

## **CUT IT OUT: COST CUTTING MEASURES THAT PROVIDE MORE DOLLARS FOR BETTER FOOD**

Food service generates huge amounts of waste from packaging to food to energy use. Instituting some of these proven suggestions for waste reduction can save you considerable dollars in the long term. Even if these savings don't directly affect your food service budget they can provide you with some powerful ammunition if you need to argue the case to your administration for more dollars in the food budget.

### **FOOD WASTE**

Locally grown food is often fresher, lasts longer, and generates less waste than food shipped in from far away. Fresher food needs less dressing up, makes it possible to create much simpler dishes, and saves preparation time.

**Less quantity, more quality.** Switch from all-you-can-eat to a-la-carte meal plans. Encourage consumers not to take more than they can eat. At Columbia University, photographs of trays with half-full plates accompany the slogan, "It's all you can eat, not all you can throw away."

The Lawrenceville School in NJ no longer has trays, which limits students to only what they can carry in their hands. Students also have to bus their own dishes. This makes them more aware of what they throw away and gives the food service staff more time to concentrate on preparing better food.

St Andrew's School in DE has students weigh their food waste and the daily total is posted in the dining hall to raise awareness.

**Reduce plate size.** Self-service cafeterias at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, reduced the size of plates from 9 inches to 8 inches as a way of encouraging students to take smaller portions and leaving less food behind on their plates. Students who are still hungry may go back for seconds.

**Compost.** Many institutions are now composting food waste on site or contracting with a composting service. This reduces the cost of waste hauling and provides compost for landscaping on campus.

### **PACKAGING**

Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, buys sides of beef and pork and baking ingredients in bulk for its central food preparation unit. There, it prepares individual servings for the campus's eight dining halls and various food services. The university ships food around campus in reusable plastic totes. This system was developed primarily to ensure the freshness of the food served on campus. But it has also reduced the need for packaging, including individual cardboard boxes and waxed paper separators used for shipping pre-prepared food onto campus.

You can purchase fruit in returnable, bulk packed, wooden crates direct from the farm. This saves money and waste for the farmer too. Each industry standard packed bushel of apples can cost the farmer \$3 or more in packaging and all the components, liners, trays, boxes, labels, tags, come in their own packaging.

Buy products in bulk containers to increase the ratio of food to packaging material and decreases packaging waste. Sugar, sugar substitutes, mustard, ketchup, and other staples are all good examples of products that can easily be purchased in bulk rather than single-serve portions.

## **SERVINGWARE**

Choose reusable items instead of purchasing single-use items such as "disposable" flatware, mugs, dishes, trays, coffee filters, and salt and pepper shakers. Dining halls at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Rutgers University in New Jersey serve most meals using china plates, stainless steel flatware, and glassware.

Bowling Green State University's food service operation, in Ohio, serves about 14,000 people daily. One year after switching from disposable to washable glasses, the cafeteria had saved \$32,000, used 1.15 million fewer single-use cups, and avoided sending 26,450 pounds of waste to the landfill. To encourage students to select glassware rather than paper cups, the university offers a small cash discount on beverages sold in glasses.

## **BEVERAGES**

Use fountain soda dispensers, milk dispensers, and water coolers rather than single-use beverage containers to reduce bottle, can, carton, and paper cup waste.

Use refillable bottles instead of single-use bottles, cans, and carton. Campus settings lend themselves particularly well to the use of refillables, which are easily collected in settings where beverages are purchased and consumed on site. Offer price discounts to encourage use of refillable containers.

## **EATING ON THE PREMISES**

Because take-out food is invariably packaged in single-use containers and served with single-use napkins and flatware, it often leads to the generation of more waste than when food is eaten where purchased. The disparity in waste generated is even greater if on-site meals are served on reusable dinnerware. Food services can offer price discounts for those who eat on the premises.

## **REUSABLE CUP PROGRAMS**

Allow consumers to bring their own cups to receive discounts. As part of the CUPS program (Cannot Use Paper or Styrofoam) at the University of Colorado, the university presents incoming students with reusable cups bearing the school logo. When students use the cups to buy beverages at university food services or at participating off-campus establishments, they get a discount. Students can rinse out their cups at washing stations in the student union building. Campus recycling coordinator Jack DeBell says that the CUPS program is one of the most visible waste reduction initiatives on campus. He estimates that cup waste has dropped about 30 percent since the program began.

At the University of Wyoming in Laramie, two food services, the university recycling office, and the student government came up with a similar plan. In January 1992, participating food services began offering a 22-ounce mug for \$2.09 and selling coffee or soda refills at a 25-30 cent discount. Within six months they had sold 2,400 mugs and 16,456 refills. The food services estimated that this saved \$950.00 in paper purchasing costs.

## **NAPKINS**

There are multiple ways of reducing napkin waste. In settings where piles of napkins are set out for the taking, napkins often become a large component of the waste problem. The ideal solution is washable cloth napkins. If theft is a problem, or if washing is not practical, there may be other ways to reduce the overuse of napkins, such as putting them in dispensers or purchasing smaller napkins.

The Lawrenceville School placed dispensers on the wall next to the drink dispensers and reduced napkin costs by \$10,000 in the first year.

Staff in campus dining rooms at the University of Michigan were able to reduce the number of paper napkins used by moving napkin dispensers to each table, rather than placing them at the beginning of the food service line where students pick up their trays. A study of two dining rooms showed that when students took napkins from dispensers at the beginning of the cafeteria line, each person used an average of 3.3 napkins at each meal. In another area, staff placed napkin dispensers on tables, and each person there used an average of 1.4 napkins at each meal.

#### **ENERGY USE**

Turn off lights when you're not in the room, only turn on the gas when you need to cook. Obvious but often ignored, these simple measures can save thousands each year. With a little training and encouragement food service staff and customers can become more aware of their energy usage.

Some institutions have installed sensors in buildings so that lights turn on when some one enters a room and off when the room is empty.

#### **INFORMATION SOURCES**

"Making less garbage on campus: A hands on guide" by David Saphire, published by INFORM, Inc.  
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