or economy size to reduce plastic waste ● Eliminate use of styrofoam cups and plates – biodegradable alternatives exist for plates, cups, bowls, cutlery etc. and prices are getting competitive, also see above on 'Minimising other waste'
Disposing of organic waste, food scraps and composting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● While most food waste is avoidable and not necessary, there are some levels of unavoidable waste. For instance, food scraps can be kept to a minimum but not everything is suitable for human consumption. The question then becomes about how to avoid this food waste going to landfills? The answer lies in Nature. Decomposition of organic matter is largely a natural biological process, and this could be achieved from composting. For further details, refer to the 'Composting' section in the 'Food Service and Community Outreach' document ● For organic waste such as compostable plates, cups, sporks, etc., send it for composting at the identified industrial composting facility or through a local council curbside voluntary composting programme, if available
Minimising other waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food preparation and serving of food is often tied to environmental considerations and sustainable practices. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use of reusable containers for excess food packaging – reduce the use of plastics and avoid styrofoam products ○ Be mindful of the quantity of water being used to clean containers, other dishes and utensils ● As suggested above, minimise dependence on plastic, paper and styrofoam products when serving food. The target should be to hold a zero-waste event, which may seem too idealistic. Depending on the number of members in your centre, as well as time and money constraints, you can consider the following options to achieve zero waste or minimise the use of plastic, paper and styrofoam products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Serve food and beverages in hard plastic/ceramic/steel plates and glasses, just like in the canteens at Puttaparthi. A team of devotees can be dedicated to wash these items and reuse them

	<p>for future use. Remember to turn off the faucet in between washes!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Serve food in containers made from biodegradable products such as sugarcane or wheat-straw, which can biodegrade without harming the environment, unlike their plastic and styrofoam counterparts. If this is not cost effective, then consider the below option ○ Encourage members/attendees to carry a Go-Green Kit (also referred by some devotees as 'Sai Green Kit') to any event. Prior to an event, send a reminder to or give a presentation (to raise awareness) on 'Bring your own (BYO) Sai Green Kit' for using at meals during events where food is being served. A typical Sai Green Kit consists of: tupperware/ceramic or stainless steel plate, soup bowl, silverware, Bisphenol A (BPA)-free water bottle, coffee mug, cloth/napkin and a cloth bag to carry the above items. Refer to this webpage for further details/illustrations on the Sai Green Kit: https://iammotherearth.wordpress.com/nature-friendly-sai/sai-green-kit/ This has been found to be the best and most effective alternative based on the response received from devotees in the United States. The zero-waste goal can be achieved if everyone uses their Sai Green Kit at the event ● When distributing food through goodie bags, use bags made of 100% recycled paper ● For further resources, please refer to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How Sai Centres can reduce their plastic consumption and avoid styrofoam products at centre events and service activities ○ Ways to reduce water usage at events
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FOOD SOURCING AND PRODUCT PURCHASE

Everything we buy affects the Earth, but some choices have a greater or lesser adverse environmental impact. Educating ourselves about the products we buy, can empower us to make a difference in protecting the planet. It is called 'green purchasing,' and it is easy to do. If we are trying to lessen our environmental impact by reducing our car use, limiting the amount of water we waste, and becoming more 'energy-efficient,' then we should extend this further and examine our eating habits.

About one third of a household's total environmental impact is related to food and drink consumption; the most significant impact comes from food production and processing. These are the result of the direct or indirect effects of livestock agriculture and industry on water, soil and air, the overuse of fish resources, food transportation and packaging waste. Consumption of sustainably farmed food, following a vegetarian diet and purchasing local and seasonal fruits and vegetables are some key choices we can make to help relieve pressure on the environment.

Considerations	Tips and Actions
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<p>Buy or use locally grown and seasonal food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food that has been grown in greenhouses and brought to your local market from far away is rarely as fresh as local produce, and the energy used to transport the food is a precious resource • Fruit, vegetables, and milk produced closer to home, rack up fewer 'petroleum miles' than products trucked across the country to your table • Another reason to go local is for better taste with greater health benefits as the fruit and vegetables are not treated with chemicals to help store or artificially ripen products • Locally grown food also supports local farmers, and the local community. It helps build a community that is more resilient, sustainable and less reliant externally for basic means. In an age where we are seeing increasing natural disasters, maintaining food security becomes increasingly important • Eat seasonally – know which foods are in season and when, and opt for these instead (it will be cheaper too!) • Search online for farmers' markets, greengrocers, roadside sellers and food co-ops or farms in your area to directly purchase food items • Grow your own seasonal food and/or take part in a community garden. Refer to the 'Food Service and Community Outreach' document
<p>Buy organic food products where possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food that has been processed in an ecological and environmentally friendly way is called 'organic food' if it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Does not contain chemical fertilisers, chemical pesticides, growth regulators or food additives (those proven to be harmful to human health) ◦ Do not contain GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms), of which the full possible effects to human health are not yet known • Organic food is tasty and healthy, and environmentally friendly. It is more nutritious, has a higher vitamin content and longer storage life than food produced in the conventional way • Organic food is good for the environment: whereas conventional agriculture is very short-sighted. The latter tends to use considerable amounts of chemical fertilisers and pesticides to increase current outputs. Their residues pollute soil and water, causing a steady degradation of the ecosystem and making a sustainable, long-term use of the soil impossible • Grow your own organic food and/or take part in a community garden. Refer to the 'Food Service and Community Outreach' document
<p>Buy fair trade products</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose groceries and brands, which promote fair trade • Try to buy local and directly from the producers

<p>Additional considerations</p>	
<p>Food shopping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy whole fruits and vegetables to avoid unnecessary trays and wraps • Buy large economy sizes (less packaging per weight of product) • You can also buy items with packaging that can be reused or recycled

<p>Reusable and recycled containers for storing and transporting food</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Say No to plastic bags; take your own cloth bag for food shopping ● Reusable containers are great ways to carry and store food without creating waste. Use reusable silverware and dishes instead of disposable plastic utensils and plates when serving food at an event or community food service programme ● Many of the items we use every day, like paper bags and plastic milk cartons, yogurt and butter containers are made out of materials that can be recycled and can be reused to store and distribute leftovers ● In addition to recycling the things you buy, you can help the environment by buying products that contain recycled materials. Many brands of paper towels and garbage bags, to name a few examples, will tell you on their labels if they are made from recycled materials
<p>Food Prayer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chant the food prayer before any meal ● Offer gratitude to everyone involved in the process of consumption ● Engage in prayers for world peace and prosperity
<p>Serving tips</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are some of the things you can do to minimise food wastage? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you are serving yourself, serve yourself mindfully (so you have a balanced meal) ○ Ask for/take small portions ○ If you are unsure of the dish, find out what it is before it goes on your plate ○ Go back for seconds, only if necessary ○ Eat slowly and mindfully (it is difficult to eat mindfully in a social setting, especially, with different conversations going on while eating) ● These are some of the ways the host can minimise wastage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have volunteers to serve food in small portions ○ Instead of setting out the entire amount of food, bring food trays out in batches ○ Opt to serve the food at a central counter instead of at each table, because less food will be consumed when food is out of sight ○ Opt for small sized plates instead of large ones

If you have any questions or need additional information pertaining to the contents in this document, please do not hesitate to contact the Serve The Planet team via servetheplanet.ssio@gmail.com.



