

Food Waste Solution Pilots Case Study

PSU | ReFED



The Organizations



Portland State University (PSU)

Victor's Dining Center in PSU's Ondine Residential Hall is one of four cafeterias on campus, operated by Chartwells Higher Education, a subsidiary of Compass Group. Victor's offers all-you-can-eat meals and serves 365 students on average during lunch.



ReFED

ReFED is an entrepreneurial nonprofit that works with decision-makers from across the food system to reduce food waste. ReFED's mission is to accelerate solutions to food waste that will spur economic growth, increase food security, and protect the environment.



The Opportunity

According to ReFED's Foodservice Food Waste Action Guide, reducing food waste provides significant social and financial benefits.



Foodservice providers can generate more than \$1 billion in cost-savings by implementing waste tracking & analytics solutions alone.



Guests are key to reducing food waste. Solutions like smaller plates and trayless dining can result in up to 30% reduction in plate waste.



Approximately 10% of surplus food is now recovered for donation in the foodservice and restaurant sectors, leaving 900,000 tons of unrecovered surplus food, the equivalent of 1.5 billion meals per year.

At PSU, most frontline staff (approximately 63% based on a recent survey) are aware of and interested in food waste reduction. They actively track the amount of food that goes uneaten in the back-of-house operations using Compass Group's WasteNot tool, which records waste in the following categories: kitchen trim, overproduction, and unused/out-of-date inventory. Having recognized that food waste initiatives could be enhanced at Victor's, PSU collaborated with ReFED to identify and implement solutions to reduce over production and plate waste.



The Solutions

ReFED and PSU developed an eight-week pilot program to test the effectiveness of two food waste solutions:

Food Donation: A donation program was created at Victor's Dining Center to decrease overproduction*

Student Engagement: Educational signage was placed by the dish return to reduce plate waste

*For the pilot, food donations came from Kitchen, G8, and Grill stations only.

Rescuing Food to Serve Those in Need

10%
Food Donation
Capture Rate

Result: PSU's donation capture rate averaged about 10% during the pilot. They donated 830 pounds of food over the course of 8 weeks, the equivalent of nearly 700 meals.

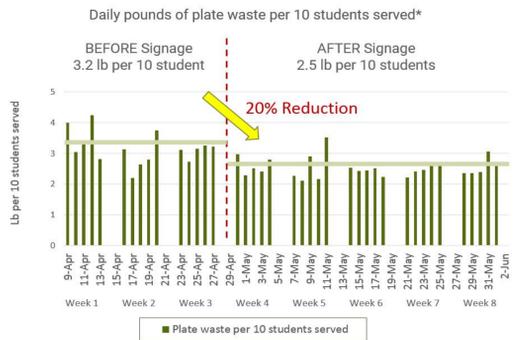
PSU built upon an existing relationship with local food rescue organization Urban Gleaners to begin a food donation program at Victor's Dining Center. Successful program implementation and testing involved two challenges: (1) Establishing new standard operating procedures for tracking the amount of food donated from each station, and (2) Finding space to safely hold for donation pickups, which occurred only once a week. In response, the executive chef took ownership of measuring the food donations from each station and dedicated a single food cart for donations in the freezer, where line cooks could store any safe-to-eat, leftover food from their stations at the end of service.

Inspiring Students to Take Action

As typically occurs in all-you-can-eat settings, students often left large quantities of uneaten food. Staff realized that student engagement was necessary, but didn't know how much plate waste was occurring, or how effectively student education could address the challenge. ReFED supported PSU by helping establish a plate waste baseline over the course of three weeks, developing educational signage for Victor's, and tracking plate waste for the following five weeks.

Result: Plate waste per student decreased by 20% when educational signage was placed in the dining area.

20%
Decrease in
Plate Waste



Recommended Next Steps

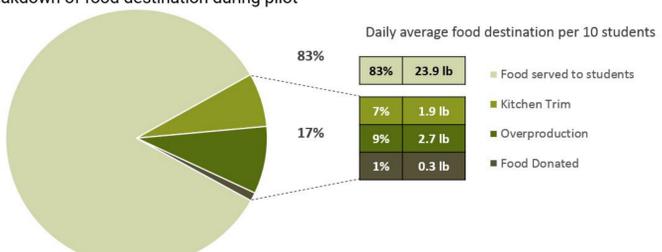
The solutions piloted at PSU showed great progress over a short eight-week period. In order to see more significant, sustained results, ReFED recommends continued action and leadership on food waste reduction.

Continue to address food overproduction

Pilot data revealed that nearly 20% of food never reaches students' plates. Of that 20%, only 5% is going to food donations, and about half of the food is overproduction that is composted. As such, there are opportunities to decrease overproduction:

- Increase percentage of overproduction being donated to Urban Gleaners.
- Improve food production efficiency through updated demand forecasting to reduce food overage.

Breakdown of food destination during pilot*



Continuously Improve Measurement and Tracking of Food Waste

While the culinary team actively uses the WasteNot tool to monitor food waste, measurement and tracking could be conducted more consistently. Irregular tracking has occurred largely been due to staff turnover and misaligned expectations.

Improving data measurement systems will enable the culinary team to better understand the main drivers of food waste, which they can present to clients to inform solutions implementation.



Ways to improve measurement and tracking:

- Continue to measure and track plate waste to evaluate the impact of student engagement.
- Make food waste measurement and tracking part of the culinary team's daily tasks to establish it as an expectation like completing HACCP as procedures.
- Include food waste measurement and tracking training as part of onboarding for new staff.
- Continue to keep culinary staff up to date on PSU food waste initiatives and the importance of these efforts.
- Identify a staff member who could serve as a food waste champion to maintain consistency and accountability, allowing the chef to focus on other responsibilities.
- Invite team members to participate in external community events focused on food waste with partners like Urban Gleaners.



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