



The University of Texas at Dallas 2020 RecycleMania Case Study

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2. Focus of Case study

This is a comprehensive analysis of the steps UT Dallas has taken over the past few years to improve its food waste diversion program on campus.

3. Detailed description of campaign component:

The food waste reduction program at UT Dallas began in 2012 with an on-campus pre-consumer food waste composting program. Facilities Management took the lead on this, and leftover scraps were used for campus fertilizing projects. However, the program has come a long way since then, and the current food waste reduction program can be divided into 3 main parts.

UT Dallas officially partnered with Organix in 2017 with an aim to create a more inclusive and efficient composting program across campus. In 2018, post-consumer food waste collection was added at Dining Hall west, the only dining hall on campus. Following this change, food waste composted at UT Dallas soared, with an almost **40,000**-pound compost increase from 2018 to 2019. **100,000** pounds of food composted in a single year was a huge feat, showing the impressive results of UTD's commitment to food waste diversion.

Student Government has successfully implemented a residential composting program entitled the "Comet Composting" program. After attending a brief training, these individuals gain access to on-campus compost collection bins for them to dispose of their waste. Students, staff, and faculty are all welcome to attend the training, and the individualized caddies provided by Green Initiative make composting easily accessible for all comets. The program continues today and has been growing in participation and success ever since. Since then, more than **11,000** pounds of food waste has been composted from on-campus resident participants of the program.

A Food Recovery Network chapter is also very active on UTD's campus. Since its founding in 2016, the chapter has donated over 6500 pounds to help local food insecure members of the community. In 2019, the chapter donated 959 pounds of food to Hope's Door, a local DFW women's shelter.

These three components, along with many passionate stakeholders across campus, allows UT Dallas' food waste diversion program to be successful and efficient.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

This section will be presented as the timeline UT Dallas followed to accomplish the food waste program we have now.

- In 2012, UT Dallas began composting pre-consumer food waste contributions. Dining Services took the lead on this and saved all leftover scraps from preparing food.
 - Originally, this was added to an on-campus composting program ran by Facilities Management. These composting contributions were used on campus in place of a regular fertilizer. Beginning this partnership between Dining Services and Facilities Management, even on a small scale, was essential towards building the program for the future.
- In 2016, students on the UT Dallas campus founded a Food Recovery Network chapter. UT Dallas took similar steps to case studies that have been published in the past on this particular step. A group of passionate students found local organizations that would be in need of food, and then volunteered to help Dining Services package up leftover food items to bring to these in need people in the local community. To this day, this is a volunteer operation with a very similar process to that at other schools.
- The biggest step towards accomplishing a highly inclusive food waste program is to make the move to partner with an industrial composter. In August 2017, UT Dallas partnered with Organix for inclusive composting and efficiency.
 - Organix is a composting company with partnerships all across the nation, including many restaurants, supermarkets, and campuses. This partnership was led by the Office of Sustainability, who was able to coordinate the same food waste contributions relationship between Dining Services and Facilities Management with one small change: outsourcing the disposal of this compost material to an off-campus location through this company.
- Once this partnership was made, UT Dallas was able to expand composting to include post-consumer food waste contributions. In September 2018, about a year after the partnership was originally made with Organix, Student Government's Green Initiative took the lead on founding the Comet Composting program. This came with a few essential steps.

- Green Initiative identified an individual composting bin style they would use for the program and purchased about 100 of these for on-campus residents to begin the program.
- Additionally, Organix composting bins were installed near two of the main residential areas on campus. Green Initiative developed a training that would provide residents with the necessary knowledge to compost correctly.
- The Office of Sustainability installed reusable bag dispensers near the industrial Organix composting bins and implemented locks that only those trained would be able to access the compost bins.
- With some marketing across campus, student residents began to show up to Comet Composting trainings, and food waste contributions skyrocketed.
- It was also during this time that post-consumer food waste collection was added at Dining Hall West. There were several critical steps to establish this successfully.
 - One was to make sure that all materials inside the dining hall were compostable; this was an easy way to prevent any contamination of the compost bins. Any distribution of plastics in the Dining Hall was eliminated, all dining items were reusable, and the napkins were compostable inside of Dining Hall West.
 - Then, Facilities Management placed two composting bins near the dish drop-off area. Composting was the only method of disposal in the Dining Hall, and thus students scraped all leftover food into the composting bins, creating an all-inclusive program in the Dining Hall.
- The UT Dallas Sustainability Office has also recently made efforts to expand educational and marketing materials for composting on campus. Recently, we launched [Digital Earth Day](#), an online campaign in April of 2020 that was an all-inclusive educational effort about sustainability framed by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Some videos that directly pertained to composting were included.
 - [One video](#) gave some tips for starting your own at-home composting system. A member of ECO, the Environmental Conservation Organization on campus, gave suggestions, motivating others to compost properly in their own homes.
 - [Another video](#) made by Green Initiative gave an overview of how the Comet Composting program was created and how it functions on campus today.
 - In order to establish this online campaign, the Office of Sustainability contacted campus departments, faculty, student organizations, and students interested in sustainability and encouraged them to submit videos about any sustainability topic, relating it back to a UN

Sustainable Development Goal. These video submissions, limited to 5 minutes long, were reviewed by a student worker and uploaded to the page. Then, the Sustainability Office promoted the videos on our social media pages and we saw increased web traffic and a great amount of positive feedback from students who watched the videos online.

- Since establishing a successful Food Recovery Network chapter, expanding the Comet Composting program across campus, and adding both pre and post-consumer food waste contributions at the campus dining hall, UT Dallas has exponentially increased the amount of food waste diverted from going to landfills. By partnering with an industrial composter and including other campus stakeholders as UTD has, we think other campuses could also build expansive and successful food waste recovery programs.

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

The gamechanger for UT Dallas was when we partnered with Organix, an industrial composter who was able to streamline food waste reduction on campus and create a measurable impact. This also incorporated several different stakeholders across campus.

- Student Government Green Initiative: Allocated student fees to fund caddy purchase from Organix, Help distribute comet composting caddies to residents across campus
- Dining Services: Compost pre-consumer food waste contributions and make contributions to Food Waste Recovery Network, Compost post-consumer food waste contributions through collection bins, Fund service of compost bins in respective locations
- UT Dallas Housing: Help facilitate individual residents composting within their apartments and dorms.
- Facilities Management: In charge of all waste on campus, established food waste contribution bins in campus dining hall, continue to help facilitate food waste contributions and relationship with Organix
 - Sustainability Office: A liaison between all campus stakeholders involved in composting, Provides composting training resources

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

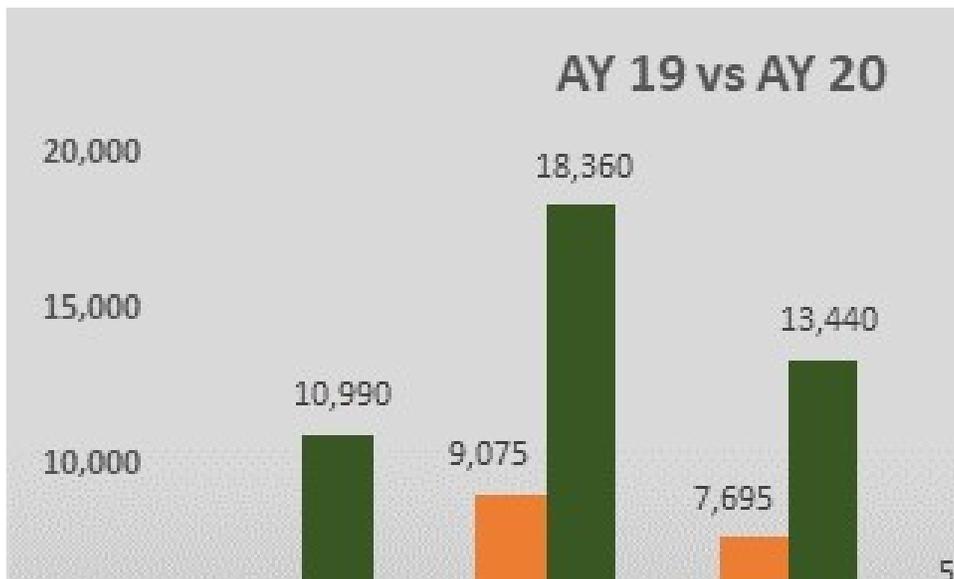
a. General results:

The food waste program at UT Dallas has been periodically mentioned in campus news articles and press releases. Additionally, it has gained campus traction as composting bins are recognizable across campus and more and popular for individual residents. The UT Dallas website has [an entire informational page](#) dedicated to Food Waste and Composting on campus, including the Comet Composting program, Food Service Composting, Landscape Waste, and ways to get involved with composting on campus. This page also has [a map](#) of composting bins on campus that makes getting involved in the program easily accessible and understandable. Before UT Dallas partnered with Organix to create the comprehensive food composting program that is on campus today, composting was already gaining regional traction. In 2016, the State of Texas

Alliance for Recycling [recognized UT Dallas](#) with the Outstanding Sustainable Materials Management Award for the on-campus composting program that Facilities Management had developed. When post-consumer food waste was first added on campus, the UTD News Center published [this article](#) detailing the hopeful plans for the food waste program's future in Dining Hall West. A few months after this program had been successfully implemented, Green Source DFW, a local environmental news resource, published [this article](#) boasting the program's success at UTD. The Mercury, UT Dallas' student newspaper, has also published high visibility news articles about the steps UT Dallas is taking towards processing food waste. [This September 2019 article](#) discusses the Sustainability Innovation Award UT Dallas was presented with from APPA, and this [older 2018 article](#) provided visibility when the Comet Composting program first began. More recently, [this Sustainability Office press release](#) details the food waste diversion results from UTD in the RecycleMania competition this year with a comprehensive analysis of food waste efforts on campus since the program began.

b. Specific measurable impact figures:

As of recently, just under 100 residents are involved in the Comet Composting program across campus. The following graphs are a display of how the amount of food waste composted on campus has improved over the past 8 years, peaking in 2020. Once post-consumer food waste collection was added at Dining Hall West, the only dining hall on campus, collection soared, increasing by about 40,000 pounds to reach over 100,000 pounds of food waste collected in a single year. While it is great that we have a large increase in amount composted, it is also important to note that we have an educational and awareness campaign to reduce the amount of food that people are putting on their plates in the first place. Simply composting more food waste does not necessarily prove a greater food waste program; however, the combination of this growth in numbers and the Dining Hall resources that urge residents to only eat what they can take shows a very inclusive and successful program. Although the 2020 academic year was cut short, UT Dallas was project to almost double the amount of food waste composted between 2019 and 2020, as displayed through the monthly numbers in the second graph.



7. What would you do differently in the future?

Although our food waste diversion program is currently rather comprehensive, there are certainly areas of improvement that we are targeting to make better in the future. They are as follows:

- Advertise Comet Composting, our residential composting program, better
 - We have the infrastructure to expand the number of residents who are involved in this program. However, the turnout at Composting training remains lower than what we would like it to be. In the future, we hope to market the program better and make training events more accessible and well-advertised. By expanding the number of

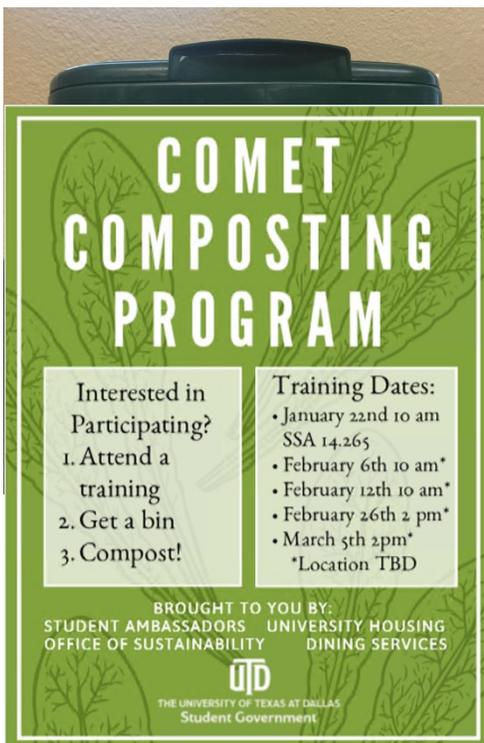
residents involved in the comet composting program, we could definitely increase the amount of food waste diverted from residents significantly.

- Expand post-consumer food waste to other locations on campus.
 - Currently, we have limited post-consumer food waste collection to Dining Hall West because all products in the dining hall can be recycled; there is no trash. It is difficult to expand post-consumer food waste composting for fear of compost error and plastic contamination of the compost. However, finding a way to expand post-consumer food waste to include food retailers on campus, the student union, etc. could also greatly expand the amount of food waste diverted from landfills.

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

- Take small steps at improvement. Building up the food waste diversion program at UT Dallas to be what it is today definitely took a lot of time and involvement from many stakeholders across campus. Jumping into a comprehensive food waste diversion program is very difficult; instead, slowly expanding the program is a much more successful approach. Although expansion may move faster or in a different order at your university than ours, definitely recognize that it is a slow developing process.
- Partner with an industrial composter. This is a great way to streamline the process and make all composting on campus more efficient.
- Involve as many stakeholders as possible, especially passionate students. The Food Recovery Network is student-run, and Student Government took the lead on the Comet Composting Program. Involving many different people, especially students, across campus allows UT Dallas to maximize the amount of food waste composted.

9. Photos and Graphics



This picture is displayed on the UTD Office of Sustainability website. It is an individual composting bin, given to residents who participate in the Green Initiative Comet Composting program. Residents can collect their food waste in this reusable bin and then dispose it in the Organix drop-off bins on campus.

Created by Student Government and periodically updated with the latest dates and information, this flyer advertises trainings for the Comet Composting program. It has been used on UTDSG and UTD Office of Sustainability Social Media, and printed out and displayed in the Student Union and residential areas on campus.



This is a great informational flyer provided by our industrial composter on campus, Organix. It is an accurate representation of how the Comet Composting individual composting program works. Residents can pick up their bag, fill their bin, and drop off their compost as displayed. This image is used in the Comet Composting trainings.

This is another great image used in our Comet Composting trainings. Also provided by Organix, it gives a clear outline of what can and can't be composted on campus. This image is also displayed near compost bins in the dining hall and other composting drop off areas on campus. It is a great reminder for all those who participate!



Moving on to inside of the Dining Hall, this is an image of the dish and food drop off area in Dining Hall West. The grey bin with the green lid in the center of the image is where all food waste can be disposed of. Residents scrape their food waste into the bin, and then place their dishes in the dish drop-off area.



This is a napkin dispenser inside the Dining Hall. As you can see, the infographic educated residents about food waste and how much an issue it can be when not properly treated.



A cool image of one of the walls inside the Dining Hall. It encourages those who eat there to “Know the Story of Your Food” and support local communities.



Another wall inside of Dining Hall West. This provides information about the Food Recovery Network’s success on campus, and also displays information of places we get out food from and donate our food to.

Standard Collection Receptacles



The above image is displayed in the Comet Composting trainings for residents on campus. This is a large drop-off bin for those who participate in the program. Once residents fill their individual bins, they can drop off food waste here; only those who participate are given the lock combination to prevent contamination.



A movable compost bin; many can be found across campus. This may be used in the Dining Hall after food waste is collected, or to dispose of other compost from collection bins on campus.