



## 2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

### Towson University

**Contact info:**

Meghan Bennett

Facilities Management – Office of Sustainability

Towson University

[meghanbennett@towson.edu](mailto:meghanbennett@towson.edu)

410-704-3712

**Focus of Case study:**

Towson University coordinated with the Maryland Department of the Environment to integrate food waste reduction strategies into the annual state Food Summit, hosted at TU.

**Detailed description of campaign or effort:**

In late 2023, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) began soliciting for host sites for the annual MDE Food Summit. The MDE Food Summit brings together leaders from across the state in a day-long summit with the purpose of rallying together for food recovery and diversion in Maryland. The TU Office of Sustainability saw this as an opportunity to showcase the great food system work happening at TU and as a chance to host a zero-waste event that reflected the summit's focus. The TU Office of Sustainability submitted an innovative bid with a strong emphasis on minimizing food waste.

Once TU was selected as the host site, the TU Office of Sustainability worked with MDE and TU catering to develop a menu that highlighted local, in-season, and planet-friendly food options that reduced unnecessary food waste as much as possible. This included: mashed potatoes made with red potatoes to avoid discarding the potato skins, cake pops made from leftover cake from dining halls, invasive blue catfish cakes, seasonal vegetable salad, and local yogurt, coffee, salad mix, and snacks. Catering also worked to right-size serving portions and minimize food packaging as much as possible. The only food served in single-use packaging was the locally produced popcorn and jerky. Meals were also served buffet style, so guests could take as much or as little food as was right for them.

During the event, volunteers from TU's chapter of the Food Recovery Network worked to collect and sort all food service waste. Clear collection bins were placed in a visible location so all guests could see directly how much food

waste was generated. The volunteers weighed each waste stream after each meal and at the conclusion of the event.

During the last hour of the event, catering was instructed to bring all leftovers back out for service, and guests were given compostable to-go containers to take any remaining food home with them. This was very popular among guests and no food was left in the trays at the end of the day.

In total 153 people attended the event, two meals were served, plus snacks, and only 7.27 pounds of food residuals and 0.60 pounds of trash were generated. No single-use items were used so there was no recycling generated. This only includes waste from the ballroom where food was served, not the breakout rooms or back-of-house meal preparation.

#### **Planning steps & timeline to implement:**

- October 2023
  - Initial conversations with MDE to discuss TU as a potential host site.
- November 2023
  - TU met with MDE to tour the potential event space and discuss the vision for the event.
  - TU Office of Sustainability (OS) worked with dining to get a catering quote for the event that included a low-waste focus and reusable dishware.
  - TU submitted a bid to host the MDE Food Summit.
- December 2023
  - TU was selected as the host site for the MDE Food Summit.
- January 2024
  - OS began working with the University Advancement office to secure sponsorships for the event.
  - OS and MDE met with TU Events and Conference Services to walk the space and discuss event logistics.
  - OS and MDE had their initial meeting with catering to discuss the food for the event and how to make the event as low waste as possible.
- February 2024
  - OS held multiple check-ins with MDE to ensure that event planning was running smoothly.
  - Catering plans were finalized.
- March 2024
  - The [MDE Food Summit](#) was held on March 19<sup>th</sup> from 8 am to 4 pm.
  - Event waste data was sent to all participants post-event.

#### **Resources and stakeholders involved:**

##### Food Budget:

\$13,000 which included:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ● House-made assorted pastries & muffins | ● Tea                                       |
| ● Local jams & jellies                   | ● Juices                                    |
| ● Local yogurt                           | ● Garden salad with local produce           |
| ● Local coffee                           | ● Blue Catfish Cakes with Old Bay Remoulade |

- Grilled Lemon Rosemary Chicken
- Pasta Primavera with grilled vegetables and local basil
- Roasted Garlic Red-skin Mashed Potatoes
- Cake Pops
- True Pop (local) - Popcorn
- Stick It (local) - Beef Jerky Sticks
- Seasonal Fruit & Cheese Display
- Roasted Garlic Hummus with Carrots, Celery, and Fried Flatbreads
- Staffing/service charges
- Linens
- China (plates and stainless steel flatware)
- Takeout containers for guests

#### Sponsorship:

Silver Tier (\$500 - \$999):

- Coker Composting & Consulting
- Shore Soils
- Wies
- Waste Neutral

Gold Tier (\$1000 - \$2000)

- ABM
- Aramark

Platinum Tier (\$2000 - \$5000)

- Coca-Cola

#### Student Labor:

\$240 (2 students at \$15/hour for 8 hours)

1 student volunteer (8 hours)

#### Stakeholders and support:

- **Office of Sustainability:** Submitted bid to host the MDE food summit, coordinated between all stakeholders and partners, supported menu development, and assisted with event logistics.
- **Maryland Department of the Environment:** Hosted the summit and supported zero waste efforts and food waste minimization.
- **Aramark Dining:** Created an innovative menu focused on waste minimization and local food.
- **Catering Staff:** Helped coordinate the collection of food waste for weighing, made sure all food was brought back out at the end of the event for guests to take home, and made sure to only bring out food as needed during the event to minimize waste.
- **Food Recovery Network Volunteers:** Collected and weighted all food-related waste.
- **Events and Conference Services:** Event logistics and planning
- **Design and Graphic Services:** Made all signage for the event
- **Event Sponsors:** Sponsors included Coca-Cola, Aramark, ABM, Coker, Waste Neutral, Shore Soils, and Weis. Sponsors help make the event a success and the food waste reduction efforts possible.

#### **Describe the Results of this campaign component:**

#### General Results

Many attendees mentioned that the food waste reduction efforts were the best they'd ever seen from an event like this. Attendees also felt that it was important that a summit focused on food waste reduction took waste avoidance steps.

Multiple attendees, including representatives from the EPA, have reached out to MDE and Towson University since the event to express their gratitude for the waste reduction efforts taken.

#### Specific Measurable Impact

Attendees	153
Compost	7.37 pounds
Recycling	0 pounds
Trash	0.60 pounds
Ounces of waste per person	0.87 ounces
Diversion Rate	92% <sup>1</sup>

#### **What would you do differently in the future?**

- Make the efforts more obvious to the guest. Additional signage detailing the food waste reduction efforts associated with each dish would have been helpful.
- Announce at the beginning of the event the many food waste reduction efforts that are taking place during the event.
- Make a large sign that can accompany the waste collection stations. The signage would include information on why the scraps are being collected.
- Announce the total compost and trash weights at the end of the event.
- Communicate expectations better with the catering staff. Require catering to weigh any waste they collected or created back-of-house.
- Create a report post-event to share with dining, highlighting the success of the event and encouraging them to take similar actions at all catered events.

#### **What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?**

- The steps we took were actually very simple. Don't try to overcomplicate it. The hardest/most time-consuming part is coordinating with stakeholders.
- Our catering team was on board because they wanted to showcase to attendees what they were capable of. Showing your dining provider how this type of effort can benefit them will help them get on board.
- Use your efforts as a case study to show your dining provider that these techniques can be used for other events and at dining halls in the future.
- It's important to note that this was an event for zero waste professionals and our results could have been different if we were hosting an event with a less informed audience. It was especially noticeable that very few guests had food remaining on their plates. We assume that this audience was already thinking about food waste when deciding on how much food to take. It would be interesting to host another event, following these same steps, but for a different audience, and compare the results.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on the definition of a zero waste event (10% or less landfilled waste), the event was a zero waste event.

## Photos and Graphics:

### FOOD SUMMIT 2024

PERSONS REGISTERED AS OF 3/18 = 182

PERSONS ATTENDED ON THE DAY OF = 153

WAITLIST AS OF 3/18 = 33

FOOD RESIDUALS COMPOSTED = 7.7LBS

PACKAGING DISPOSED OF AS SOLID  
WASTE = 0.6 LBS

Figure 1. Summit totals sent out to participants after the event. Credit: Maryland Department of the Environment.



Figure 1. Waste collection station following breakfast. Credit: Meghan Bennett



Figure 3. Cake pops made from leftover cakes served in the dining halls. Credit: Meghan Bennett



Figure 4. Food Summit Graphic. Credit: TU Design and Graphic Services

## EVENT SPONSORS

PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



Figure 5. Food Summit Graphic. Credit: TU Design and Graphic Services

Figure 6. Signage explaining the impact of incorporating blue catfish into the menu. Credit: Patricia Watson





Figure 7. Guest using the to-go containers at the end of the event. Credit: Patricia Watson