Food Waste Prevention Spotlight

The Organization | University of Massachusetts

The University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass), located in Amherst, MA, has one of the largest collegiate dining operations in the nation, serving more than 16,000 students on the meal plan. Between its four dining commons and 15 retail operations, the university serves about 40,000 meals a day (or 5 million a year). The dining team staff consists of over 500 employees and 1,600 students.

The Challenge | Advance the Mission for More Sustainable Dining

UMass Dining is passionate about sustainability—their mission is to serve students in the most environmentally conscious way. They focus on correct portion sizes with a motto of "Small Plate, Big Flavor" and implemented a "trayless" dining program, which reduced post-consumer waste by 30%. Additionally, UMass Dining is one of the first in the nation to where students initiated and implemented a permaculture garden, which was honored with the White House Champions of Change award. But the team knew they could do more to advance their mission by examining pre-consumer waste—the food being discarded in the kitchen before it reached the students' plates. They needed a system to help them identify what, where and why waste was occurring so they could make changes to prevent it in the future.

The Solution | Automated Food Waste Tracking

UMass implemented the LeanPath Food Waste Tracking System in January 2012, installing two food waste trackers in the largest dining commons which are linked to a LeanPath reporting dashboard. After an energizing training session led by LeanPath, it didn't take long for UMass to start seeing the food waste trend downward.

Making Meaningful Comparisons
Having LeanPath Trackers in the two busiest dining commons has enabled the UMass team to spot variances through comparison reports. When they see that one dining common has higher waste, they drill-down into the data to uncover what's driving it. They have examined the peaks and valleys of customer demand to time production and meals more appropriately.

A Tool for More Accurate Forecasting
UMass dining management also uses the LeanPath data for forecasting. As a complement to Aurora Information Systems' FoodPro production software, managers compare forecasts against the LeanPath waste reports to make adjustments. If they observe repeat high-waste items, they know to tighten up production plans or re-examine the menu items.

Encouraging Staff that Everyone Plays a Role
Staff is also more aware of what's happening. Managers post the LeanPath reports publicly and hold pre-meal meetings. Staff can see the strides they make in terms of improvement, and know that they are making a difference in contributing to a more sustainable, less wasteful, foodservice operation.

The Results | $70,000 Savings in Four Months and Food Cost Reduction

In just four months after implementing the LeanPath System, UMass had reduced their food waste by nearly 25%, saving more than $70,000 due to food waste prevention across the two dining commons. They have also seen a marked reduction in food cost—reducing 1% year-over-year. They continue to experience ongoing savings.

"High-end production and high quality food are not what drives up food cost. It's waste that drives up food cost. When you see specific wasted menu items that you can quantify, you can have meaningful dialogue with your staff and begin to solve some of the problems."

"For a meal program serving 16,000 students, a 1% reduction in food cost is a significant savings."

Garett DiStefano, Director, Residential Dining

*To learn more about LeanPath Food Waste Tracking Systems, visit **www.leanpath.com** or call **(877) 620-6512**.*