

IOWA FOOD WASTE REDUCTION PROJECT Case Study

Food Displaced = WASTE

Iowa Health Systems

A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Beginning in 2008, Iowa Health Systems spent a year tracking kitchen food waste at three hospitals in an effort to reduce the amount going to landfills. The staff was trained to weigh and record information pertaining to discarded food such as the type of food and the reason for disposal. Food waste was discarded in clear buckets and bags to allow for a visual inspection of the amount and types of food waste entering Iowa landfills. This information was utilized to change purchasing habits and reduce food waste in hospital kitchens through careful monitoring. In 2008, Iowa Health Systems reduced food waste by 70,273 pounds which equated to a savings of \$2,785.47. By 2011 with the addition of two more hospitals and one medical center to the program, this number had grown to 347,514 pounds of reduced food waste and a savings of \$13,196.16.

The beneficial achievements of the food waste reduction program led Iowa Health Systems to reach for further success with new goals. The next step was to implement a composting project that would further divert food waste from Iowa landfills. In the summer of 2011, Iowa Health Systems

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Since 2008, Iowa Health systems has reduced a total of 1,298,485 pounds of food waste at six medical centers and hospitals throughout Iowa.

Iowa Health Systems has recognized a total cost savings of \$47,694.41 in reduced food waste since 2008.



implemented a pilot program at Iowa Lutheran Hospital in Des Moines that allowed for a private company to haul food waste to a composting facility. In the fall of 2012, Methodist West Hospital in West Des Moines was added to the composting project. By the end of 2012, since the inception of the composting project, Iowa Lutheran Hospital had sent a total of 86,953 pounds of both kitchen waste and patient tray waste to a composting facility. Methodist West Hospital had sent 12,460 pounds of food waste to a composting facility in just four months. Due to a reduction in tipping fees, Iowa Health Systems also recognized a savings of \$8,700 in 2012.

Laura Ippen is the sustainability coordinator at Iowa Health Systems. Ippen states that the implementation of the program was fairly simple despite the large size of the hospital communities and the amount of food produced. One of the biggest challenges for Iowa Health Systems was finding a private vendor that could accommodate the hospital's needs in transporting food waste to a composting facility. Iowa Health Systems contracted with GreenRU to transport their food waste to a composting facility. Small issues such as food waste bins being too heavy were easily solved with GreenRU by adding carts with wheels.

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CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ippen has learned from the program's successes and challenges that implementing a food waste diversion program can be done by other large facilities as well. She has recommendations for food waste generators to consider when implementing a food waste diversion program.

1. Start with food waste reduction before moving to composting and follow the food waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse, recycle.
2. Measure and track food waste to find a baseline and set goals of reduction.
3. A well trained, involved staff will contribute to the success of any food waste reduction program.

FUTURE GOALS

Through a waste audit in 2012, Iowa Health Systems estimated that an additional 135 tons of food waste could be diverted from hospital and medical center cafeterias. Currently, the goal for 2013 is to include cafeteria food waste in the composting program as well as switching to compostable service and tableware.

Within Iowa Health Systems, four Des Moines area hospitals are participating in both reduction and composting efforts: Iowa Lutheran Hospital, Methodist West Hospital, Blank Children's Hospital, and Iowa Methodist Medical Center. Also included in food waste reduction are Allen Hospital in Waterloo, St. Luke's Hospital in Cedar Rapids, and St. Luke's Health System in Sioux City. The success of Iowa Health Systems sustainability efforts provides many other organizations in Iowa with a positive mentor and guide to reduce, reuse, and recycle food waste.



DID YOU KNOW?

In addition to providing valuable nutrition to soils, compost also suppresses plant diseases and pests which results in higher quality of plants and crops.