

Large Venues Clamp Down on Food Waste

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[Arlene Karidis](#) [4] | Mar 27, 2017

Large venues and institutions, from school cafeterias to airports, are working to tackle food waste. Managers at these venues realize that by diverting much of the massive volumes that are generated daily, or by preventing food waste in the first place, they can have an enormous impact on the environment while helping their bottom lines.

For example, through a program engaging students, Horry County school district in South Carolina has diverted 47 percent of cafeteria waste from landfill generated at participating schools.

Meanwhile, among the focuses of Wayne County Airport Authority in Michigan is its work with onsite food vendors to get salvageable food to a local food pantry. The authority is examining ways to grow this program which means addressing challenges posed by airport security protocol and other complexities unique to the organization.

And Sodexo's Maryland-based sustainability division supports multiple initiatives for the corporation's clients throughout North America. Among its many organic diversion efforts are composting programs at various institutions throughout its network.

Greg Sponseller, Horry County schools' sustainability analyst, developed a turn key education program that coordinators at each school can implement. It's written with a timeline and can be integrated into various curricula. And it comes with educational materials. Sponseller is among speakers who will present on organizations' initiatives Monday, May 8 at 4:30 PM at a session named [Food Waste Reduction and Recovery at Large Venues and Institutions](#) [5] at the 2nd Annual Food Recovery Forum at WasteExpo 2017 in New Orleans.

The school district also partners with haulers who have a dedicated employee come out and present to students.

Students tour composting operations and have compost delivered to their schools for their own projects.

“The environmental literacy component is the biggest win,” Sponseller says. “I can talk about solar, but students flip a light switch, and the light comes on. But when they go to the county's compost site and see it, then get compost to plant vegetables, eat them, and finally compost the remaining waste, they are actively engaged in closing the loop.”

Designing programs in-house has made a difference.

“We have been able to identify the details we need to be successful. For instance, we can determine how to order waste containers when students move through the line to dispose their trash,” he says.

Food waste comprises just over 10 percent of the trash generated at the Wayne County airport.

The authority is working to cut that down, especially liquids. Those pose especially a big problem as people toss unemptied, and sometimes unopened, containers before entering secure areas.

“So we are assessing ways to remove the liquids from the waste stream,” says Sara Kaplan, the authority’s sustainability program administrator. Kaplan is also presenting at the Food Recovery Forum session.

But the ultimate plan is to salvage food rather than deal with it once it’s tossed.

The authority recently began partnering with airport vendors to donate food to a local pantry. Hopes are to finetune logistics of delivery to the pantry—and to design a centralized, refrigerated storage location in areas where vendors are permitted.

“We routinely take [food] to the pantry, but it’s making a truck and driver available. So we are looking for an outside dedicated service for delivery,” says Kaplan.

Navigating operations within the varied regulatory frameworks of multiple stakeholders takes orchestrating. On-site entities range from state to federal agencies, to national restaurant chains and small local eateries, each with their own compliance guidelines.

Early efforts are paying off already.

“In eight months, over 13,000 pounds of food have been donated, reducing waste, while seeing that healthy food gets to those who need it,” says Kaplan.

Sodexo’s dedicated sustainability division supports organics waste management programs for its clients throughout North America, with composting and food donation platforms among them.

“With food donation, our campus division leads the way and is usually student organization driven. The atmosphere of college campuses is progressive, so we have seen a lot of buy in,” says Nathan Ruger, Sodexo catering and conference services manager, who will also speak at WasteExpo.

Similar programs on campuses can be applied at businesses, with tweaked strategies. For instance, Ruger will soon launch a composting site at a conference center, leveraging lessons learned through similar projects at Loyola and Tulane Universities in New Orleans.

Another corporate initiative is Weigh the Waste program, which tracks waste generated in kitchens from product delivery through preparing and serving food, helping staff improve food production practices.

“Because we have so many resources, we are sometimes in a position to educate our clients and customers, and to lead the way as change makers.

“But, these programs involve training and buy in from clients [such as institutions], customers [consumers who buy food] and staff [Sodexo employees]. The programs are only as good as stakeholders’ knowledge,” says Ruger.

Source URL: <http://www.waste360.com/food-waste/large-venues-clamp-down-food-waste>