



K-12 Schools: Outreach to Prevent and Reduce Food Waste



SOUTH CENTRAL CALHOUN COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Iowa Waste Reduction Center (IWRC) received grant funding from the United States Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural Development to assist K-12 schools throughout rural Iowa. The goal of the project is to help K-12 schools and districts reduce the amount of food waste currently headed to the landfill.

ASSISTANCE TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE AT K-12 SCHOOLS

The wide-array of assistance provided by the IWRC includes the following:

- Measuring pre-consumer kitchen food waste
- Training kitchen staff to measure, record, and analyze food waste being tossed from the kitchen
- Measuring student food waste by conducting waste sorts but also including beverage waste, trash, plastics, cold lunch waste, and edible leftover foods normally thrown away by students
- Providing cost / benefits analyses of current disposal practices
- Analyzing environmental, social, and economic benefits of preventing and reducing food waste
- Promoting donation of edible whole, uneaten, and unopened foods to local non-profit organizations
- Implementing food waste composting with proper siting and techniques
- Providing regulatory counsel regarding donation of food and food waste composting both on-site and off-site
- Distributing age-appropriate posters developed by the IWRC to K-12 schools to hang in lunch room; posters create awareness of issues surrounding food waste
- Furnishing K-12 schools with fact sheets and training guides so they can conduct waste sorts, kitchen food waste tracking and analyses, and strategies to prevent and reduce food waste
- Uploading all materials developed for the project available on the IWRC's website to reach a broader audience
- All information provided has been made available to each school / district in a customized report complete with recommendations to prevent and reduce food waste based on the on-site assistance provided

K-12 schools have been eager to learn how much food waste and beverage waste they are sending to the landfill. It varies from school to school and by age range, but by conducting waste sorts to measure different waste streams, then extrapolating the food waste data, K-12 schools can get an estimated snapshot of how much food waste each student in their district is throwing away daily and yearly. This number is much more important to gauge success when implementing strategies than only looking at the tonnage that is tossed by district or school yearly.

The IWRC has worked with some really great students, teachers, staff, and administration from rural schools and districts all over Iowa. Many of them are already doing amazing things to prevent and reduce food and beverage waste.

SOUTH CENTRAL CALHOUN COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Patty Schmit, Food Service Director at South Central Calhoun Community School District signed up for the project and the IWRC visited the schools in April, 2018. This school district has three schools in Rockwell City and Lake City, Iowa: an elementary, middle, and high school. They are doing some great things and staff is really excited to implement even more strategies. For example, the high school science teacher has rats and roaches in her classroom. She brings an empty box to the lunchroom and asks students to place partially eaten fruits and veggies in the box to feed the insects and rodents.

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After meals, students are required to sort waste from their trays into corresponding labeled bins which are later weighed.





South Central Calhoun CSD staff encourage students to eat while creating a fun and welcoming lunch room environment. From left to right are Wendy Miller, Maureen Schultz, and Tanya Grummon.

Additionally, two of the three schools in the district rescue edible foods that are normally tossed from students' trays. Foods like unopened, whole, uneaten apples, muffins and chips are set aside by students for their peers to help themselves. Also, the grab-and-go breakfast style at the high school allows students to take only what they can carry to eat on their way to class or their lockers. This also helps prevent food waste because students are taking only what they can carry in their hands. This school district is making a difference! One of the most passionate people within the district about food waste is Tanya Grummon, lead cook at the elementary school. Tanya rescues all unopened, whole, and uneaten foods students in the elementary school would normally toss out. Students love Tanya and her cooking too! The IWRC has NEVER seen seconds lines like that at South Central Calhoun's elementary school. The positive attitude of staff in the cafeteria creates an atmosphere that makes eating breakfast and lunch enjoyable and fun for students.

RESULTS OF WASTE AUDITS AT THE DISTRICT

The IWRC has conducted over 30 waste audits at K-12 schools throughout Iowa and has found the extrapolated average is 0.3 pounds of food waste that students toss after lunch. This does not include food waste after breakfast or any

beverage waste. South Central Calhoun Community School District district as a whole is doing better than the IWRC's extrapolated average of 0.3 pounds tossed by each student after lunch. Students in this district are tossing less at 0.2 pounds of food waste after lunch.

While the school district already has a handle on strategies that work to prevent and reduce food waste, there are other techniques that can also help including the following:

- Schedule recess before lunch to help expend excess energy and create a calmer lunch environment while stimulating appetites.
- Extend meal times to at least 25 minutes so students have time to finish eating.
- Check food deliveries for freshness before accepting them.
- Order inventory more often – less food at once is easier to manage and use.
- Repurpose left-overs into new recipes; turn burgers into chili or stale bread into croûtons.
- Create an appetizing and visually appealing presentation of foods.
- Store foods so that shelf life is optimized.
- Keep track of foods that end up in the garbage more frequently and understand when a recipe change may be in order.
- Donate left-over edible foods from students' trays. Foods that haven't been opened or eaten can be donated to local non-profits that feed the community's food insecure.
- Compost food waste.
- Get students involved in preventing and reducing food waste by helping plan menus, naming food items, and measuring food waste.

The project is in full swing through September, 2018. Once the project concludes, the IWRC will continue to offer assistance to any K-12 school or district in Iowa that is interested in preventing and reducing food waste. *"It's been an absolute delight working with so many kids eager to learn more about food waste! And I feel like we are tipping the scale in our state!"* stated Jenny Trent who has been conducting on-site assistance to help entities prevent and reduce food waste for the last 6 years.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?



For more information or to request assistance, please contact Jenny Trent at Jennifer.trent@uni.edu.

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