

# Case Study CUYAMACA COLLEGE



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## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

**5,200 Full-Time Equivalent Students**

**149 Full-Time Equivalent Employees**

Situated on 165-rolling acres in scenic Rancho San Diego, Cuyamaca College has an employee cafeteria and a child development center, which serves breakfast, lunch, and snacks to 75 students every day. Prior to August 2013, the college disposed food waste in the trash.

Recognizing that participation in the County of San Diego's recycling assistance program for businesses would help them fulfill the objectives of their 2013 Sustainability Strategic Plan, the college began the process of looking at their waste generation, and finding options to reduce waste and sustainably manage their remaining materials.

The college has now incorporated composting into their campus and added this component to the Child Development Center Farm-to-Preschool Curriculum.



## Recycling Practices Prior to Intervention

- ➔ Food disposed as waste
- ➔ Desire to fulfill food waste diversion goals outlined in Sustainability Strategic Plan

Prior to August 2013, Cuyamaca College was disposing food waste in a small, infrequently serviced trash compactor and had not yet started the composting program that was outlined in their 2013 Sustainability Strategic Plan.

## Recommendations Implemented

- ➔ Installation of a four-bin compost system and operation of an on-site food waste composting program
- ➔ Revision of preschool menu options to reduce food waste

Staff at two food service sites on campus, the Coyote Café and the Child Development Center (CDC), were trained to separate and collect pre-consumer kitchen scraps for composting. CDC also began to compost post-consumer plate scraps as well as enlisted a new food vendor to offer smaller portions of healthier, fresher, and more diverse food choices that appealed to the children, further reducing plate waste. Daily composting tasks are facilitated by cooperative efforts between a student intern, CDC staff, and garden volunteers.



Challenge	Practice Implemented
Insufficient infrastructure to manage college's food waste sustainably	Development of a practical food waste collection and processing protocol for pre-consumer and post-consumer food waste. Revised preschool menu options to reduce plate waste.
Continuous and ongoing participation, despite changes in leadership	<p>Top-down support of college management through the sustainability committee and 2013 Sustainability Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Staff training coupled with routine follow-up and troubleshooting assistance through the County's technical assistance program.</p>
Inconsistency in tracking food waste diversion due to staff time constraints	<p>Continued training and feedback from County consultants and CDC Coordinator.</p> <p>Simplification of the monitoring and tracking forms.</p>

## The Bottom Line

- ➔ 14 percent reduction in food waste
- ➔ Overall diversion of 5,200 pounds annually of pre- and post-consumer food waste
- ➔ Improved and better portioned menu options for preschool program
- ➔ Enriched preschool program through incorporation of composting tasks



“Children are learning about composting, and at 3, 4, and 5 years old, already know what they're doing is helping the garden grow and producing the food they eat. [...] At this age, the benefits of composting are ingrained in them, and the practice becomes integral to how they view the entire food system.”

**Denise Blaha**  
Coordinator, Child Development Center

The County of San Diego conducts free on-site visits to help businesses comply with the State's mandatory commercial recycling and organics recycling requirements. Contact County staff or your solid waste hauler to request assistance.  
Email: [Recycle@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Recycle@sdcounty.ca.gov) or visit: [www.R1earth.org](http://www.R1earth.org)



The County also maintains a recycling database available online and toll-free hotline: Visit [www.WasteFreeSD.org](http://www.WasteFreeSD.org) or call 1-877-R-1-EARTH (1-877-713-2784)