

INNOVATIVE IDEA AWARD
Foodservice Employee/Manager Level Entry

Title of Project:

Let's Compost! Why is there always so much garbage???

Do you ever think about garbage? Sometimes I do. I started thinking about all the garbage the employees were taking out. Why is there always so much garbage? I wish there was a better way to manage so much waste.

Then it hit me. COMPOST!

Our school has wonderful edible gardens and fruit trees. We have been teaching the students about "farm-to-table" but what about "table-to-farm"? What would be the impact if we recycle our food scraps?



Project: What did you do?

I had a plan and quickly set it into motion. Working in a kitchen making salads, eggs and fresh vegetables every day, we always had lots of food scraps. I decided to save them and turn them into compost. Composting is good for several reasons. It saves water by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff. It benefits the environment by recycling organic matter making nutrient rich soil, and by producing less garbage, which in turn, conserves landfill space. It was a "win-win" situation.

I knew my school would be on board, so with help of my school counselor, Dr. Marie Bracciale, we ordered some plastic composting bins. As the staff was prepping meals, they saved the scraps in the composting bins. Then we brought them out to our tumbler-style composting barrel. Students would turn the bin (which they love doing), and learn about composting. They then added a microbe growing solution, dead plant life from weeding the garden, and kitchen scraps to help fill the compost barrel.

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Purpose: Why was your idea useful?

On average, a school of 600 students generates about 225 pounds of compostable waste each week, or over 9,000 pounds per year. Here in Volusia County, over 50% of the waste, sent to landfills, is compostable.

These wasted resources are also a lost opportunity to teach our students lifelong sustainable practices. By implementing composting programs at our school, we can reduce landfill waste, educate students and create healthier school gardens.

They learned, through their S.T.E.M curriculum, to improve their science scores. Students are more willing to taste the fresh arugula salad in the lunch line (named "Rocket Salad") because they had a hand in growing it. We provided samples of produce from the edible garden to students in the cafeteria, and gave them names with catchy titles, so they would give it a try.



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Results: Did you share your idea? YES

If Yes: With whom did you share your idea?

I first shared my idea with my Principal Dr. Mary Ellen Speidel, who thought it was a wonderful idea. Next, it was shared with the Coordinator of Nutrition, Evelyn Klironomos, RD, LD and my Area Manager, Debbie Cox. All agreed it was a fantastic idea!

We had a newspaper article published in the Port Orange Observer and were featured in our School Newsletter, shared with our community partners and parents.



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What responses did you receive resulting from your efforts?

The cafeteria has reduced the amount of waste that goes into the garbage each week, and this waste is brought to the composter to be recycled and reused. This is part of the plant life cycle. It helps the garden tremendously to use fresh compost instead of traditional fertilizer.

The response from our community partners has been fantastic and they encouraged us to continue to apply for funding and sustainability grants to keep our composting and gardens going. We have had a positive response from our sponsors and grant providers, as well.

Students also benefited by learning the value of composting and recycling waste. They also learned about the amount of waste we put in landfills each year and how we can reduce our environmental footprint. Students learned they could recycle their wasted food for composting, and learned how it breaks down into valuable soil for the garden.

To summarize, Table to Farm is as important to practice as Farm to Table, especially in a dynamic learning facility such as Sugar Mill Elementary School.