



Fletcher Allen Health Care Burlington, Vermont

90% Recovery of Preconsumer Food Discards



The Medical Center Hospital of Vermont (MCHV) Campus of Fletcher Allen Health Care delivers approximately 90% of its food preparation scraps and steam table leftovers to an off-site composting facility. The hospital also donates produce to a food bank and sends old grease to a rendering facility. Its food discard recovery program allows Fletcher Allen to save approximately \$1,400 per year in landfill hauling and tipping fees and to support a local farm.

Program Description

Kitchen staff at the MCHV Campus of Fletcher Allen Health Care prepare 4,000 meals a day for patients and cafeteria patrons at the 500-bed facility. Kitchen staff place food preparation discards and leftovers from cafeteria steam tables into 64-gallon totes every Monday through Friday. Leftovers from plates are not collected because separating out post-consumer compostables from individual patient rooms is difficult, and because staff need to be extra careful about keeping sanitary conditions in this hospital setting.

Hospital housekeeping staff bring full totes to an organic farm run by the Intervale Foundation where discards are **windrow composted**. Intervale is a non-profit organization that runs many programs including the Intervale Composting Project, a partnership between Intervale and the Chittenden (VT) Solid Waste District, with Intervale the managing partner. The project accepts food scraps from hundreds of large and small businesses in addition to horse manure from a farm, leaves, and yard trimmings. Because the project is located near residential communities, Intervale staff only

turn windrows when the wind is blowing away from more populated areas. The material takes about 10 months to compost. It is then screened to remove large pieces and used on Intervale farms. It is also sold to area businesses and gardeners and through mail order.

During the year it took Intervale to receive a permit to accept commercial discards, hospital staff were trained in separation of compostable items as well as in proper storage and handling procedures. Staff were already separating out recyclables to send to the hospital's recycling facility located in a nearby town. Separating food discards was not a major change in their daily routine. All new staff are trained in separating

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recyclables, including compostables.

The hospital housekeeping staff's waste team makes daily trips to the recycling facility in a 19-foot box truck; trips to the Intervale farm, about 1 mile off the route, were added when Fletcher Allen began composting. The truck is standard dock height, making it easy for staff to wheel heavy toters on and off. After emptying toters, the waste team disinfects them at the recycling facility with a hospital grade disinfectant. Fletcher Allen has had no odor or vector problems. The hospital's Waste Specialist attributes this to "keeping our compost moving," and to cleaning the toters daily.

Kitchen staff collect grease in containers, which are emptied into a 180-gallon tank. Baker Commodities, a rendering company, picks up the tank at no cost to Fletcher Allen, and sends it to one of its facilities for processing.

The hospital donates fruit and vegetables to a local food bank.

Costs/Benefits

Start-up costs were minimal. In 1997, Fletcher Allen paid per-ton tip fees of \$25 at the compost facility plus approximately \$57 per ton in labor,

transportation, and other related costs. Trash hauling and landfill tipping cost the hospital \$98 per ton.

Fletcher Allen buys \$1,000 of produce wholesale per month from the farm, allowing patients to eat locally grown, pesticide-free produce. Once a week, employees can buy organically grown produce from a farm cart brought to the hospital.

The program provides good public relations in the community and fits in with the hospital's waste reduction policy. As one of 6,000 hospitals in the United States, which in total produce one to two percent of the country's solid waste, Fletcher Allen Health Care staff believe composting to be part of the hospital's mission to provide for the health of the community.

Tips for Replication

- Know what's going on at your facility before you begin any program. Calculate your baseline operation in tons and costs. If you don't measure your success, the program will be invisible.
- Look for existing infrastructure or processes within the system on which to piggyback your program. This will make program costs small add-ons rather than whole new costs.
- Train food service workers well, and well ahead of program implementation.
- Place signs on containers.
- Assign program responsibility to somebody. To ensure program success, one person needs to oversee it.

Program Summary, 1997

Sector	Hospital
Average number of meals prepared	4,000 meals per day
Start date	1993
Dedicated employees*	0.5
Methods	Off-site windrow composting; rendering; donations
Materials collected	Kitchen scraps; cooking oil; preconsumer leftovers
Part of comprehensive waste reduction program?	Yes
Total waste generated (TPY)	1,431 tons (estimated)
Food discards generated (TPY)	100 tons (estimated)

RESULTS:

Food discards recovered (TPY)	90 tons
Food discards recovered (%)	90% (estimated)
Total waste recovered (TPY)	468 tons
Total waste recovered (%)	33% (estimated)

COSTS:

Average compost costs	\$82 per ton
Average avoided landfill hauling and tipping fees	\$98 per ton
Net savings	\$16 per ton

* A dedicated employee is one whose primary responsibility is working with the food discard program. TPY = tons per year

