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What does your school do with leftover food?

In a meeting with our school's food sourcing company just last week, we asked him this very same question. "What do you do with leftover food in the dining hall and in on-campus events such as Open Houses or Admitted Student Days?" His response was that of course, the college would like to preserve the food and give it to whoever needs it however, the issue comes when it is all food that is left out all day at events and unattended. It becomes a sanitary and health issue at some point and the line is very gray. Acknowledging this, he also let us know that he is definitely interested in setting up a program in the future where any leftover foods could be given to a shelter or food shelf in some way shape or form but for the time being it is not exactly feasible. For the time being, everything that goes uneaten in dining halls or at events gets composted.

Does dining services donate any food to the school pantry or local community? (Is there a food pantry on your campus?)

Although Champlain College Dining Services does not donate to any pantry or local community, the Champlain Office of Diversity of Inclusion has started a Food Pantry this past year. Students and members of the community are free to take or leave any items they are in need of such as

grains and boxes of pasta, canned foods, and hygienic supplies as well! It's available during business hours of every weekday to make sure anyone who needs to access it can find a time in their busy schedule to make use of it.

Is your school part of the Food Recovery Network?

At the moment, Champlain College is not part of the Food Recovery Network, however the neighboring school University of Vermont is.

What percentage of students from your school are food insecure?

At the moment, there has not been a conducted study of any kind at our school that estimates how many students at our school are food insecure that is accessible to the student body.

Conversations with Food Insecure Students

After talking to two students who have faced issues of food insecurity, I have witnessed firsthand how drastic the situation is. As a student you would obviously state that your main focus would be on your studies, secondarily your jobs, then your social life or clubs, etc. However, to food insecure students, their first focus is on where their next meal is going to come from. "If I'm too focused on when my next meal is going to be, I can't exactly pay attention in class because i'm worried about money." The student informed me that she would become more irritable and start

experiencing physiological effects if she wasn't getting enough calories. "You get low energy, more irritable. You can't get work done and you're too tired to get up and stay your whole day."

She also stated that this issue was prominent in her life because the issue isn't just a problem when she's on campus. It's in fact worse on campus because "[she is] supporting myself financially, [she] comes from a low income family and money's short. There won't be a lot of food in the house, and we have to spend money on a lot of other household bills so food is the general go-to for what gets cut in the budget. In general a lot of college students go through this a lot of this are not from supportive families and if you're just here on your own and you have to survive, you have to choose between paying a bill and eating. It's gonna be a problem for you."

Something that is not thought about often is the support students get from their families. It is widely assumed that everyone has family who sends care packages, takes care of bills and whatnot, but this is not the case for most students.

Write up a plan to reduce food waste on your campus

In doing research on how to best combat food waste around campus, I have found that the best way is to go about the issue is not by bombarding them with statistics and negative effects that may be caused (that's for later in the process!), but by reminding them the alternatives to throwing out food.

Having something as little as signage either in their personal rooms, around campus, or in residence hall kitchens goes a long way in changing habits. (And so does a persuasive viral video!) I created individual signage that addresses the alternative solutions of “Planning,” “Storage,” and “Cooking Leftovers.” Each of these solutions discusses important information that is never really thought about when knowing how to properly purchase, store, and consume a product! In researching Harvard’s sustainable practices, I have found these topics to be ones that are displayed to students on campus.

Planning:

- Keep a pad and pen in the kitchen (or use a note or app on your phone) and write down items when they run out so you don't buy things you already have.
- Work out a weekly meal plan. Shopping for specific ingredients with meals in mind and taking a list helps ensure we use what we buy.
- Don't plan every meal! Life at Harvard is busy and there are always events that come up during the week. Just thinking about 4-5 meals allows you to be flexible with unexpected leftovers, especially if you keep some meals in the freezer as a back-up in case your plans fall through.
- Buying foods that can be used for several different dishes gives us flexibility to create different meals.

Storage:

- Make sure you store food correctly according to the label. Often, foods come with lots of packaging which seems wasteful, but is often designed to help keep the food fresh, so keep it in its original packaging when you store it.
- Make sure your fridge and freezer are at the correct temperature. A fridge that is too warm will lead to waste.
- Use your freezer! It's an amazing resource to prevent waste when your plans change.
- Food can be frozen any time before the 'use by' date on the label so if you buy something and don't use it straight away, you can freeze it anytime before the use by date and it will still be safe.

Cooking Leftovers:

- Try to keep your store-cupboard and freezer well-stocked with a variety of canned, dried, and frozen goods. These store-cupboard essentials have a long life and can be mixed with other foods to make delicious meals.
- Use leftovers for lunch the next day! Find out where there is a fridge and a microwave at your department or school, make sure you remember a fork and you're all set to eat well, save money, and reduce waste! A small investment in a plastic tub to carry leftovers can pay-back very quickly.

Share your plan with someone you think could make a difference on your campus' approach to food waste. Who did you meet with and what was their response?

After talking to the Student Government Association here at Champlain College, they informed me that they would be interested in helping me out in putting out flyers and promoting these solutions to food waste. They said that if I can get access to the individual halls, which I and my great team of Eco-Reps do, I could hand out small pieces of signage that residents can have posted on their mini-fridges, communal fridges, and cabinets! This way, they have a constant reminder of how to go about purchasing, storing, and cooking food! They asked that the signs have super light text and be brief in each category because students won't read a full text flyer. I also inquired about getting digital flyers posted onto the SGA's official page and if they would be interested in posting in different facebook groups their members are a part of and they told me to simply email the flyer to their communications associate and they would do that as soon as possible! They were very helpful and receptive to what I had to say!

