

Sustainable Dining Service

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Mission Statement:

The mission of this project is to compile an information database, concerning waste generated in Rastall dining hall. This study will exist as a benchmark to measure future improvements in waste reduction. With preliminary data collected we will network to develop working partnerships to assist in waste reduction and develop a plan of action to build a more sustainable campus. This project will serve as a model of sustainability locally and throughout the academic community.

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is a multi-faceted mentality embracing a balanced perspective of economics, society, and the environment. The vision is that humanity can sustain its current lifestyle without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainability requires people to consider the past, present, and future implications of their actions. Over the past year Colorado College has made a strong commitment to sustainability, hiring a working group for sustainability, integrating courses, and initiating campus wide projects. Now is the time to acknowledge the importance of a dining service that parallels the commitment of the Colorado College community.

Methodology for Data Collection:

1. Developed a data collection sheet to be used at each station and bar (classics, grill, exhibition, and pizza stations, bakery, condiment/sandwich, cereal, bread, and fruit bars) for all meals (see attachment #1)
2. Student interns and Rastall dining staff weighed raw ingredients for all food served between 2/24/03-2/26/03
3. When the meal period was over all leftover food was weighted and categorized as reusable or trash (if the reusable food was used in the next dining period than it was subtracted from the next starting weight of that station or bar).
4. Kitchen waste and student waste was weighed at the end of each day. This waste was separated into compostable and non compostable categories.
5. At the end of each day the sheets were collected and calculated according
 - a. each station and bar was calculated separately
 - Totalled weight of all raw ingredients at the beginning of the meal period
 - Totalled weight of any additional food put out during meal period
 - Totalled weight of leftover food, separating into reusable food and trash.
6. When possible we averaged the different weight measurements for each meal
7. All data was calculated in an Excel program to find weight of food used at each station for each meal and amount of waste generated

What has been accomplished?

Through this study the student interns and Sodexo administration identified that unnecessary waste is generated in Rastall dining hall and practical solutions exist.

Meetings and a pilot study provided a plan of action to reduce the waste in an effort to save money and collaborate with the campus wide vision of sustainability. The pilot study performed enabled us to design a method for collecting food weights while working through many of the initial problems.

First, we generated a database of averages for student waste and kitchen waste per meal, separating waste into compostable and non-compostable categories. This information is a building block for subsequent proposals concerning the reduction of waste. Knowing how much organic waste is currently generated allows us to estimate the benefits of implementing a composting program. Employing a plan to reduce the amount of food placed directly in the trash can begin to save money on trash disposal.

During our three-day study many students expressed interest in the project, raising questions about why and how we were going to reduce waste. This was an opportunity for student interns to collect feedback from as well as educate the student body about our initiatives to reduce waste. In addition, this experience educated the Rastall dining staff about Colorado College's increasing commitment to sustainability.

The sustainable future of Rastall dining hall depends on collaborative efforts between students, staff, and administration. We believe our greatest accomplishment was the relationship developed between Sodexo administration and student interns. Through numerous meetings students and administrators we developed a common vision for this project as well as methods to fulfill our goals. These past three months have laid a solid foundation for future projects to grow. The prospect of next year is exciting, there is much work to be done but the resources and enthusiasm is in abundance.

Obstacles confronted within project

This project was the first attempt at addressing sustainability in the context of Colorado College's food service program. Since many of the concepts and methodology were experimental the pilot test encountered a few problems. First, there was a lack of consistency in the collection of food weights. Certain data collection forms were returned blank or with incomplete ingredient lists as well as some of the weights were estimations. We believe this was a result of there being little incentive for the Rastall dining staff to participate.

For the three-day study period the staff was asked to contribute 20 extra minutes per day dedicated to weighing and recording. Since the staff was receiving no monetary benefits they may have found it difficult to see the short term gain of this project. The money saving benefits of wasting less food in the dining hall will not be visible until initiatives to reduce food waste are implemented. In future data collection student interns must collect weights or a more tangible incentive must be presented to staff members.

Suggestions to make continued efforts easier

The preliminary work described in this summary has laid a solid foundation for continued efforts to reduce the waste generated from Rastall dining hall. Through this research many problems were identified and can be avoided in future work. To integrate the vision of this project into the daily routine of the dining hall, staff members need a comprehensive understanding of their role in the project's success. This may require that staff training include a briefing concerning why this project exists, how it works, and what positive outcomes are expected.

To address the issue of consistency in data collection the methodology will need to be changed. One idea is to weigh only two stations each day. This would allow student interns to do a majority of the weighing with assistance from one staff member at a time. This ensures the methodology for collection can remain consistent and improve time efficiency. Since the same people will be collecting and analyzing the data they will be able to minimize confusion as well as avoid estimations and blank collection sheets. The constant presence and working relationship between student interns and Rastall dining staff may reinforce the importance of the project and the dedication of the student body. Another idea is to create a work-study position that would allow a student to engage in a yearlong position dedicated to addressing sustainability in Rastall dining hall.

Action Plan for next year

1. Research universities who have undergone similar projects. Communicate with representatives and discuss problems and solutions to help us avoid similar mistakes.
2. Network throughout Colorado College community and nearby farming community to find an outlet for compost material

Short term Benefits

1. By minimizing waste we can reduce the cost of trash disposal
2. Through a composting program waste can be diverted from landfills and placed back into the nutrient cycle
3. An environmentally conscious campus is an attraction to incoming students

4. Sodexo will gain popularity with students by acknowledging and proactively responding to the student body