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Gogan sites
"good planning,
infrastructure,
partnerships and
peer marketing" as
ways to create and
sustain a successful
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University Food Waste Composting Case Study Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts

Summary: Harvard University is the nation's oldest institution of higher learning and has proven itself a champion in waste diversion. Space on campus is a limited commodity considering it was designed in 1636. Harvard has few loading docks, zero back alleys and is centrally located in one of the most densely populated areas in metro Boston. Harvard's highly successful waste diversion programs have achieved an excellent diversion rate of 55%. Year after year, Harvard continues to improve their program with a variety of student body incentives and strong presidential commitment to waste reduction.

Food Waste Diversion: With limited dock space, Harvard has utilized food waste diversion technologies such as the BioGreen 360 and Somat systems. Both systems reduce food waste volume by either dehydrating or pulping food scraps, which reduces the space needed for storage and collection. Once dehydrated or pulped, the University sends this food waste to an off-site composting facility, or manages it at their on-site composting facility. Applying this nutrient rich soil amendment through the University's organic landscape services reduces irrigation needs.

Reduction and Reuse: Reduction and reuse are also vital to Harvard's program. Harvard has implemented a successful reusable mug program, where discounts are given on campus and at various retail locations for their use. The University also offers a mug-washing program to keep student mugs clean, and to serve as a reminder that the mugs are reusable. By removing single-use cups from display, Harvard has reduced campus single-use cup consumption by over 100,000 cups each month. Other reduction activities include food donation to local charities and shelters; purchasing pre-trimmed food for use in the kitchen; and The Clean Plate Club, a peer-to-peer social marketing program established in 2009, that rewards students who only take the desired amount of food they will eat and enjoy.



The Somat Centrifuge (top) directly feeds food scraps into a 2-yard container (above).



By promoting reusable mugs, Harvard has decreased single-use cup consumption by over 100,00 per month.

Student Involvement: The University competes annually in Recyclemania, a friendly competition and benchmarking tool aimed at college and university waste reduction. Additional incentives are given to students to reduce the generation of waste on campus. Summer housing and board is offered to any student pledging to work 30 hours per week as a member of the Harvard Habitat for Humanity “Stuff Sale” team. This team has been charged with recovering student books, clothing and furnishings at the end of each academic year for resale the following fall. On average, the Sale Stuff team gathers an estimated 100 to 200 tons of material annually and raised almost \$90,000 in 2011.

Evaluation: With an admirable diversion rate, and successfully reducing their average per-plate food scrap amount from 5 ounces to less than 2 ounces, Harvard believes there is still room for improvement. “Approximately 9% of our total waste stream is food scraps which are not currently recovered for composting,” states Rob Gogan, Harvard’s Recycling and Waste Services Manager. Harvard continually evaluates their waste stream by conducting waste audits each semester. These audits show students that food and recyclables are still being sent to the landfill and allows the university to chart its progress from year to year.



Harvard Staff with a GeoTea composter



Biogreen 360 In-vessel composter