

Council teams up with Heriot-Watt tracking carbon footprint in campus meals

A pioneering online tool is giving students, staff and visitors of Heriot-Watt University fresh insight into the environmental impact of food offered at its Edinburgh campus.

As part of its commitment to sustainability, the University has teamed with the City of Edinburgh Council to launch a new initiative to track the carbon footprint of each meal served.

The new software, provided by the company, Klimato, is being rolled out across key food venues across campus on Thursday with each dish rated dependent on its impact on the environment – allowing customers to make an informed choice when ordering.

Professor Mercedes Maroto-Valer, Deputy Principal for Global Sustainability at Heriot-Watt University, said: “By clearly showing the carbon footprint of food served on campus, we are empowering our community to make informed choices, not just for their plates, but for the planet.

“Through Klimato and with the assistance of the City of Edinburgh Council, we are becoming ever-more conscious contributors to a greener, more sustainable future.

“Let every meal be a mindful step towards environmental

stewardship as the choices made today will help shape the world of tomorrow.”

With 34% of global emissions accounted for by the food sector, the University, through this project, can now identify high-carbon food items on menus, and experiment by substituting with more planet-friendly options.

Meals served on campus are rated A to E. A-rated meals are those which are considered very low-carbon choices, such as lentil chilli, with less than 0.4kg of carbon produced from one meal. Higher-carbon meals, where over 2.6kg of carbon is produced per meal, are rated E.

A and B rated meals are in line with the Paris Climate Agreement targets for a two-degrees Celsius warming situation by 2050.

Klimato has calculated the carbon footprint of each meal by using ‘life cycle analysis’. This is a certified method for calculating carbon dioxide equivalent emissions and other environmental impacts which arise during the production and distribution of a product.



Anton Unger, CEO at Klimato says: “We are thrilled to be supporting Heriot-Watt University on their sustainability journey, helping them raise awareness on food-related environmental impact and enabling students, staff and visitors to make informed food choices on campus.

“Promoting conscious food consumption among the youth is a mission that is close to our heart, which is why we are extremely proud to have been chosen by Heriot-Watt University as a sustainability partner.”

City of Edinburgh Council are supporting the project as part of their Plant-Based Treaty Action plan, which was approved by their Sustainability & Policy Committee in January.

The local authority says the action plan does not seek to remove freedom of choice but instead increase the availability and visibility, of sustainable food options.

Council Leader Cammy Day said: “I’m delighted to see that Heriot-Watt University is taking steps to better consider and understand the environmental consequences of the food consumed on their campus. I’m also proud that the Council is partnering with the university to help make this happen.

“Following the Council’s endorsement of the Plant-Based Treaty and our target to become a net zero city by 2030, Edinburgh became the first European capital to support this global initiative, which calls for a Plant-Based Treaty to be negotiated at global level as a companion to the UN Paris Agreement on climate. The evidence is clear that food systems have a significant impact on the climate crisis. We published our action plan addressing this in January 2024 and work is ongoing to roll this out.

“It is the responsibility of the whole of society to help us reach our climate goals and I’d like to commend Heriot-Watt for their efforts so far.”

Alongside its global research and innovation into sustainable solutions, Heriot-Watt is working to reduce both the direct and indirect impact of its own operations on the environment.

A growing global environmental sustainability team is committed to making significant impact toward the attainment of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By gaining greater insight into the carbon impacts of the food it orders, Heriot-Watt will contribute toward the SDGs of responsible consumption and production, and climate action.