

# Exploring Options for Waste Reduction in WMU's Dining Halls

## Contact Information

Trevor Dubats  
(586)764-8469  
trevor.j.dubats@wmich.edu

Kylie Merrow  
(269)998-3517  
kylie.e.merrow@wmich.edu

Philip Penzien  
(248)504-1097  
philip.l.penzien@wmich.edu

## Project Introduction:

In America, food leftovers by weight account for the single largest component of the waste stream according to the EPA. "Food leftovers" refer to both kitchen scraps, as well as uneaten food left on individual plates. There is a profound disconnection in American culture between what happens to our food remains once we are finished with our meals, and many American are completely ignorant to the waste cycle and the staggering amount of waste we as a society generate through our eating practices.

This American benightedness towards food waste is evident in the dining halls at WMU. According to a case study done by a former WMU student, approximately 13,350 pounds of food waste is generated on campus daily. Food waste is of particular interest to university administrators because the national cost of food waste disposal has skyrocketed in recent years, and will likely only continue to increase. Additionally, there is a trend amongst universities towards reducing dining hall waste. If Western Michigan University wants to maintain its role as a leader in sustainability practices it will be necessary for our institution to consider our waste reducing options.

Our initial vision with this project was to craft a composting pilot initiative that could be implemented on campus to tackle the problem of post-consumer waste in our dining halls. However, as we embarked upon our project's journey, we realized that this simply was not a feasible option for Western in its current state. Thus, we decided to focus our efforts on general waste generation, consumption and reduction in WMU's campus dining halls.



## Project Components:

- (1) Waste Audit of WMU's Bistro 3 dining hall on March 20, 2012.
  - ◆ Goal 1: Test hypothesis: Bistro 3's make-to-order food service style would produce less mass of waste per meal than WMU's traditional buffet style cafeterias
  - ◆ Goal 2: Provide Office of Sustainability vermicomposting interns with detailed information about the contents of post consumer waste
- (2) Best Practice Evaluation of WMU's Dining Service Waste Reduction Efforts
- (3) External Case Study of Exemplary Dining Hall Waste Reduction Initiatives at Other Universities:
  - ◆ Georgia Institute of Technology
  - ◆ University of California– Davis
- (4) Explore potential for reducing dining hall pre-consumer waste by contracting with an external company

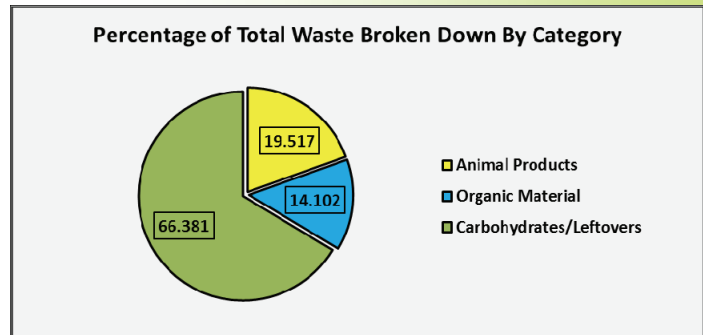


## Results of Bistro 3 Waste Audit:

On March 20, 2011 a total of 1,994 meals were served in Bistro 3. From these meals, a total of 466.25 lbs of post-consumer waste was created. This equates to a total of 0.234 lbs, or approximately 3.7 ounces, of waste generated per meal.

## University Recommendations to Further Dining Hall Waste Reduction Initiative:

- ◆ Perform comprehensive waste audits in all WMU dining halls
- ◆ Encourage WMU to develop and nurture a university-wide culture of sustainability with a focus on waste reduction
- ◆ Encourage WMU to focus on educating our student body about the waste cycle by expanding information, communication, and publicity about waste reduction and recycling
- ◆ Create a university-wide, holistic approach to waste management in dining halls, fostered on increased collaboration between Dining Services, the Office of Sustainability and Waste Management Services
- ◆ Create programs that encourage sustainable-minded students to become involved in helping to educate dining services employees on sustainability issues.
- ◆ WMU should begin aggressively exploring the potential for creating a campus-wide post-consumer waste composting system.
- ◆ Permanent signage should be placed in dining halls as a reminder not to waste food and to educate student consumers on amount of waste generated in dining halls
- ◆ WMU should explore potential for obtaining a greater percentage of total food from local, sustainable, and organically produced sources



## Why the NEW bowls?

We reduced the size of the Mongolian BBQ bowls to encourage healthier portion sizes and to help you reduce food waste!

An average of **2oz of food was wasted per person** from the Mongolian BBQ with the old bowls

**What do you think of me?**

*Be sure to provide your dining staff with feedback about the new bowls!*



**42% of students said they "served themselves too much food"** when polled about food waste from the Mongolian BBQ

### Did you know?

- Studies show that people tend to eat 92% of what they serve themselves
- Only 19% of college students say they stop eating when full

Brian Wansink, Ph.D., "Mindless Eating"

UC Davis Dining Services is committed to actively engaging its procedures, policies and practices that foster a sustainable food system at the University of California, Davis



Example of educational dining tips at the University of California-Davis

*"Waste not the smallest thing created, for grains of sand make mountains, and atoms infinity." -E. Knight*

