

ON-CAMPUS HOSPITALITY

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Sodexo Works to **STOP** “Wasting Food”

In an effort to cut down on the amount of food wasted on college campuses, foodservice contract management company Sodexo launched a Stop Wasting Food pilot program on eight campuses in September 2010.

Colleges participating in the waste-reduction pilot program include Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, California State University of Monterey Bay in Seaside, Calif., Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., Linfield College in McMinnville, Ore., Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., University of California at Davis, Calif. and University of Wisconsin in River Falls, Wis.



Photos by William Hauck

Juniata College

“The campuses were chosen based on geography,” said Christy Cook, sustainability support for Campus Services with Sodexo. “We wanted to look at a kind of snapshot across the country. We also wanted to make sure that these were really highly engaged campuses that had an awareness about sustainability issues because we really wanted to see in a perfect mod-

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FOOD WASTE MANAGEMENT

el, so to speak, what the results would be and compare them.”

According to the company, Americans trash 25 percent of all the food they prepare each year, leading to 31 million tons of wasted food piling up in landfills annually. Food waste in landfills produces methane gas, which is at least 21 times more potent than carbon. Methane breaks down the ozone layer and leads to climate change.

“There is a tremendous opportunity to save waste, deter waste from going to the landfill,” she said. “So many people seem to really forget about waste. So we thought it would be a

really great way to bring more awareness about the impact of waste and highlight that as an education process for others.”

The campaign has two basic parts: educating students about food waste and analyzing and measuring kitchen waste in an effort to better manage it.

Sodexo is asking students to take two simple steps. The first is to only take what they plan to eat in all-you-care-to-eat dining halls. The second is to come back for more if they are still hungry.

“There are different components of educating students,” said Cook. “The Stop Wasting Food campaign comes in with our website and the information continues to go out. We have created educational videos that we have been able to have at the locations.”

Each of the pilot schools has tailored the education to its campus. “Linfield College in Oregon created their own video that they did for their students,” she said. “It became a more customized video and advertised for their students specifically.”

She continued, “The students at Juniata College are pretty engaged and have been looking at ways to do some things differently. They created a student-run platform — a place where you can eat inside the dining hall. They named it Love. They actually run the whole thing. It stands for Local, Organic, Viable and Ethical. They take all of their waste to a sustainable house. It is a group of students that grows their own food. They take their food waste back to a compost pile and it is used in their garden. They customized the ValuWaste system that is used to

measure the waste so that we could also track the compost in our waste in the donation. That is another component that we weren’t tracking initially.”

To analyze and measure kitchen food waste, Sodexo works with Lean-Path, a technology company providing food waste tracking systems. The pilot study focuses on kitchen — or pre-consumer — waste, not what customers throw out. The pilot study system features a tracking station where Sodexo employees enter data about what they are throwing out and why. By tracking the reason for throwing away items, the schools are able to correct the problem to prevent future food waste.

The Results

The final results of the pilot demonstrated an overall food waste reduction of 47 percent.

Reduction By School:

Linfield College	28%
Marist College	30%
Coe College	62%
Juniata College	36%
University of California – Davis	69%
University of Wisconsin-River Falls	33%
California State University Monterey Bay	40%
Pomona College	35%

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Each site has a Stop Waste Action Team (SWAT) composed of employees that reviews the waste-tracking data, sets specific goals for improvement and tests waste-prevention ideas. The most effective ideas become permanent.

Cook said that the program has had a great buy-in from the employees. "What we found is the level of engagement with our team members is just blown out of the water in ways we didn't necessarily expect. We had hoped it would be the case, but we weren't sure. Sometimes when we do something different, there is always some trepidation or you are not really sure how it is going to go over. This became something fun. It became a fun competition between the deli line versus the meat and veggie line and the salad bar. It became some internal fun and competition. The team members were really excited once a week when the numbers were posted about how everybody did. They were so excited to see it."

Employees at the eight sites have dramatically reduced overproduction, spoilage, expiration and trimmings by participating in the pilot study. [See sidebar for the results.]

At Marist, one of the areas that was reviewed was soup waste. "It may seem granular and simple really, but they were able to look at the waste in soup and rice and they realized they were having a lot of waste in those areas," said Cook. "They set goals to reduce their waste with just those two items and they were able to reduce it by just about 30 percent, for just those two items. That allowed them to do, was use the dollars that were going into the garbage to purchase more organic items, and they started serving some organic spinach and beets."

Based on the early results of the program, it is working. "We are showing that we reduced waste by 47 percent across all of the campuses," she said. "That is huge."

Cook is obviously very pleased with program and its results. "So many campuses are thinking today, 'let's just compost or let's just recycle.' What is great about this program is it really focuses on source reduction. You want to reduce the waste before you can talk about where it goes from there. That is the beauty of this program and this campaign. It is all about reducing before we have to look at landfilling, recycling and composting. I think that is what is an added environmental impact to this whole process that has been outstanding, which we are really proud of."

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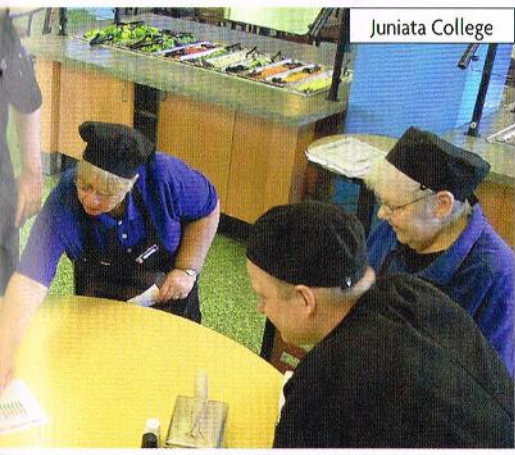
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