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Caitlin Glennon weighs onions before putting them in the compost. The ValueWaste program aims at improving Bon App's sustainability.

Bon Appétit weighs in on waste, consumption

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Waste not, want not. With the recent addition of a new system to the Cherry Street Market kitchen, this seems to be Bon Appétit's new maxim.

The ValueWaste system by Lean Path is designed to pinpoint categorically what kinds of food are being overproduced, and thereby wasted, and provides ways to help eliminate waste in the future.

Lean Path is a company based out of Portland, Ore. Four to 10 percent of food that customers purchase ends up as kitchen waste, according to the company's Web site.

"It helps us from a business standpoint; it helps save the company money," said Jim Cooley, executive chef for Bon Appétit at Seattle U. "But it also helps us stay more sustainable by letting us know what we're overproducing."

The system includes a scale and a small touch-screen monitor that are kept on a table in the middle of the kitchen. When a worker weighs food waste, they must first enter their name so Bon App can keep tabs on how much food each individual employee is saving or wasting. After that employees identify what type of container holds the food waste so they can offset that weight when the screen brings up the measurement.

"I use it every day," said Shannon Wilson, café chef at Cherry Street Market. "I think it's a useful tool. We probably don't use it to the full capacity that we could use it to, but it's useful in many ways."

All of the statistics and data collected by the scale are wired to an office computer in another room, where any Bon Appétit employee can log in and look at the numbers. The software provided by the company also allows its users to view a multitude of charts and graphs about their waste. Lean Path charges a monthly subscription fee for these services.

According to Cooley, the management has been trying to offer incentives to their employees to use the system and watch their waste in preparing food.

"I don't see a problem with [tracking employee waste]," said Cynthia Tackett, deli slicer at Cherry Street Market.. "But I just use the system to weigh the extra meat that gets cut off."

Some of the foods that have been bigger problems in the past have been soup, fruits and vegetables.

"That stuff's always going to end up causing us trouble, though, because it weighs more than most of the other waste," Cooley said.

Cherry Street Market has had the system for about a year, and Cooley said it has helped them reduce the amount of food they overproduce. The system costs around \$25,000, but the price was reduced for Bon App when the Puget Sound Energy Company wanted to fund a study about food waste and then subsidized the cost.

But for Cooley, limiting the amount of waste that happens in the kitchen is only the beginning. He has plans to bring the ValueWaste system back near the dishwashing station of Cherry Street Market and begin to weigh how much food is being wasted by students. After a month or so of measuring students' waste, Cooley wants to tell them about it.

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