



Waste Less Dinner promotes sustainable eating on campus

GRACE YUH

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The promotional table for the 'Waste Less Dinner' at Carmichael Dining Hall is pictured on Nov. 1. Anika Agarwal / The Tufts Daily

Sustainable eating at Tufts has increasingly been a combined effort between the administration and the student body. One result of these efforts has been Waste Less Dinners. Hosted by Tufts Dining, Tufts Eco-Reps and the Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative, Waste Less Dinners have been a part of the larger campaign for sustainability at Tufts. According to Tufts Dining's Julie Lampie, nutrition and marketing specialist, and Lyza Bayard, communications specialist, although the structure and format of Waste Less Dinners has changed over the years, the end goal has remained the same.

"We want students to know what they're consuming, what that looks like in a more thoughtful way, and how that fits into a larger system at Tufts," Bayard said.

Eliza Hilfer, an Eco-Rep in Harleston Hall and area leader for Tilton and Metcalf Halls, said Waste Less Dinners provide a way for the Tufts community to adapt for sustainability.

"Our main goal was to raise awareness and let people know how much food they were wasting and show how food insecurity plays into the lives of students at Tufts," Hilfer, a junior, said. "On a college campus, you can't really control where your energy comes from. You can't control how much heat is being used or how much electricity is being used, but food is something you can tangibly make a difference in. I think it enables people to take a part in what they can be doing to help the environment on a day-to-day basis."

This academic year's first Waste Less Dinner was held on Nov. 1 at both Carmichael Dining Hall and Dewick-MacPhie Dining Hall. According to Lampie and Bayard, information regarding data and statistics around food waste was available at both dining halls. Tufts Eco-Reps and members of the Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative were present at tables near dish disposal areas to promote the event. If students presented plates in which no food was left, they were entered into a raffle for JumboCash. Additionally, there were disposal bins where students could scrape leftovers to demonstrate a visual representation of the waste that occurs at dining halls every meal.

In data provided by Tufts Dining, this most recent Waste Less Dinner yielded 1.61 oz. of waste per person in Carmichael and 1.78 oz. of waste per person in Dewick-MacPhie. This was a relative decrease in comparison to data from previous Waste Less Dinners, which yielded numbers ranging from 1.5 oz. to 3.16 oz.

Lampie said leftover food from dining halls are donated to [underserved populations](#) through Food For Free, a Cambridge-based non-profit organization, noting that scraping the plate can reduce food waste and increase the amount of food donated.

“Food that has been left on students’ plates cannot be donated and must be composted. While composting is good and something that Tufts Dining has been doing for years, students are encouraged to only take what they need [so] we are able to give more to the community and ... better analyze how much food Tufts students consume,” she said.

Hilfer also noted that the activity could bring more mindfulness surrounding the labor that goes into food production and consumption, resulting in more awareness about the economic implications of sustainable eating.

“The idea is to remind people that food doesn’t just disappear,” she said. “It’s someone’s job to scrape it off at the end of the day. This coincides with how food, people and the environment are really intrinsically linked.”

Bayard said she believes that student feedback is crucial in promoting sustainable eating at Tufts.

“We really care about student input. We aren’t the ones eating in dining halls every day, and so we want to know what the students think and to work with them,” Bayard said.

Hilfer said that she and several other Eco-Reps are focusing on sustainable eating habits this year and that she hopes to educate students on ways that food impacts the environment.

“We think about the types of events that we want to run, and sustainable eating is a really fun way to run events. People like going to events where there’s free stuff, and our main goal is to engage with as many people as possible,” she said. “I think that there are people who really care and we want to work with other students.”

For Lampie and Bayard, it all rests in how the administration can better support student initiatives. This includes Tufts Dining’s existing partnerships with Tufts Eco-Reps and the Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative. In particular, Bayard noted the Swipe It Forward program, an opportunity for students on meal plans to donate meal swipes to students in need, as an example of how student-led ideas can become university-wide initiatives.
