

Food: *Too Good to Waste!*

Benefits Abound through Sustainable Management of Food at Schools

Why Food Recovery Matters

A lot of Waste! Food accounts for at least 20% of a school's discards, sometimes up to 50%! This includes kitchen prep scraps, unserved meals, leftovers from the salad bar, expired foods, peels, and any food that students throw away.

Environmental Impacts - Food sent to the landfill creates methane gas, a major climate pollutant. This discarded food could instead be intercepted to feed hungry people or composted to return valuable nutrients back into our soils. Studies show that applying small amounts of compost to the soil not only helps soil fertility, but improves water retention, and even helps draw carbon out of the atmosphere!

Educational Opportunities - Food recovery provides hands-on opportunities for students to learn about ethics, social responsibility, sustainability and environmental stewardship. Students engaged in food recovery and composting gain practical knowledge in core subjects including chemistry, biology, physical and earth sciences, agriculture, math, social studies and more!

Compliance with State Laws - Regulations require food scrap recycling. AB 1826 - Mandatory Commercial Organics Recycling, and SB 1383 - Short Lived Climate Pollutants, are just two examples of major statewide laws moving to eliminate disposal of organics from landfills. **Schools are required to participate and comply.**

Cost Savings - Reducing the amount of food thrown away can significantly reduce trash pick-ups, saving money. The material that does go into the dumpster is also less likely to smell. Other cost savings can be found through menu changes and meal-prep practices. Composting onsite produces a nutrient-rich soil amendment that can be used in the garden or on landscaping and can help reduce water and fertilizer use.

Schools in Action!

Ramona Unifies School District - Since 2014, RUSD's multiple award winning program, *Take a Bite out of Waste!*, has donated ten tons of edible food to a local pantry, helping to feed the underserved in the Ramona community. The program has also source reduced eight tons of food waste, fed five tons to animals, and composted more than six tons of food scraps.

Cuyamaca College Child Development Center and Intergenerational Garden - This

The Farm-to-Preschool participant has been composting all leftovers and preschooler's plate scraps since Fall of 2015. More than five tons of food scraps have been transformed into valuable soil amendment for the school's intergenerational garden.



Joan MacQueen Middle School – A lunchtime sorting and recycling program launched on the first day of the Fall 2018 semester. Overseen by the Associated Student Body (ASB), the program includes several food recovery components:

- Student share table for unwanted yet edible food
- “Goat food” bucket for nearly whole vegetables or fruits
- Compost bucket for remaining fruits and vegetables including peels
- Liquids bucket for juice and milk

Food collected for composting is composted in the school's new organic garden. In the first two weeks, the program diverted 450 pounds of food!

Keys to success

Perform an audit to understand how much food waste is generated at your school and to help determine its makeup from different locations around the campus. This is a great interactive learning experience for students too!

Obtain buy-in and ownership of the program from administrators, teachers, and food service and grounds maintenance managers. Find a champion to get things started and lead the charge!

Plan to ensure the program's a success. Food waste is generated every single day, which means it will need to be *managed* every single day. Understanding the hierarchy and food recovery options can help schools set both immediate and long-term goals for their program. Target small, easy wins that can immediately reduce food waste, and think big picture and into the future.

Establish a management team of staff and students to lead the program and follow through with action items and responsibilities. A core team will be responsible for day-to-day activities. Ideally, the team's activities will be integrated into the school curricula and culture, so that as students move on, or if a staff person leaves, the program will continue successfully without them.

Utilize assistance available, such as funding from the PTA, grant opportunities and funding or materials from local businesses. Schools in unincorporated areas are eligible for free audits. Your school may be eligible for additional free consulting assistance including program planning, logistics, management support and equipment as well. Contact us for more details.

Celebrate and promote your new program! Launch a kick-off to engage students and ignite enthusiasm within your community.

Food Recovery Options



Source Reduction is simple and means preventing food waste from happening in the first place. Tracking food waste and loss can help nutrition staff make more informed purchasing decisions, resulting in reduced food purchases or menu changes to serve more popular items.

Feed People. Schools overproduce a lot of food! Donating excess food to charity is preferable and legal. Rules are routinely being updated in favor of donation opportunities. Share tables for students are also encouraged and highly effective.

Feed Animals. San Diego is an agricultural region. Onsite animals love leftovers from the salad bar. Also, there's a good possibility a school staff member, nearby farmer or animal rehabilitation center would appreciate leftovers for their animals and associated reduced feed costs.

Onsite Composting is highly engaging for students and replete with benefits. Start slow, with veggie scraps first. And with the right system, training and management, even meats and dairy can be safely composted. A staff person interested and knowledgeable with the composting process will be instrumental in the program's success. Everyone will be amazed to see the transformation of food scraps into a nutrient-rich soil amendment.