



2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study

Waste Wise Wednesday at Appalachian State University

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Focus of case study:

The focus of the case study is to educate students on how to better sort their waste inside the dining hall in a fun and interactive way.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Late in Fall 2022, the Office of Sustainability learned that our Landscape Services team was having difficulties at our compost facility due to the amount of contamination that was coming from our central dining hall. As a zero-waste learning opportunity, our sustainability ambassadors spent 20 hours over a two-week period, hand sorting the compost collected from the dining halls, documenting each contaminate and calculating diversion rates. As a result of this audit, Campus Dining worked with the sustainability ambassadors on ideas to improve the quality of the waste stream and to increase learning opportunities for students inside the dining halls to re-establish the composting culture at the university.

Campus Dining was able to make changes to operations, including sorting compost back of house to ensure clean material was going to the compost facility to be composted. They have also begun working with the Office of Sustainability to redesign communications in the dish return space, highlighting their emphasis on local foods and describing how composting works at Appalachian State University, including the journey from farm to plate to composting facility. Prior to Campus Dining moving compost to back of house, our compost bins were in front of the dish return, leaving the sorting up to the students. When we became aware of the high contamination rates inside the bins, we realized there was a disconnect in education around composting and how it works.

For this case study, our student ambassadors designed a campaign known as Waste Wise Wednesday, through which they encouraged students to sort items that can be found in the dining halls into the correct waste streams. The purpose of Waste Wise Wednesday is to teach students, faculty, and staff about composting at Appalachian State University while also clearing up any misconceptions about waste flow at the university. We used items from the dining hall to create the connection between the waste and the waste stream, and students sorted these

into recycling, trash, and compost bins. If they got a certain percentage of the materials correct, they could enter a raffle to win a sustainability swag bag that included reusable dishware and other items. The design of this campaign allowed for peer-to-peer education, improvement in our composting stream, and a fun way for students to engage with our office.

Planning steps and timeline to implement:

Early to Mid-November

- Coordinated with Landscape Services to determine drop off site and sorting station, avoiding conflicts with their normal operations.
- Waste Audit Week began with four sampling periods within the first two weeks of November.
- Calculated diversion rates and created official documentation of the entire audit in a readable format for campus partners.

Late November

- Interviewed Campus Dining and Landscape Services staff to better understand each department's operations.
- Developed plans for improvement, such as back of house sorting and engaging learning opportunities for students.

January

- Coordinated with Campus Dining to collect examples of materials that are used in the dining hall.
- Hosted the first Waste Wise Wednesday on January 25th, 2023.

February-March

- Hosted additional Waste Wise Wednesday events on February 2nd, 2023 and March 22nd, 2023.

April

- Hosted additional Waste Wise Wednesday events on April 19th, 2023 and April 26th, 2023.

Resources and stakeholders involved:

There was a minimal budget for this program. We were able to obtain materials from the dining hall for the sorting game and to use mini bins we already had in the office. In the future, there would ideally be a budget for purchasing the sustainability swag bags, as students enjoy and benefit from the reusable items that we distribute.

This initiative would not be possible without the positive relationship we have with both Campus Dining and Landscape Services staff. Campus Dining has been an integral partner, both providing space for our tabling and being open to positive changes that can be made to improve the overall sustainability around food service at the university.

Describe the results of this campaign component:

- **General results:** Overall, we received great student and staff engagement. The relationship between the Office of Sustainability and Campus Dining has significantly improved, and Landscape Services is much happier with the final product they receive when running their compost routes. The overall operational change from students composting front of house to dining staff sorting back of house has drastically improved the end product.

It has opened the door for our sustainability ambassadors to focus on composting education and teach their peers about something about which they are passionate while positively improving the waste stream at Appalachian State University.

- **Specific measurable impact:** Over the case study, we were able to engage with approximately 200 students and staff.

What would you do differently in the future?

In the future we would like to improve the marketing aspect to the programming. We tried to recognize our winners after each event to encourage more students to participate during the next event. It was hard to meet that goal when a winner did not respond. We may explore more ways to keep the conversation going outside of the event itself. Another aspect to this initiative is the location within the dining hall. Location factors into the attention you are able to get from students when they are in the dining hall, and adjusting our location may increase the number of students who want to play the game. It is also possible that adjusting the time of the event would help increase engagement.

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

Advice for other colleges that would like to undergo a similar effort would be to create positive partnerships with the departments vital to your program. A unique marketing plan is crucial to increase engagement. Using actual items from the dining hall is very helpful, as students will see the items they encounter every day and know exactly in which stream they go. A helpful conversation piece is also why two items may look similar but go in two different waste streams. That helps with the educational aspect and allows students to think more deeply about their waste.



Sustainability ambassadors hosting Waste Wise Wednesday game
(Photo Credit: Lanie Karstrom)

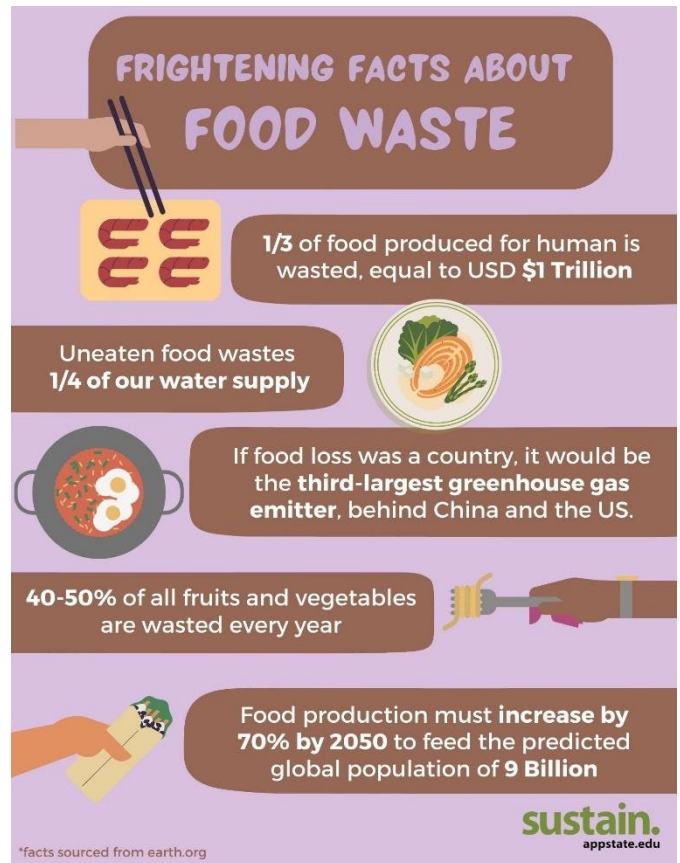


QR Code linking to Campus Dining's Zero Waste Initiatives

(Image Credit: Office of Sustainability)



Marketing flyer for Waste Wise Wednesday
(Image Credit: Campus Dining)



Informational Flyer displaying facts about food waste
(Image Credit: Office of Sustainability)



Waste Wise Wednesday tabling setup
(Photo Credit: Emma Ayscue)