



environmental campus outreach

ECO

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Weighing the Waste Has Far-Reaching Impacts

In promoting Green Cup, the Weigh the Waste competition showed that little actions make big strides in sustainability efforts.

For Weigh the Waste, which took place from February 1-5 at all resident dining halls, students were asked to put their food waste in a bin. The dining hall that wasted the least amount of food would win the competition.

Willard wasted the least amount of food per person and celebrated with a carnival-themed night in their dining hall on February 24.

One factor that is being accredited to Willard's success is its tray-less dining. Northwestern is currently tray-free at five dining locations, which has saved energy, water and food.

According to nuCuisine, it takes ¼ gallon of water just to wash one tray. Going tray-less means that less water is necessary for washing, which also saves time and money on expenses like dishwashing liquid.

The average person throws 163 pounds of food away each year, according to nuCuisine. But when people go tray-less, they decrease food waste by one ounce per plate. No trays means less filling up on food that you aren't likely to consume.

With more food saved, there is more to go around for Campus Kitchens, an organization that nuCuisine has teamed up with to donate unused food to the needy in the Evanston area. When people make smarter decisions about how much food to take, they are indirectly giving to those who really need it.

Campus Kitchens serves about 119 meals per day. A meal consists of about 1 pound of reclaimed food. It is estimated that if all of the wasted food was able to be reclaimed during lunch, Campus Kitchens could serve about two times more people in need each day.

Molly Hoisington said that even though it is difficult to tell how representative a high publicity day like Weigh the Waste is, "the 50 percent waste reduction is definitely real."

"Both the baseline and the 50 percent reduced figures were recorded on Weigh the Waste day, so that is a start," Hoisington said. "Plus, it was averaged across all the dining halls. At the baseline observation, two sixths of the dining halls were tray-less. At the 50 percent reduced observation, five sixths were. We can probably conclude that traylessness is responsible."

Hoisington said that it has not been measured whether the food waste reduction has affected food purchasing.

Hoisington said that more eco-friendly dining reforms are in the works. Sodexo at Northwestern plans to try aerated faucets to lower water pressure with no loss of effectiveness.

A dishwasher will be hired for Foster-Walker Complex, which, according to Hoisington, typically serves 150-200 students and was previously using Styrofoam.

Also, dining halls will begin measuring food scraps as a preliminary planning step for a dining hall composting arrangement.