



Mayor's Food Waste Challenge to Restaurants

Overview

Background

New York City sends four million tons of waste to landfill every year. Almost a third of that is food waste. When food waste degrades in landfills, it produces methane, a harmful greenhouse gas. Removing organic material from landfills not only benefits the atmosphere, it also presents an opportunity to harness its positive value as a potential clean energy source or compost input. For these and other reasons, Mayor Bloomberg, in his 2013 State of the City Address identified tackling “New York City’s final recycling frontier: food waste” as a key step towards reaching the goal outlined two years prior to divert 75 percent of New York City’s waste from landfill by 2030.

New York City restaurants, in total, account for the largest single stream of food waste on the commercial side. They generate close to a half million tons of food waste per year – enough to fill well over a hundred subway cars per day. As such, the restaurant sector represents the greatest commercial opportunity to reduce the volume of New York City’s landfilled food waste. If just five percent of New York City’s largest restaurants diverted from landfill half of the food waste they generate – by reducing it at source, donating what’s edible, and composting what’s not, for example – the city as a whole would reduce landfilled commercial food waste 14 percent.

Through small steps, restaurants can realize big impacts in their waste stream. City data reveal that less than one percent of our city’s commercial food waste is diverted from landfill currently, and has received less attention overall than initiatives such as recycling. This makes this area a ripe arena for sustainable operations improvements and, potentially, even cost savings. Moreover, restaurants’ increased awareness around food waste will strengthen existing efforts to reduce and avoid waste, and increase recycling of non-organic waste.

To engage New York City residents – our “customers” – on the importance of harnessing food waste as a resource, City government is implementing a number of residential-side initiatives. Curbside organics collection will begin as a pilot in the spring of 2013, with participating residents receiving a container for their organic waste that the Department of Sanitation will collect weekly. In addition, organic waste collection will increase in schools, city agencies and high rise buildings across the city, building off the success of an ongoing six month organics collection pilot in schools. At the same time, multiple agencies are looking at ways to expand organics processing capacity in the city: from community garden compost plots all the way up to large-scale facilities testing innovative technologies, like anaerobic digestion.

The Challenge

The Mayor’s Food Waste Challenge invites New York City restaurants to help reduce landfilled food waste by committing to a 50 percent food waste diversion goal.

- **The 50 percent Target:** To meet the 50 percent food waste diversion goal, participants in the Food Waste Challenge must reduce the amount of their food waste that goes to landfill by 50 percent from their base year, of which no more than 10 percent can come from non-organic waste recycling and reduction.



- **Tracking (Food) Waste:** The program requires participants to conduct a baseline waste generation to determine the volume or weight of the total waste generated and the composition, and monitor changes on at least a quarterly basis. Itemized billing from a participant's carter or other receipts may suffice.

Completing the Challenge

To successfully complete the Mayor's Food Waste Challenge, each participant must meet the 50 percent food waste diversion goal subject to verification by OLTPS or a neutral third party.

Structure of the Program

The Mayor's Food Waste Challenge consists of the following:

1. Regular Partner Meetings

2. Working Groups

Workshop topics may include:

- Carter contract negotiation: Group rates / Geographic cluster discounts; Detailed billing
- Simple ways to measure waste generation and monitor diversion
- Effective messaging (front-of-house & back-of-house) and training (back-of-house)
- Waste storage bin and optimized layout solutions

3. Access to Resources and Technical Expertise

4. Promotion and Recognition

Benefits of the Food Waste Challenge

The Mayor's Food Waste Challenge to Restaurants offers participants the opportunity to be recognized for their food waste diversion efforts as part of broader citywide goals.

Participating restaurants will have access to a diverse forum of peers, industry experts, and ancillary organizations that will provide the contacts, best practices, and technical assistance needed to realize meaningful reductions in landfilled food waste. Promotion and recognition will also include:

- Official participant listing on the Mayor's Food Waste Challenge web page on the Plan NYC website
- Inclusion of company name or logo, successful project profiles, and/or names and biographies of exemplary participating staff on official NYC documents
- The ability to self-promote participation in the Challenge, including the use of the Mayor's Carbon Challenge logo on vetted documents, collateral, web pages, social media, or other informative media, and placement of a Food Waste Challenge participant decal in restaurant window