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At a Glance:

- Boston University Dining Services serves 6.2 million meals annually.
- A compost program was instituted in 2007, including both pre and post-consumer diversion.
- The program has grown from 4 tons of organic waste composted in 2007 to over 850 tons in 2011.

RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is funded by MassDEP and delivered under contract by the Center for EcoTechnology



Food Waste Composting Case Study: Boston University Dining Services

Summary: In 2007, Boston University (BU) Dining Services established a waste diversion program in partnership with its hauler, Save that Stuff. The program was established as part of a larger campus-wide effort to reduce the University's use of non-renewable resources and operating costs, improve their environmental and social impacts, and prepare this generation to lead society toward a more sustainable future. Today, 90% of BU's dining locations divert pre-consumer food waste and 70% of their dining locations divert post-consumer food waste. In 2011 alone, Boston University composted more than 850 tons of organics.

Profile: Boston University Dining Services serves 6.2 million meals a year from 3 residential dining halls, 1 kosher dining hall, 2 catering operations, 1 faculty dining room, and 19 retail locations. These dining locations are operated with 80 managers and 500 hourly employees. BU Dining Services aims to serve wholesome, delicious and affordable food to the University community and its guests, with minimal environmental impact.

Program Evaluation: The BU program was established in 2007 in partnership with Save that Stuff. The employees and management team were trained on separating organics, cardboard, cans and bottles and recycling used fryer oil. A select group of dining locations began pre-consumer diversion in their kitchens and post-consumer organics diversion began in residential dormitory locations. Due to the program's success, pre-consumer diversion has now expanded to the vast majority of BU food service locations, while post-consumer has grown to include many retail locations with sorting stations for customers to divert food waste themselves. The program has grown from just 4 tons of organics composted in 2007 to more than 850 tons composted in 2011. At the George Sherman Union (GSU) student union, diversion rates were 31% in 2008 and increased to 73% in 2011 by adding post-consumer food waste collection. Not only has BU's diversion rate increased, they have also been able to realize a 5-10% savings per ton on waste disposal by diverting organics. The BU Dining Services Program has received the Sustainable Food Leader award from the City of Boston and is a three-star certified Green Restaurant through the Green Restaurant Association.



Boston University Students Using the Sorting Station



Implementation: Most kitchen locations on campus are equipped with 42-gallon yellow barrels located throughout the kitchen to collect food waste. Full barrels are brought to the loading dock and emptied into dedicated dumpsters or directly into the collection truck. One location utilizes a disposal and pulper system where de-watered food waste is collected in bins and then composted. In dormitory locations, dishwashers scrape leftovers and napkins into compost barrels before dishes are washed. For post-consumer composting at retail locations,

sorting stations are located throughout the facility with color-coded signs to ease sorting.

Boston University Dining Services also hosts several catered events throughout the year and wait-staff sort recycling and organics behind the scenes. Almost all waste generated by catered events is compostable. For non-staffed events on campus, customers are offered the option of a Zero Waste pickup service, where Dining Services provides a compostable bag and recycling bag as well as instructions on how to sort. One of the biggest events on campus is Commencement weekend, which generated 19 tons of organics in 2011, all of which was composted.

Signage: Signs act as guides and reminders for both employees and customers. Universal color coding has been established for signage across campus: yellow for food waste, green for recycling and black for trash, or “landfill” as they call it. Signs for customers are pictorial with minimal text for fast recognition, and posted at all container locations. Signs for employees are also pictorial with text in several languages.

Employee Training: The sustainability coordinator conducts formal training for new employees at the start of employment. Retraining for all employees and managers is provided at the beginning of each semester. Sorting instructions and sustainability guidelines comprise a section of both the employee handbook and Sustainability Handbook for managers.

Communication: Boston University Dining Services employs several types of media to broadcast their sustainability efforts, including their website, Facebook, Twitter and printed posters. They share data on diversion rates and tons recycled and composted, which encourages participation and enthusiasm among students, employees and managers. BU also hosts special events throughout the year to communicate and educate about the importance of waste diversion and reduction.

Challenge/Solution: Contamination in the organics waste stream is a challenge that must be addressed regularly, with rubber gloves being the most common contaminant. In 2012, BU Dining Services began attaching “trash buddies”, small bins clipped to the outside of compost barrels, to capture stray rubber gloves. Post-consumer contamination in their retail locations is a challenge BU addresses with education and signage. During the first week of each semester, BU Dining Services employs a group of students, the “green team,” to stand in front of sorting stations at the George Sherman Union food court helping fellow students and customers learn how to sort their waste properly.