

BuffaLow Waste initiative

University at Buffalo

Essay:

The BuffaLow Waste initiative, conceptualized and put into action by Campus Dining and Shops (CDS), is a multifaceted waste reduction program that set out to reduce single-use disposables, divert waste by recovering surplus food, encourage recycling and composting, and educate students, faculty and staff on the significant impact reducing all waste has in our community and planet.

Overall Impact of Initiative or Program

Our efforts led to remarkable results from previous years, as we experienced a tremendous increase in food recoveries in collaboration with the student-led Food Recovery Network. In 2024, 29,879 pounds of food was diverted and captured by 200 student volunteers to produce nutritious meals for local programs serving food-insecure community members. For 2023, 22,893 pounds of food was recovered and distributed to organizations including Feedmore WNY, Friends of the Night People, the Salvation Army, and our on-campus food pantry, Blue Table. These figures, coupled with our Weigh the Waste educational nights, reduced our compost collection totals by 403 totes or 71,331 pounds. These efforts netted a savings of over \$3,365 while helping shape a better future where food is not wasted.

A key initiative of our waste reduction program set out to reduce single-use disposables while also encouraging reusable products. A reusable/refillable souvenir cup was launched in connection with the University at Buffalo (UB) Athletics Department for UB football and men's and women's basketball games. The 22 oz. cup, featuring the UB Spirit logo and pride sayings, not only exceeded expectations in terms of sales, but also in the number of refills generated. This first-year effort had 3,299 cups sold with 1,267 refills. The refills were offered at a greatly reduced price to encourage sustainable practices

and many families returned with their cups in hand at future games. Not only did this reduce single-use waste, it also reduced costs for cups/lids by \$240.

Through educational programming like Weigh the Waste nights, visual aids for Mindful Eating Tips, and peer-to-peer explanations on how the R.O.T. system (recycling, organics, trash) works, Campus Dining and Shops saw a phenomenal spike in the satisfaction scores on the 2024 NACUFS Customer Satisfaction Benchmarking Survey for both Environmentally Friendly and Social/Ethics practices related to food. UB received scores of 4.13 and 4.10 respectively in 2024 compared to previous scores of 3.91 and 3.88. The 2024 national average for these categories were 3.97 and 3.95.

Creativity and Innovation

UB students, with minimal guidance, were at the heart of innovation for this initiative, bringing passion and creativity to the challenge of waste reduction on campus. Through inventive solutions like volunteer recruitment for the Food Recovery Network and educational zero-waste initiatives like Weigh the Waste supported by UB Sustainability students, they are redefining sustainability in everyday life. Their commitment to minimizing waste not only fosters environmental responsibility but also inspires a culture of conscious consumption. By thinking outside the box and embracing innovative approaches, our students are proving that small actions can lead to a lasting impact, creating a greener, more sustainable future for all.

Low Start-Up Resource Costs / High Return

The many facets of the BuffaLow Waste program showed tremendous financial savings almost immediately. By tracking and recording waste and recovery figures, Campus Dining utilized the technology in the Food Service Suite post-production system to reduce over-production by 27% from the previous year. This benefit was two-fold as it not only helped reduce food costs, but it also played a significant part in reducing waste collection costs.

Through the success of collaborating with the Food Recovery Network, CDS was able to secure funding from the UB Climate Action Plan. These funds will be instrumental to cover resources including food pans and lids, packaging, and transportation carts.

An increased effort on cardboard collection across all dining locations, called From Box to Better, had an extremely positive effect. Cardboard packaging is an item that is a revenue generator while at the same time, reduces trash receptacle space and subsequent tipping fees. This campaign aided in recovering 4.13 tons more than the previous year which garnered an additional \$1,200.

Weekly waste log monitoring and monthly check-ins with our community partners helped the team adjust recipes and production along with managing pick-ups and deliveries to our community organizations. These check-ins ensured that our partners were comfortable with the program and kept the lines of communication open for success.

Applicability of Initiative

A by-product of the BuffaLow Waste initiative was the outreach by various New York State departments and other colleges to learn about the successes that were achieved. Assistant Dining Director, John Bottorff, was asked to present the program at the New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling (NYSAR3) Annual Conference along with at the NACUFS Spring Conference Series. At both, attendees saw new perspectives on common challenges they face but also solutions through networking and success stories.

The BuffaLow Waste initiative was designed to connect all facets of Campus Dining and Shops and was launched and support through the Residential Dining Centers, Retail Food Operations and Catering. The program thrives through a concerted team effort to minimize waste and collaborated with students to achieve these goals.

Effectiveness of Measurement

Collecting and analyzing waste data points across all operations was critical to the success and longevity of the initiative. Waste logs are maintained daily, documented, and shared with all unit team members to evaluate future production schedules and find areas of opportunities. The fall 2023 semester saw a daily average of 59.04 pounds of food waste recovered, where the fall 2024 semester saw a daily average of 46.95 per recovery – a 20% decrease. With the reduction of compost totes collected, coupled with recovering the food in place of composting, a savings of over \$4,775.00 was realized in 2024 as compared to 2023.

A waste tracking Google Doc shared between CDS, UB Sustainability and the Food Recovery Network allowed for real-time collaboration by multiple users. The teams were able to track the number of meals complied along with the number of pounds of food recovered, which aided in distribution with community partners and the on-campus food pantry, Blue Table. UB/Campus Dining and Shops was the first university to be audited by the NY State Department of Conservation as part of

the Food Donation & Food Scraps Recycling Law. The Inspection Report found 100% compliance in all categories with the auditor commenting that UB “has set the gold standard for all other colleges/universities”.

Education, Outreach, and Marketing/Communications

Our successful waste reduction program here at UB relied on strong education, outreach, and marketing/communications efforts to engage students, faculty, and staff. As UB ranks in the Top 25 of Best Green Colleges in the United States (as reported by College Consensus), our community is always interested in sustainability initiatives and eager to help spread the news. Through the UB Sustainability newsletter and UBNOW, the daily campus news outlet, stories were disseminated regularly.

It is because of the activism and motivation of students that sustainability at UB has risen to a level unseen before. The BuffaLow Waste initiative was readily adopted by students mainly due to the fact that it was simple and easily relatable. Having students stationed at the Recycle, Organics, and Trash (R.O.T.) stations to help guide guests with their waste sorting was extremely impactful. Working with UB Sustainability students, CDS provided the talking points and appropriate signage to aid the volunteers in explaining the sorting process to our guests. In the following weeks, students were observed telling their friends how to sort their waste when approaching the three-container system.

The Weigh the Waste nights in the residential dining centers, along with recognizing students for being Clean-Platers, provided detailed knowledge on the importance of reducing food waste, with the key objectives to raise awareness of food insecurity and reduce waste sent to the landfill. Student representatives from the Food Recovery Network joined student marketing assistants from CDS and student ambassadors from Blue Table to have meaningful conversations with the student body during these events. These sessions proved successful in that an additional 150 volunteers were recruited to aid in the collection of food recoveries between the two UB campuses.

Attractive and informative signage, both back-of-house and customer-facing, played a crucial role in guiding behavior and increasing engagement. Clear visuals and concise instructions helped students sort waste correctly, reducing contamination in recycling and compost bins. In addition, these visuals helped support UB’s Sustainability goals with consistent messaging that reinforced a culture of environmental responsibility.

Through monthly meetings with our Student Advisory Committee and UB Sustainability, the teams brainstormed to explore new possibilities for waste reduction including support for moving away from single-use plastics (bottled beverages) as part of the SUNY Phase-out Policy. With this support, Campus Dining and Shops instituted several All-Aluminum vending machines and placed only aluminum beverages in Bulls on the Run grab-in-go locations. Going forward, students are working on improving solutions for aluminum recycling receptacles and exploring creative ways to educate peers on aluminum vs. plastic recycling rates (71% vs. 29%), with approximately only 9% of all plastics ever made being recycled. The BuffaLow Waste program set out and continues to educate and promote responsible consumption, conservation of resources, and social responsibility. The faculty and staff, but especially the UB students, have been tremendous supporters of the initiative and it is through their actions where they can influence peers, family, and future workplaces to adopt sustainable practices.

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



UB Waste audit -... 621 KiB



scraping into co... 3.6 MiB



frn weighing.pan... 3.9 MiB



C3 river.jpg 141 KiB



weigh the waste... 1.3 MiB



what goes in co... 3.4 MiB



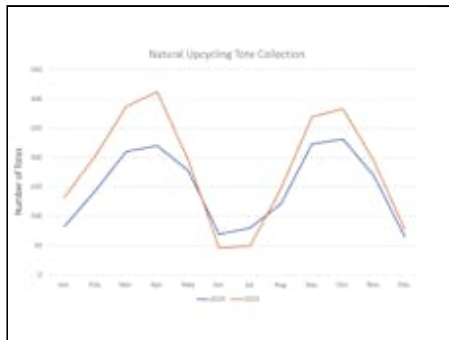
weigh the waste... 71 KiB



Mindful Eating Ti... 741 KiB



weigh the waste... 125 KiB



Tote collection 2... 778 KiB



food recover c3.j... 3.5 MiB



Food Recovery B... 956 KiB



Feedmore of W... 117 KiB



souvenir cup.jpg 550 KiB

UBNow
News and alerts for the UB community

RECYCLE
ORGANIC
TRASH

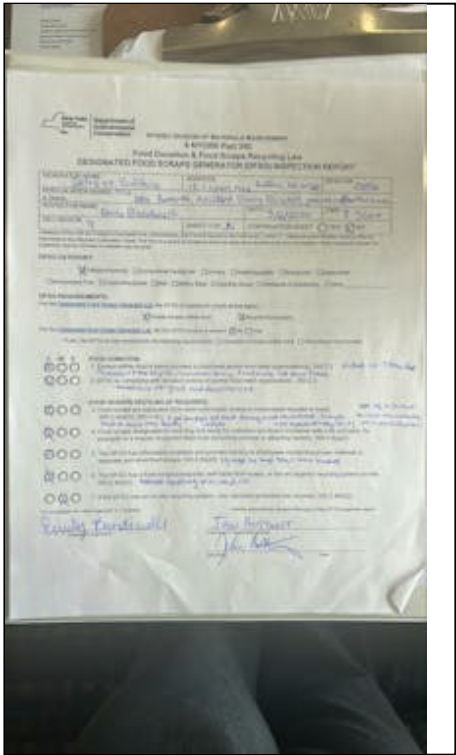
New bins, waste collection changes to aid UB's zero waste efforts

At this time, UB is in the North Campus, New School, and South Campus areas. These areas currently use their waste as they are located into the appropriate stream.

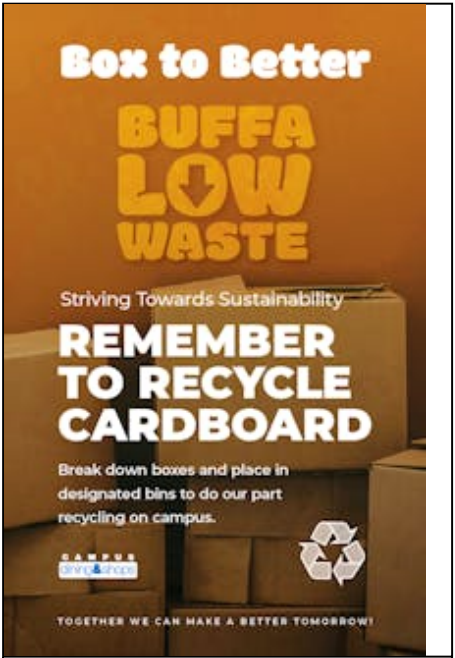
The UB's 100% goal, as the lowest, allows users to properly sort their waste in these areas (and then, when the recycling bin is full, they can take the trash to the recycling bin). The UB's 100% goal, as the lowest, allows users to properly sort their waste in these areas (and then, when the recycling bin is full, they can take the trash to the recycling bin).

The new bins will be set up beginning in select areas. The new bins will be set up beginning in select areas. The new bins will be set up beginning in select areas.

UBNow Article... 333 KiB



2024 DEC Report... 1.6 MiB



Box to Better B... 666 KiB



aluminum.jpeg 3.4 MiB



ROT station edu... 4.2 MiB