

Software worth its weight in soup
by Charles Redell - 2.9.09

SEATTLE

>At Swedish Medical Center's First Hill campus in Seattle, a lot of soup, it turns out, was winding up down the drain. That's what Eric Eisenberg, executive chef at Swedish Medical Center discovered last year thanks to technology supplied by Portland-based LeanPath. Serving soup to thousands of customers each day, Eisenberg knew he was overcooking, but never prioritized finding ways to reduce soup waste.



A cook weighs unused ingredients before composting.

>That's where LeanPath, creator of ValueWaste, a scale and software system that tracks and calculates the value of pre-consumer food waste, stepped in.

>Through a pilot program sponsored by Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), LeanPath installed ValueWaste at Swedish Medical Center's First Hill campus and at Seattle University. For the past year, kitchen staff there have been stopping on the way to the compost bins at a combination scale and touch screen with any food waste generated in the kitchen, but not served to customers.

>They input the type of food and the container it's in, place it on the scale, and ValueWaste calculates the food's value based on its weight. Later, any staff member can access a wealth of reports to see what recipes generate the most waste so they can look for efficiencies with the highest value.

>Within a month, Eisenberg saw how much unserved soup was costing him and changed production methods. He cut costs from soup waste alone by about \$800 per week.

>Now Swedish is installing ValueWaste at its two other campuses at a cost of nearly \$25,000.

>"I think overall, it's ultimately worth it, even if you can't associate a dollar amount with it," Eisenberg says. "The fact that it puts food waste

in the front and center with all of the front line staff, just through osmosis, it creates a positive result.”

>Thirty percent of Seattle’s commercial waste stream is food, according to Carl Woestein, SPU’s food recovery manager. The City Council passed legislation that caps the amount of waste the city will send to landfills at 440,000 tons annually, the amount it landfilled in 2006. Knowing that some studies show that as much as 50 percent of a restaurant’s waste can be made up of food, SPU agreed to spend as much as \$20,000 to study ValueWaste and its waste-reduction potential.

>The city is pleased with the results so far. After more testing and data collection, SPU may try to find a way to subsidize the cost of the system for restaurants, according to Woestein.

>Although LeanPath reports that its methodology works best for kitchens that spend more than \$1 million a year on food, Woestein says SPU wants to see if it can use the software for smaller operations. In 2009, he says, the goal is to introduce it to some of the city’s smaller ethnic eateries to see how much food in the city’s waste stream can be avoided.

Like this article? [Subscribe to *Sustainable Industries* magazine.](#)

© *Sustainable Media Inc.* All rights reserved. Permission is required for reproduction in whole or in part. For high-quality reprints of articles, contact FosteReprints at 866-879-9144 or via email: sales@FosteReprints.com

RELATED LINKS:

Homebuilder uses only certified wood [Read More](#)
Akeena charges direct to AC [Read More](#)
Tough times for tax credits [Read More](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.sustainableindustries.com/breakingnews/39163417.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.