

The University of Sheffield

Reusable Milk Churns

Accommodation and Commercial Services (ACS), operates 19 cafes, bars and stores across the University of Sheffield campus and residences, and are working towards achieving a net zero position by 2030. With such a range of outlets in our portfolio, reducing waste is one of the big challenges we face. A waste audit revealed that the biggest single contributor to waste that we generate is milk, which is sourced from our local Sheffield based dairy farm, Our Cow Molly.

Our Cow Molly is located less than 3 miles from the University main campus and is more than just our local dairy farm. Collaboration over the last 10 years has included research activity and our long term commitment enabled them to secure funding to build a state of the art milking parlour, helping them to expand supply beyond the University, into the local community. The benefit to the University is that the journey from farm to coffee cup is an exceptionally short one, resulting in reduced delivery emissions and a super fresh high quality product. We receive over 430,000 pints of milk a year, which unfortunately generates a large amount of single use plastic waste. We wanted this to change.

As part of the University delivery group aiming for net zero, our strategy is to work towards eliminating waste or a closed loop recyclable system. Our Cow Molly partnered up with some of the leading academic and professional teams at the University to tackle this problem. These included the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, Institute for Sustainable Food and the University of Sheffield Sustainability Delivery Group. Together we have funded, sourced, developed and installed state of the art milk churns and milk shot dispensers in three of our busiest cafes. By doing this we have reduced the annual amount of single use plastic waste generated by 27,000 bottles.



The whole project was a real team effort. Prof Rachael Rothman, the Academic Lead for the University of Sheffield Sustainability Delivery Group, helped with resources to fund the initial delivery of the churns. Prof Duncan Cameron, School of Biosciences, funded the purchase of the milk shot dispensers as well as being highly supportive of the Our Cow Molly farm. His PHD students are working with Our Cow Molly looking at soil improvement to help make grass growing more efficient, this is also an example of how our sustainability work with Our Cow Molly offers students at the University of Sheffield the opportunity to develop their skills. Peter Anstess, Head of Retail for ACS / UNICUS, installed the milk shot dispensers into the cafes. For all of this to work, you need a supplier that is willing to work closely with you, with shared values, and Eddie Andrew, owner of Our Cow Molly, is just that. The close relationship we have developed over the years has led to a tight knit partnership where we can develop these kinds of innovative projects knowing we are all pulling in the same direction.

The end result is we now have 70 reusable stainless steel churns in circulation that can each hold around 22 pints of milk, but crucially can be washed, refilled and reused, eliminating the use of single use plastic. The initial impact of these three installations is the saving of 27,000 plastic bottles per year, with plans to roll out to our other outlets with an aim of saving a total of 87,000 plastic bottles per year. This switch to churns will also cut the carbon footprint of milk deliveries to the University by over 65%, 6.5 tonnes of CO2 every year.



This is just the latest example of the effort we put in to demonstrate our commitment to behave in a more ethical way, creating new and sustainable business practices. Wherever possible we work with local suppliers, as a result of this we have been able to eliminate waste in several other ways. Our local coffee roasters, Roastology, source their coffee through direct-trade. We have reduced the amount of waste we produce by switching to reusable containers in which our coffee beans are delivered, which are then returned to our supplier for refilling. We redirect food waste away from composting or landfill by donating to Sheffield homeless charities or redistributing via our Community Fridge. We use electric delivery vehicles and even a pedal powered cargo trike for our smaller deliveries, and all our electricity supply is sourced from renewables. We believe it is up to us all, with individual actions creating a truly sustainable business, as custodians of our planet for future generations.

