2020 RecycleMania
University of Connecticut
Food Waste Program
Food to Fuel

Case Study

1. Contact Information

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2. Focus of Case Study

Within my project, Food to Fuel, involvement, engagement, and life-long learning is my priority. Students are creating habits in college for their futures, this program is providing students opportunities to create healthy and sustainable lives.

3. Description of Campaign Component:

In the United States, an estimated forty percent of all food doesn't get eaten, so where is it going? At UConn, about 2.5 ounces of food per meal is wasted within the dining halls, but at least here, at UConn, we know where it is going. UConn Dining Services tracks food waste using LeanPath technology, before it gets taken to Quantum BioPower, a state-of-the-art anaerobic digester, where it either gets turned into compost or biogas that powers local communities. This is a great innovative leap forward in terms of dealing with food waste at UConn, but fails to account for food waste that the UConn Dining Halls do not come into contact with, such as in campus housing, cafes, offices, etc.

This last semester, I piloted a food waste project, through the funding and support of UConn's Office of Undergraduate Research, through the Co-Op Legacy Fellowship which awarded me a Change Grant. With this grant, I piloted "Food to Fuel" which provided students in on-campus apartments, a one-gallon bin to sustainably dispose of their food waste. It joins the food waste from the Dining Halls on the way down to Quantum BioPower in Southington, CT.

Each week of the semester, I offered continuous education for students on how to live a sustainable lifestyle and create habits to maintain after graduation. Food waste is more than just a banana gone bad, it is about lost nutrition, pesticides, transportation, fossil fuels,

capitalism, and I could go on and on. As soon as a student walks into the grocery store, they have the choice to impact their food waste, it is not just dependent on the discard of it. All semester, I did not let up the push and outreach to encourage students to sign up, via social media, Residential Life, flyers, and word of mouth. This program focuses on empowerment and action; students often feel hopeless in the climate crisis, so by providing them an opportunity to engage in the community and educate themselves, students felt like they were really making a difference.

The project was a success, but unfortunately like many things this semester, was cut short. Food to Fuel, was not just about food waste, but also about providing an opportunity for students to take their environmental impact into their own hands, even if the impact might seem small, it can be empowering. The program is looking to be expanded to other areas of campus in the fall.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- Secure funding through a Change Grant. (October 2019)
- Discuss with Dining Services, Residential Life, and Facilities, how the food waste will get from students' apartments to Quantum BioPower. (November 2019)
    - One 45-gallon food grade container was placed centrally in the apartment complex for drop-off. Once a week, the WilliWaste truck picks up the food waste, along with the dining hall waste, and brings it down to Quantum BioPower.
- Pick out the bin to use. The bins had to be dishwasher safe, convenient, and easy for students to use and fit on their countertop. (December 2019)
- Advertise the opportunity and enlist for participants via facebook, instagram, flyers, etc. (December 2019 - Spring 2020 Semester)
- Create educational materials, not all students know how to compost and what can/cannot go inside the bin. Quantum BioPower set strict guidelines to follow for zero contamination. (December 2019)
- Provide the bins to students (January 2020)
- Meet with apartment complex RA's to explain the project and train them for when residents ask questions. (January 2020)
- Host kick-off event to encourage more participation and allows apartment residents see that this is a student run initiative. (January 2020)
- Begin incentive program: Whenever an apartment dumps out their bin at the drop-off location, I asked participants to send me a picture. Every week I draw a raffle of all the participants who sent me a picture, and the winner gets a $20 Dunkin Donuts gift card. (January 2020-March 2020)
- Once students have the bins and are educated, it is smooth sailing. All participants stay connected in a GroupME group chat if they have questions.
- I constantly and consistently create new flyers and information to be spread throughout campus to encourage more participation.

- Once the semester closed out, I sent a feedback survey to participants to help continue improving the program. (April 2020)
- The next step is expansion of the program if we are on campus for the fall semester.

5. Resources and Stakeholders

The Change Grant awarded me $2,000. Each 1-gallon bin and lid cost about $2.80 each, there were 100 bins purchased. Educational, dishwasher safe stickers are placed on each bin which cost $180. Dining Services provided the drop-off bin and pickup services at no charge, and Residential Life and RAs provided their time and support at no cost.
I had much guidance from my grant team, which included my mentor Julia Cartabiano, Spring Valley Student Farm Manager, and the assistant director of the Office of Undergraduate Research, Melissa Berkey. We also collaborated with Dining Services, Residential Life, Facilitates, and WilliWaste. This was a joint effort that needed support from all parties mentioned to be successful.

6. Results of Campaign Component

a. General results
Program featured by UConn Communications, on UConn 360 Podcast https://uconn.edu/uconn360-podcast/episode-54-keep-on-truckin/ from about 2:30-11:30

Daily Campus newspaper article:
https://dailycampus.com/stories/2020/3/12/feldman-fires-up-food-to-fuel-uconn-junior-tackles-food-waste-in-hilltop-apartments
Please see attached.

b. Specific measurable impact figures, if applicable
The program ended early, March 15th due to COVID-19, but up until that point it was running steadily with positive feedback from the participants. Around 70 of the bins were collected by students, one bin per apartment. Approximately 1,700 lbs of food waste was diverted from the incernator because of this program!
The trash receptacles at UConn move the waste to an incinerator, Quantum BioPower is a more sustainable outlet.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

In the future, I would enlist more help by building a team of students to better support this project. There are countless students on campus who are passionate about the environment and particularly moving towards zero waste. It was hard and lonely at times to handle this all

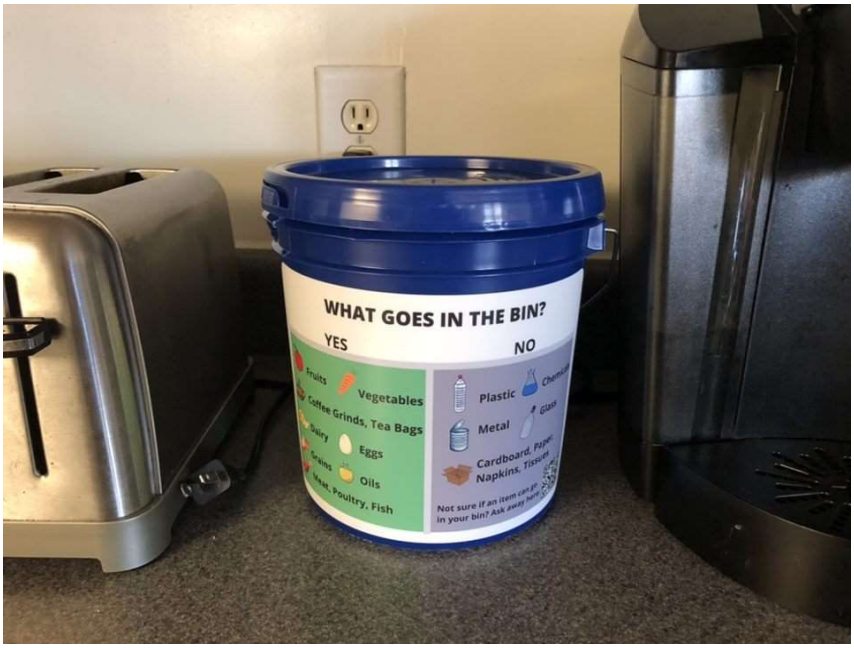
by myself. It would also have been helpful to get an already established student organization that has similar interests involved. If COVID had not interrupted the semester, I would have loved to do a mid-semester event that check-in on students' concerns and gathered feedback with the program. Similarly, I had planned a closeout event at the end of the year.

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

If you have an idea, if you see a gap on your campus, odds are you are not the only one! Start talking to your peers, staff, faculty, and you never know where it may lead you. Opportunity arises in all kinds of places. I had wanted to begin a compost project at my high school, I never got to it there so I started it at UConn. It is important to be aware that not everyone comes from similar backgrounds, my roommate had no idea what to do with our bucket, but by the end of the semester she said she was going to start a compost back home with her family. Educate and empower wherever you can!

9. Photos and Graphics

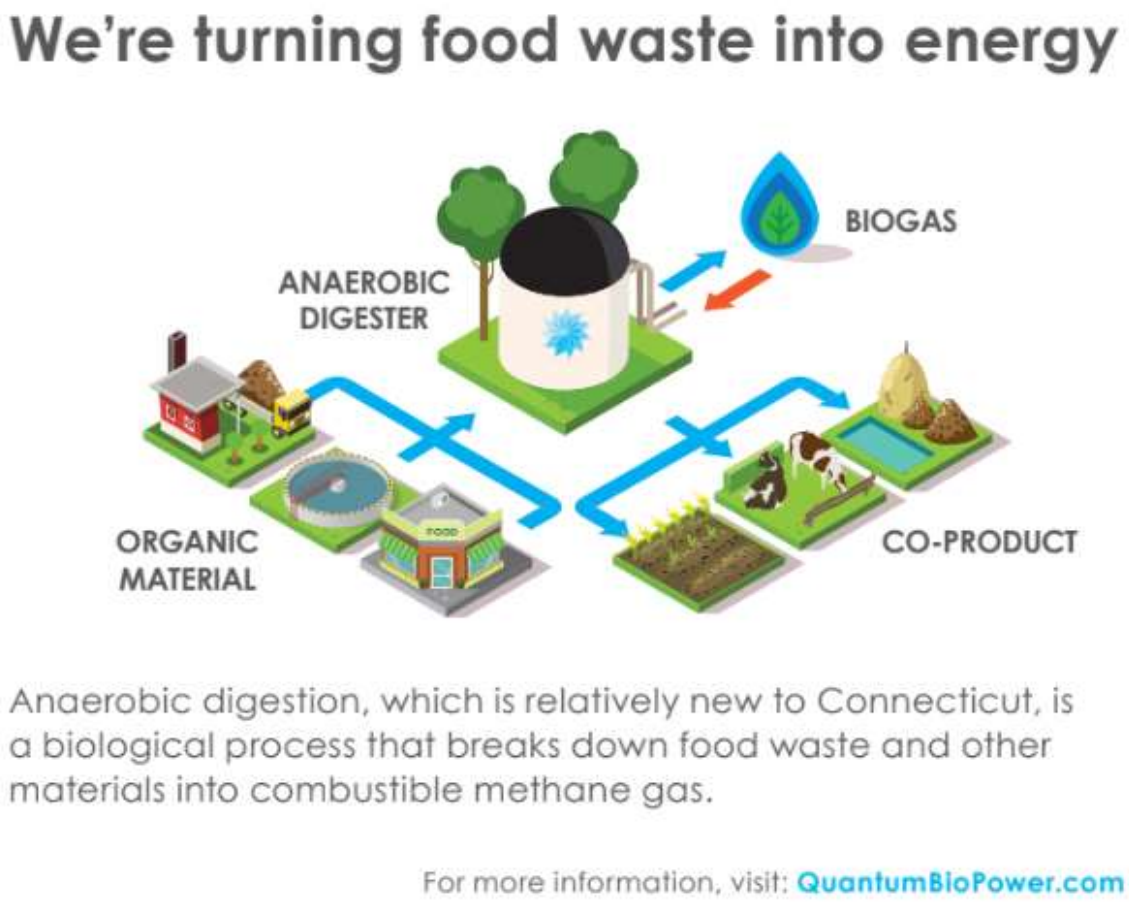
Food Waste Bin with educational sticker:



Drop-off Bin:

Program Logo:

Quantum BioPower information:



Source: Quantum BioPower

Appendices

1. Daily Campus Article
2. Participant Feedback
3. Examples of promotional material