The University of Iowa found itself on the forefront of the sustainability movement when, in 2003, the UI Power Plant began burning oat hulls, a byproduct from the Quaker Oats cereal-making facility in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to generate steam and electric power. Not only does the innovative project save money for the University, it reduces carbon dioxide emissions and displaces coal in the UI Power Plant.

Earthly Concerns

University’s campus conservation efforts continue and expand

As a member of the Chicago Climate Exchange, The University of Iowa is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 6 percent by 2010.

The University also has committed to building all new construction, including the six buildings currently under way, to at least a silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standard, Christiansen says. In the future, existing buildings may be retrofitted for “optimal energy conservation.”

Recycling and composting have become central to University operations, too. About 30 percent (by weight) of waste is recycled. This includes nearly one ton of food scraps per week, which are composted as the result of a student-proposed residence halls project.

But it’s Iowa’s longstanding alternative transportation programs that earned the highest grade—an A—from the College Sustainability Report Card, an independent evaluation of campus operations and endowments published by the Sustainable Endowments Institute. The Cambus system provides 3.7 million rides annually, discounted community bus passes are available to the University community, a 30-year-old employee van pool program saves hundreds of thousands of gallons of gasoline each year, and the University supports bicycling on campus by funding biking programs and providing bicycle parking spaces.

Because of the size of the University, policies like these can make a big impact, says Carlison.

“This is a huge institution,” he says. “We have 24,000 employees, 30,000 students. It’s like a small city.”

And when the University implements sustainable policies, everyone becomes a part of the efforts.

“These are exciting times at The University of Iowa,” says Don Guckert, associate vice president and director of Facilities Management. “Sustainability efforts are bringing together students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners to solve difficult challenges, explore new frontiers, and position The University of Iowa as a leader in sustainability.”

—Anne Kapfer