



WMU Composting Project

*"We, the presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors of universities from all regions of the world are deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of environmental pollution and degradation, and the depletion of natural resources... We, therefore, agree to take the following actions: To set an example of environmental responsibility by establishing institutional ecology policies and practices of resource conservation, **recycling, waste reduction**, and environmentally sound operations."*

-Talloires Declaration, Action 5

The waste reduction group is dedicated to reducing waste on campus and diverting it into a useful product. A WMU composting program could divert almost half a million pounds of food waste annually from our waste water stream and turn it into a money-saving, nutrient-rich compost. Such a program would increase the university's efficiency, both environmentally and economically.

Our project included auditing two cafeterias, Davis and Valley I, to quantify the amount of food waste produced (We then did a follow-up audit to study the effects of removing trays from the cafeterias on the amount of tray waste). Because removing almost a half a million pounds of biological waste from our waste water stream will have ramifications for the Kalamazoo Water Reclamation Plant, we are also in the process of discussing those changes with representatives from the plant, as well as how that might affect our billing. We see a potential for savings in a reduction in our water use from decreased use of garbage disposals. We will also negotiate a possible savings with Kalamazoo Water Reclamation Plant representatives.

We would like to thank President Dunn for the time he spent discussing the project with group members and students at Valley I Dining during our follow-up audit. Immediate future plans for the project include exploring possible avenues of budget generation for a fall pilot composting program, based on Sarah's Campbell's research of which methods would be best for WMU.

"Waste is just a resource out of place."

-Nancy Jack Todd

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Group member Fields Ratliff emptying a weighed bucket of food waste at Davis Dining Hall.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Addressing Food Waste

Across the country college campuses are striving to “go green.” Reducing waste and saving money by improving efficiency are two ways schools are mitigating the ecological footprints their institutions make upon the environment.



STEP ONE: *Owning up to the Problem*

It is no secret that college students are notorious for wasting food in dining halls. The unnecessary costs to the schools in energy, waste removal, human health, and labor are a blight upon a budget, especially when many budgets are only getting tighter. What can schools do to address this problem?

STEP TWO:

Creative Solutions

Not all efforts to green up campuses have to involve expensive investments or upfront costs. **Reducing food waste is as easy as removing the trays from dining halls!** Schools across the nation are ditching the trays, and getting

great results.

Alfred University, Middlebury, St. Joseph's College, Harvard, the University of Connecticut, as well as numerous other schools have either removed trays or are investigating how much savings can be achieved by getting rid of trays.

STEP THREE:

Waste Audits

In order to find out how much waste reduction can be achieved, many schools have conducted pilot studies of trayless policies.

By weighing all the food waste people generate while they have trays, and comparing it to how much waste there is once trays are gone, the savings are amazing. **Some schools have reduced**

their food waste between 30-50%!

The waste audits conducted here at WMU are consistent with these findings, and makes tray removal an exciting possibility to help the school save money and reduce its impact on the environment.

STEP FOUR:

Instituting the Policy

Some people are unhappy with the prospect of removing trays. Negative reactions are common at first, however ultimately people like having an easy way to encourage them to waste less food and save their school money. Once people realize the benefits, it is easier for them to accept the changes.