



## 2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition Central Michigan University

### Contact info:

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### Focus of Case study:

Central Sustainability partnered with CMU Dining to offer food waste education in dining halls by weighing food left on students' plates.

### Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Central Michigan University (CMU) has a notable, full-circle composting program. Organic waste is collected in the dining halls and sent to Morgan Composting, then CMU buys the compost back and uses it to fertilize campus grounds. Nevertheless, it is important for CMU students to reduce their food waste. CMU has three all-you-can-eat dining halls on campus, and it is easy for students to take more than they can eat. CMU collects 330 tons of food waste every year to send to Morgan Composting. That's a lot of waste!

Central Sustainability, CMU's office of sustainability, wanted to bring awareness to the amount of food wasted daily in the dining halls, so it partnered with CMU Dining to get into the dining halls and reach students. Central Sustainability and CMU Dining collaborated during Campus Race to Zero Waste to host CMU's first-ever plate waste audit on Feb. 21, 2023. Like a typical dumpster waste audit, we collected all compostable material diverted from the landfill and weighed it. We set up a table directly in front of the conveyer belt students typically place their plate on once they are done eating. The conveyer belt sends the dirty plate, often still covered in food, back to the kitchen to be washed. We intercepted the plates and, in front of the students, dumped the food into a big, clear bucket on top of the table. Next to the table, we used signage to promote our message of reducing food waste and offered free stickers. Students watched their leftover food add up and took notice of the food waste they created by overfilling their plates at the all-you-can-eat dining hall.

At the end of the two-hour event, we collected 77 pounds of food waste and reached approximately 350 students. There are 3,600 residence-hall dwellers at CMU, so there are major outreach opportunities for future plate waste audits.

### Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- Feb. 3 – Central Sustainability and CMU Dining met to discuss the idea. Both parties agreed to participate.

- Feb 17 – Central Sustainability and CMU Dining meet again to plan the logistics of the event and secure required materials. Central Sustainability gets the scale and buckets from Facilities Management.
- Feb. 21 – Central Sustainability and CMU Dining meet at Dine and Connect dining hall at 4:30 p.m. to set up the tables with signage, stickers, the scale and bucket. The plate waste audit begins at 5 p.m. and food is added to the bucket and moved to the larger compost bin as the bucket fills up until 7 p.m. Throughout the event CMU Dining and Central Sustainability share updates to social media. At 7 p.m. the event is cleaned up.

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

The event was a partnership between Central Sustainability and CMU Dining with support from Facilities Management. No budget was needed since Facilities Management allowed Central Sustainability to borrow the scale and buckets and they take the collected compost to Morgan Composting along with the regularly collected material. As a partnership with CMU Dining, tabling was also cost-free. Staff at the event included student employees of CMU Dining and Central Sustainability.

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

- **General results:**

The event reached students in-person at the dining hall, but also virtually. Approximately 350 students ate in Dine and Connect in the 2-hour period, Central Sustainability has 378 Instagram followers, and CMU Dining has 2,031 Instagram followers. Between the in-person event and social media, we believe the message reached a wide audience of the CMU community. Students learned more about the impact of their food waste and what they can do to reduce it every day in the dining hall.

- **Specific measurable impact:**

Seventy-seven pounds of food waste were collected during the two-hour event. On Instagram, 139 accounts interacted with feed posts about the event, and Central Sustainability's Instagram Story posts reached 222 accounts.

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

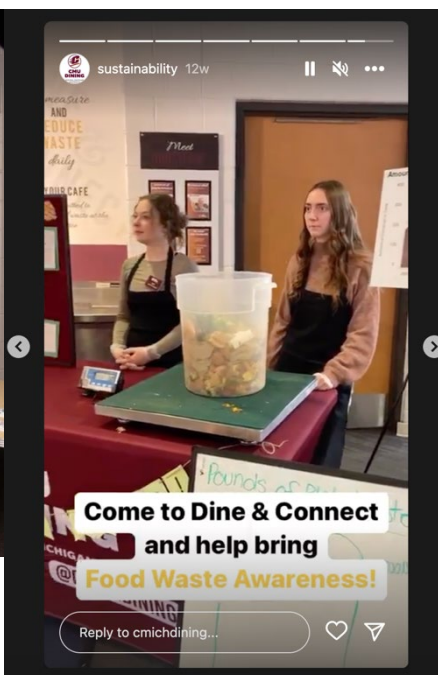
In the future, it would be beneficial to include more promotional material around the dining hall the day of the event so students are more aware of the event purpose before approaching the table. Sometimes the line to dump food in the bucket would get long and we wouldn't have enough time to explain the purpose and goal. Perhaps flyers on tables or more pre-event promotion would help.

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

Central Sustainability has gained important knowledge and opportunities by collaborating with CMU Dining. Our advice to other universities looking to put on a similar event is to seek ongoing and sustainable partnerships to support this and future endeavors. Collaborations allow for more connections, reach and possibilities.

### **Photos and Graphics:**

Photos by Central Sustainability and CMU Dining



**cmucentralsustainability** Tonight Central Sustainability collaborated with [@cmichdining](#) to spread the word about Stop Food Waste Day! We measured food waste in Dine and Connect dining hall and collected 77lbs in two hours! Make sure to only take what you need and reduce your food waste whenever you can. 🌍🍴 #centralsustainability #wedosustainability



**cmichdining** We are so thankful to partner with our Food Waste Warrior friends at [@cmucentralsustainability](#) for another plate waste audit! Thank you to everyone who stopped by to learn more about what we're doing for our planet 🌍

#stopfoodwasteday  
#earthmonth  
#foodwastewarriors

