

SUSTAINABILITY MANUAL



There is an undeniable body of evidence that the earth and its ecosystems are under great pressure due to human activity (IPCC¹). This activity threatens biodiversity, promotes extreme weather conditions and erodes the future of humankind. Only together we can make a difference.

In order to improve our chances of survival and to maintain a natural balance on earth, we need to take **action**. The **Green Office VU** created this manual to help student associations to do so.

We hope this manual inspires your student association to make the right decisions - every single contribution improves our future. Before making a decision as an organisation, give a thought as to how it would impact your sustainability. In case of doubt, do not hesitate to contact us at info@greenofficevu.nl, we are here to help!

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

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1. Quick and Easy fixes

- Use the search engine **ecosia.org** to support the VU to reduce its carbon footprint planting trees and promoting solar energy throughout the world.

At 1 M trees we will plant a symbolic tree at the Campus. We can reach this in 2 years if the whole VU-Community joins !

To add to the VU counter please install the extension with this link > <https://ecosia.co/VU>
(More information in the last chapter)

- Turn off the lights whenever they are not needed.
- Don't leave chargers plugged in.
- Turn off the heating when nobody is in the room.
- Wear warmer clothes in winter, this avoids the need for using extra heating.
Also, close the door to keep warm more inside.
- Use reusable items instead of single-use items whenever possible like reusable coffee cups (GO sells these). In the long term you save money which can be used, for example, to hire a DJ for borrels.
- Can think of using a stand in a visible place where you can put reusable cups, this promotes their use instead of single use cups.
- Can think of renting hard plastic cups for parties and events. This company does this:
<https://dutchcups.nl>

- Reduce paper use as much as possible, go digital! When you need to use, reuse for new purposes, like gift wrapping.
- Can think of using a board to write and make announcements, about for example events, instead of printing every time.
- The best is to buy second-hand, then recycled or New Ecolabel² certified products. Also, buy products with no, or minimal, packaging.



Fig. 1, EU Ecolabel logo

- Give priority to local, seasonal and EU organic food, see picture below (EU Biolabel³). If locally sourced is not possible, give priority to seasonal and EU organic food. Finally, if seasonal is not possible, give priority to EU organic food.



Fig.2, EU Biolabel logo

- Can use this website to help to know which vegetables and fruits are in the season (not perse biologically) > <https://groentefruit.milieucentraal.nl/>.
- Reduce food waste and when throwing away dispose of it in the GFT containers. There are GFT containers available at the red square WN building and the canteen.
- Drink tap water, not bottled. Dutch tap water is one of the cleanest in Europe.
- Use a bike and when this is not possible, the train. Avoid the use of planes as much as possible. If flying is unavoidable, compensate through third parties⁴ (don't use airline schemes).

² <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/#>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/organic-farming/organics-glance/organic-logo_en

⁴ <https://treesforall.nl/compenseer-co2/>
<https://www.atmosfair.de/en/offset/flight>

2. Waste Management

Recycling is the last step in the lifecycle of an item - after it has been used and when it is totally falling apart and cannot be repaired anymore.

The Netherlands recovers⁵ 54% of all its waste, this ranks us on the fifth place among all OECD countries and our disposal rate is about 2% (Mostly landfill + incineration without energy recovery).

However, countries such as Slovenia, Germany and Austria have shown us that these rates can be much improved! In order to do so we need the collaboration of the whole population, including the VU Community.⁶

FCO (Facilitaire Campus Organisatie) is open to support student associations to this regard. Furthermore, different student associations have established a common collection point at **the rode plein (red square) of the WN building. There are containers available for GFT (biodegradable) waste.** Initiatives like this are possible in other buildings with the support of FCO.

It is very important to transition towards a circular economy⁷ and to implement the waste hierarchy⁸ in order to reduce the pressure that we are putting on the limited resources of our planet. This can only be done with a Bottom to Top approach and Top to Bottom approach combined effort of our Communities and Institutions.

Please, be aware of waste pollution. This means to put the waste material in the right container without mixing it up. For example, when a batch of plastic becomes contaminated by other materials it cannot be recycled anymore - the batch is then put with the general garbage to might end up incinerated or in landfill.

Curiosity:

Did you know that a smartphone contains 70 out of the 83 stable and non-radioactive elements found in the periodic table? Mainly metals, plastics and ceramics. Including gold!

Note: these websites (in Dutch) is very handy to know to which category the waste belongs: <https://www.milieucentraal.nl/minder-afval/welk-afval-waar> / <https://www.amsterdam.nl/afval/>

⁵ Recycling + Composting rate of 2017 - <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=51347#>

⁶ <https://www.techradar.com/news/phone-and-communications/mobile-phones/our-smartphone-addiction-is-costing-the-earth-1299378>

⁷ https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Circular_economy

⁸ https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Waste_hierarchy

General garbage

- Paper with plastic coating coffee cups and coating bowls (for example, the soup bowls of the canteen).
- Receipts: they have a coating that prevents its recycling.
- Chips packaging (Both bag and tube, like Pringles)
- Black glass, wine drinking glasses, cups and mugs. These are different materials and damage the recycling process.

Plastic

- All empty plastic packaging material, like:
Lits from for example peanut butter pot.
- Juices and wine cartons if it says on the bin Plastic and Drink Cartons. If not, it is with the general garbage, except for plastic lids of course.

Paper

- If it can be ripped easily it belongs to paper waste, except for receipts. If it cannot be ripped easily, it means that it probably has a plastic coating and, as it has two materials, that belongs to general waste.
- Post Envelopes, as the plastic squares can be cutted out during the recycling process.

Glass

- Clear glass packaging: clear wine and beer bottles (so the packaging); green, brown, blue & red. Can leave the lit, when is metal, or kurk.
So no black glass, drinking glasses (like wine) and heat (fire) resistant oven bowls and thea glasses! They are different types of material and disturb the recycling process.

GFT waste

- All organic material: food waste, kitchen residuals.

3. Food and Food waste

3.1 DRINKS AND FOOD

The food that you eat and what you drink has a great impact on the environment. In the EU the agriculture & livestock industry is the second most polluting. The perception that changing from an omnivorous diet (containing meat) to a vegetarian is the solution is not necessarily true due to the extra consumption of dairy products that come from a not very efficient and highly pollutant source: cattle.

So, the best is to eat plant-based as much as possible. The most climate friendly and healthy approach is to use vegetables and fruits to make dishes instead of vegan meat replacements. The best is to use than local, seasonal and biological (EU Biolabel⁹) sourced plant-based food. If locally sourced is not possible, give priority to seasonal and EU organic food. Finally, if seasonal is not possible, give priority to EU organic food.

To find out what is local and seasonal for vegetables and fruits you can use this website: <https://groentefruit.milieucentraal.nl/>

When eating small quantities of animal products in a more plant-based diet it is better to eat eggs, than chicken, and finally goat and pork. If you want to eat some cheese sometimes, the cheese of CONO makers, from which Beemster is the more known one, has been declared as Climate Neutral Cheese. This is the website: <https://www.cono.nl/onze-kazen>

What's the EU Biolabel?



It guarantees:

- Environmental and climate protection
- Soil fertility conservation
- Biodiversity maintenance
- Respect for natural cycles and animal welfare
- Non-use of synthetic chemicals
- Non-use of GMOs

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/organic-farming/organics-glance/organic-logo_en

Plant-based food can still be very delicious but it is a different way of cooking. Fortunately, there are multiple websites and cookbooks with delicious plant-based recipes. Under here find websites with nice plant-based recipes: www.duurzamestudent.nl, www.degroenemeisjes.nl

Possible ways to slowly introduce more plant-based food:

- Slowly Introduce a plant food day, for example starting with a plant food Monday every month.
- Gyrinus student association is making a cookbook including vegetarian and hopefully also vegan dishes. They are also willing to share this, you can just send them an email.

Curiosity:

Did you know that casein, a protein contained in dairy products, becomes casomorphin during digestion? This substance is similar to morphine and that is why many people are addicted to cheese.

Did you know that insects contain more protein than cattle? Also, insects are not only more healthy for humans but also for the planet as they need way less land, water and food and grow faster.

Have you already heard of the new way of producing meat and fish in the future? The stem cell meat! Meat and filet grown in a lab from a single stem cell . In this way we need way less land, only a quarter of what we need now, way less land to produce all the feed (majority of wheat and soya are to feed the cattle). The biggest investor is of course the meat industry.

3.2 FOOD WASTE

Food waste is a very important problem. When you throw away food, you also throw away the emissions and resources, such as land and water, produced and used in the whole supply chain. Furthermore, when it is not correctly composted or it gets into plastic waste it can generate a great amount of GreenHouse Effect emissions, especially in landfills. Therefore it is very important to reduce or eat food leftovers instead of throwing them away.

Tips to reduce food waste:

- Share food or store it whenever possible.
- Often, vegetables that are a bit older and are not suitable anymore for fresh dishes are still very suitable for making a delicious soup, or other similar dishes.
- Use the GFT (Organic) waste containers.
- Be creative and use what works in your association to stimulate reduction in food waste.

An example is to offer the food leftovers in reusable food boxes. Which the members can bring every time to bring the food leftovers.

To motivate this you can give a reward or a punishment. For example, people bringing their own box or reuse the one given by you 10 times, they get a free beer. Or the other way around if they forgot for 10 times to bring the box they have to pay 1 Euro extra on their next beer.

Curiosity:

Did you know that the total amount of food waste produced is enough to feed worldwide hunger?

4. Sustainable procurement

The key to buying sustainable is to buy less! We advise only buying new goods when it is really necessary. Key points to keep in mind when something really needs to be bought:

- First, check whether you can repair the item to be substituted.
- Second, if possible choose to buy second-hand or refurbished/upcycled items.
- Third, if second-hand is not viable, buy the item made from recycled material. Also, focus on Ecolabel products/services:



This guarantees:

- Responsible and sustainable criteria during:
 - Extraction of raw materials
 - Manufacturing
 - Packaging
 - Distribution
 - Use
 - End life - waste hierarchy
- Fourth, less is more. Opt for products with little to no packaging. Online retailers sometimes offer this option. There are many websites giving tips on living a more zero waste lifestyle (which is mostly about packaging). This is an example: www.Emmajohn.nl

- Fifth, opt for durable items (like metal forks), instead of using the single-use version (soft plastic) with the aim to use it as long as possible. So, until it breaks apart and is also not fixable anymore or very expensive to repair or upcycle.
- Sixth, opt for energy efficient products. The EU Energy Label defines categories for energy efficiency from A+++ to D. Focus on the products with the maximum category possible, which is A+++. From 2021 there will be rescale, and category "A" will be the maximum grade.

Plastic

One of the biggest problems with petroleum-based plastic is that when it is not recycled ends up in the environment, especially the sea. There it takes from hundreds to thousands of years to photodegrade, it never decomposes. This implies that the sunlight breaks it up into smaller pieces (microplastics). These micro-plastics contain bisphenol A (BPA) and PS oligomer, which are toxic for animals and humans and tend to end up in the fish and beaches. Avoid PET bottles as they are toxic for humans and take a long time to photodegrade.

If we use plastic in a responsible way and recycle it then it will have a lower footprint on the environment. Even lower than paper bags, cans or glass bottles.

Examples of reusable plastic items to use for a long time are hard plastic cups. This can be used for parties and washed by hand or with a washing machine (save more water). This company, for example, sells but also leases hard plastic cups: <https://dutchcups.nl>

Paper

We advise using as little paper as possible. Go digital!

When you really need paper focus on **recycled paper**, if that is not possible focus on companies that cut trees from sustainable managed forest, or a combination of both.

Certifications FSC, PEFC, EU Ecolabel, Nordic Ecolabel, Der Blaue Engel and Milieukeur are good for recycled paper. It does not have to be way more expensive as there are different alternatives. See this website: <https://productforproduct.com/paperforpaper/>

All the paper from the VU is recycled and sustainable sourced paper, at least FSC certified.

Curiosity

Did you know that many toilet paper have plastic in them, and can become a big micro-plastic polluter? Therefore, it is important to check for yourself if it is 100% made from paper.

5. Possible collaborations

You can work with NGOs, Companies and other organisations. Examples of companies working on sustainability:

- Milieu centraal
- Natuurverdubbelers
- Ecosia.org
- Too good to go
- Green Business Club
- Green Office VU

6. Examples of challenges

To stimulate the adoption of more sustainable behaviors it can be rewarding to create prizes and challenges. These can range from small to big. The GO VU is launching the **Ecosia Challenge**:

ECOSIA 2020-2022 Challenge

The aim of this challenge is to indirectly reduce the carbon footprint of the VU using the carbon negative services of Ecosia.

Ecosia is a sustainability and privacy centered company that provides a search engine and that allocates the majority of its profits to sustainable reforestation and the production of solar energy. The GO VU is collaborating with this organisation in order to promote the use of Ecosia.org by the whole VU Community.

The VU carbon footprint in 2018 was equivalent to **39.267.000** Kg of CO₂. This represents a clear improvement from previous years and there are many active efforts to directly reduce it. We want to contribute to that reduction including indirect mechanisms such as using carbon negative services.

If half of the VU community joins this challenge and they ran 4 searches per school day, in a year we would have saved 12.600.000 Kg of CO₂ and would have planted 280.000 trees.

We will plant a symbolic tree in the faculty once we reach 1.000.000 trees.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE:

I. IF YOU ALREADY USE ECOSIA:

- A. Uninstall the extension from your browser - *Ignore if you don't use the extension.*
- B. Clear your internet cookies (You can choose to delete only Ecosia.org cookies)
- C. Follow steps "II".

II. IF YOU DON'T ECOSIA:

- A. Go to <https://ecasia.co/VU> and click on "Download Ecosia for browser"
- B. This will redirect you to the official Extension Store of your browser, then simply click on install.
- C. Done! Your search engine will default to Ecosia.org and your searches will count towards the **VU Trees Counter**.

Other challenges that can be locally implemented are:

- Create mini projects in sustainability in your student association.
- Plant (or adopt) a tree
- Don't buy food, prepare your own, for a week.
- Switch to a more green bank (ASN, Triodos Bank, Bunq)
- Do not print for one week
- Do not buy PET bottles.
- Use your own bottle.
- Learn how to make small repairs.

Be creative and come up with your own challenges competition, which can be related to the theme of your student association!

Thanks for making the world a more sustainable place for all!