



The Ohio State University - 2019 RecycleMania Case Study

1. Contact info:

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2. Focus of Case study

Measure the impact of different education strategies on the level of contamination found in organic, post-consumer waste collected in a traditional, “cafeteria style” dining facility.

3. Detailed description of campaign component:

This composting initiative was a two-week project with the goal of measuring contamination levels in post-consumer, organic waste collected in a traditional dining facility. The variable for the test was the type of educational strategy in the collection area. The project took place in Traditions at Morrill, an all-you-can-eat, traditional dining facility that produces about 40 tons of food scraps and compostable waste per year.

Week one spanned from February 18th until February 24th, 2019, with bin guards (student volunteers) located on site, from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. every day. The bin guards educated students about correct food waste sorting by informing diners about whether the leftover items on their tray were trash or compostable. There was also signage on the bins specifically stating what items could be composted and which needed to be placed in the trash.

Week two spanned from February 25th until March 3rd, from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. every day. This week of the campaign involved no bin guards. Student volunteers passively monitored the bins without assisting unless necessary to limit contamination and maximize composting. The purpose of this effort was to monitor what students were doing under no assistance, and to understand whether they knew how to differentiate between what is compostable and what is trash. At the end of each day, contaminants, if any, were removed from the compost bags and the bags were then transferred to the loading docks for pickup

The printed educational materials and the social media posts were identical during both weeks. These materials showcased the composting pilot project, and provided guidelines to assist students in sorting trash and compostable items.

This initiative was led by students from the Sustainability Committee of Undergraduate Student Government (USG) and supported by other student organizations and university departments as listed below.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

The pilot project took place from February 18 through March 3rd 2019. Due to the success of the project, the pilot was extended through the end of Spring Semester 2019.

Planning timeline:

- A. **2017.** In fall 2017, FOD Energy Services & Sustainability partnered with the Food Waste Collaborative and Student Life Dining Services to establish a baseline for organics disposal from Traditions at Morrill. According to preliminary measurements, the facility sends about 30,000 pounds of post-consumer food scraps to the landfill annually. Because of the facility's relatively remote location off Cannon Drive, there is infrequent cross traffic from the students who normally visit the other main dining facilities (Traditions at Scott and Traditions at Kennedy). As a result, Morrill Tower serves the same student diner population. The consistent customer population offers a unique opportunity on campus to test educational strategies that utilize the resources specific to the hall, such as floor signage and hall notices. Morrill is also an ideal location because it serves a significantly smaller sample size than the other Traditions locations.
- B. **2018.** Ongoing planning meetings between USG, FOD and Student Life
- C. **Spring 2019.** FOD Energy Services and Sustainability provided resources and support to test post-consumer compost collection from the dining location. The introduction of new compost bins in the campus dining hall required ongoing communication with customers to highlight the bin change, minimize contamination, and make the connection to environmental benefits of composting. The most significant barrier to post-consumer organics collection is contamination from non-compostable materials, such as plastics. During the two week period, the waste material was assessed for material weight, material size, and contamination levels. To examine contamination reduction messaging strategies, the pilot was divided into two phases. These were Week 1 and Week 2 as described above.

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

- Groups that supported the project:
 - Undergraduate Student Government (USG) - Sustainability Committee (Maria Le, Animesh Bapat, Dominique Hadad, Kaiya Weston and Alyssa Barbuto)
 - Facilities Operations & Development – Energy Services and Sustainability (Tony Gillund and Mary Leciejewski)
 - Student Life
 - Dining Services (Kathie Serif and Cory Stratton)
 - Energy Management & Sustainability (Tom Reeves and Carlos Lugo)
 - Student organization(s) that supported the project with volunteers:
 - Students For Recycling
- FOD covered the cost of food waste hauling.

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

- a. General results

- Strong student volunteer commitment to the project. USG was the project champion. They developed the proposal, pushed for implementation, led the marketing campaign, and recruited enough volunteers to cover 150 hours.
- According to the food waste hauling vendor the levels of contamination were very low
- Student campus paper (The Lantern) did a story on the event.
 - <https://www.thelantern.com/2019/04/morrill-tower-composting-program-helps-move-university-toward-zero-waste-goal/>
- Due to the positive feedback and results, Dining Services agreed to continue the project until the end of Spring semester of 2019

b. Specific measurable impact figures, if applicable

- 800 pounds of post-consumer food waste was collected during the two weeks of the original pilot project.
- 3,173 pounds of post-consumer food waste was collected throughout Recyclemania 2019 (February 19-March 26, 2019).
- 150 hours of student time spent on education and observation during the 2-week pilot project
- 1,684 residents who are served primarily by this dining facility, and who were potentially educated through active, or passive educational campaign.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

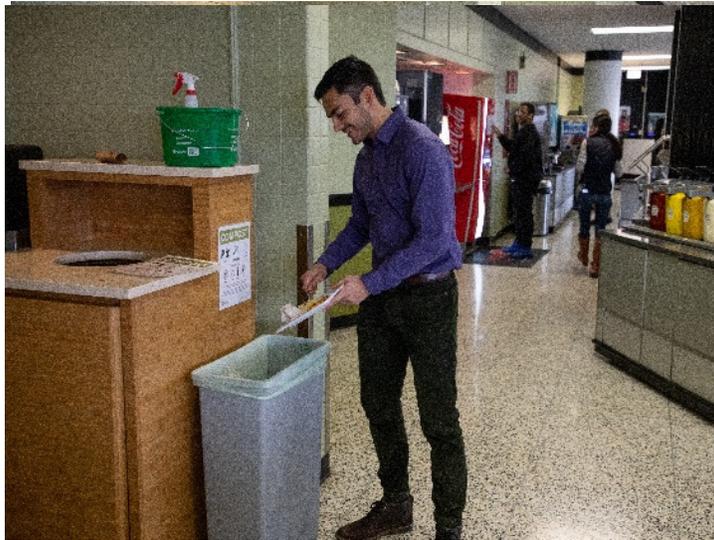
- One of the biggest issues that we have currently is the cost of hauling and the cost of the compostable liners. The compostable liners are about \$1.00 each, and we currently pay \$0.08 per trash liner. We are looking into the possibility of eliminating the use of liners altogether, but we are concerned about additional staffing costs for cleaning the cans.
- As far as hauling costs, we did add a few more containers through the course of the project, but unfortunately it was still not enough, and there is no space in the facility to add more. There is the possibility of modifying the space in the future, but that will involve building modifications and a capital expense.
- Signage should be revised to be more specific about whether certain items can be composted, such as paper products from sugar packets, straws, and liquid foods.

8. What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

- Obtain buy-in from the management of the dining facility up-front. Having them involved from the early phases of the project helped our team to streamline the process.
- Think about budget and expenses as soon as you start planning the project. Funding is crucial for this to become a long term project.

9. Photos and Graphics

Photographs courtesy of Kerem Gencer (gencer.7@osu.edu)



Bin guard with customer



Bin guard

Customer

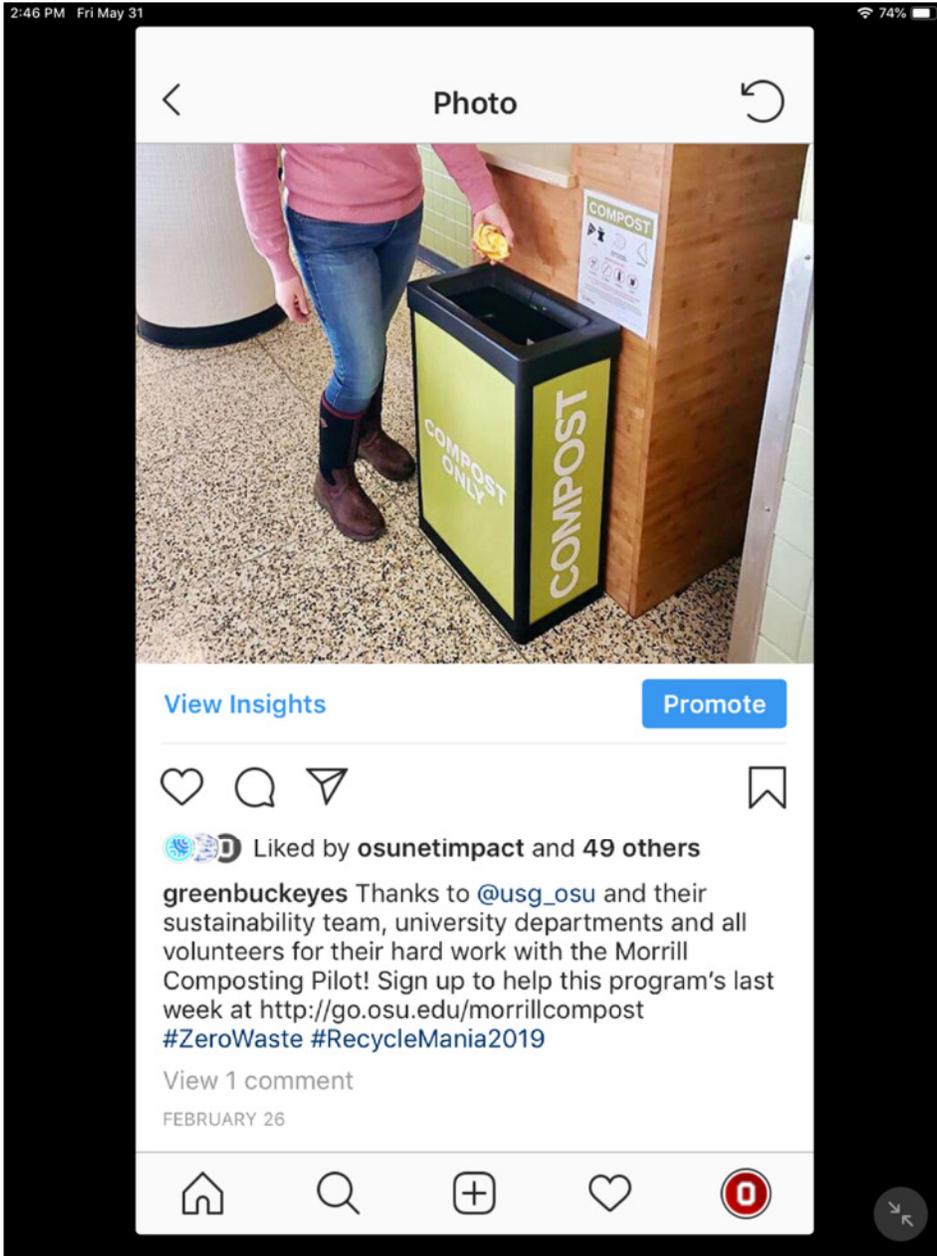
Social media campaign images



Twitter post



Instagram post



Instagram post (detail)