

EASY CHANGES HELP REDUCE FOOD WASTE, SAVE MONEY

One of the key components of any environmental program is reducing the amount of waste that is generated. In 2010, Gundersen Health System embarked on a project aimed at reducing the amount of food sent into the waste stream. Their success is impressive.

As with any dietary program, there will always be some amount of food leftover from the service line and scraps from food prep. However, there wasn't a system in place at Gundersen to track exactly how much, and what, was being thrown away. In July 2010, the Dietary department began using a tracking program called LeanPath®. Their baseline results were shocking: about half a ton of food waste was thrown away every week. That's 24 tons of waste a year. Now, anytime food is thrown away, Dietary staff places it on a scale and enters its code. The data is fed into a software program that gives Dietary valuable information, such as the time of day or day of the week that the most food waste is generated or the type of food that is thrown away most often.



Using an electronic tracking program, Gundersen has been able to make a number of adjustments to reduce food waste. In the first four years of the program, food waste decreased by 850 pounds per week, a 80 percent improvement.

Based on the data, the team has been able to make a number of positive adjustments that have greatly reduced food waste. Many of the changes have been fairly simple, like adjusting the amount of soup that is warmed up at certain times of day or educating staff on how to prepare vegetables so there is less scrap waste, but they've had an impact. From July 2010 through January 2015, food waste decreased by approximately 850 pounds per week, a 80 percent improvement from baseline. Overall, that equates to an average cost savings of approximately \$30,000.

A byproduct of the food waste reduction program was the creation of a food donation program to the Salvation Army in La Crosse, Wis. Each day, food is left over that is still safe to eat but cannot be served in the hospital due to food service regulations. In the past, the food was thrown away. Now Dietary staff package it up, label it and set it aside in the cooler or freezer. A Salvation Army member picks up the food to be served in their soup kitchen. Gundersen donates more than 500 meals a month.

By rethinking how food is prepared and finding ways to use leftovers, Gundersen has made great strides in reducing the amount of food that is being put into the waste stream.

The food waste project is just one piece of Gundersen's extensive plan to lead the healthcare industry in environmental stewardship through a program called Envision®. Gundersen Health System is headquartered in La Crosse, Wis., with hospitals and clinics in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. For more information on Gundersen's Envision program, call (855) 669-1653 (toll free), email envision@gundersenhealth.org or go to gundersenenvision.org.