



Success with Food Waste



The **Red Fern** is an entirely vegan eatery in Rochester that was founded upon principals of health, ethics, environment, and social consciousness. The restaurant creates meals from scratch, using locally-sourced and organic ingredients when possible. Menu offerings include entrees, sandwiches, salads, specials, fresh juice, smoothies, house-baked pastries, kombucha on tap, beer, and wine.

Motivation

The restaurant owner, Andrea Parros, has operated The Red Fern sustainably since opening in 2013 and believes that all food establishments can reduce and divert wasted food from landfill, “It just seems like common sense that if something that normally goes into a landfill can be repurposed, why wouldn’t you?” Andrea emphasizes that it is just as easy to throw food scraps in a designated bin as it is to throw them in the trash, and that paying for food scraps to be hauled away is similar to paying for trash removal.



Solutions

Source Reduction

The restaurant takes inventory twice daily to limit waste and to properly manage food purchasing, costs, and preparation. Frequent inventories help avoid overproduction, which can lead to spoilage and less-than-optimal product for customers. Kitchen staff at The Red Fern manage food waste from preparation by following par status sheets. These sheets track how much of a certain item, such as coleslaw or soup, should be prepared in advance. The sheets are based on patterns from historical data. Since traffic at the restaurant differs seasonally and day-to-day, kitchen staff use weekday, weekend, and seasonally-based par sheets. Other source reduction practices include repurposing leftovers to create special menu items and using blue tape to indicate which foods to use first.

Food Donation

The Red Fern donates surplus food from catered events to the Open Door Mission, which runs a community meal program. The restaurant can claim a federal tax deduction for food donated through this program. The restaurant owner also encourages employees to take shift meals. Each employee is allowed a meal of choice during their shift or they can take home a meal after their shift. Staff will often rescue meals that were mis-made or eat menu items that would otherwise be wasted.

Organics Collection

The Red Fern collects pre-consumer food scraps from kitchen preparation stations, as well as post-consumer food left on customer plates. When new employees are hired, their initial training includes learning how prep stations are set up, and where food scraps are collected. Andrea says, "It's very simple. New staff are shown to throw all food scraps into the [collection] buckets. We've never had to reprimand anyone about this. Staff is excited to help!"

Kitchen staff collect food scraps in 3-gallon buckets which are brought outside and emptied into one of two 64-gallon wheeled carts. The carts, which have tight lids to control pests and limit odor are moved closer to the kitchen door during winter months for easier access. The restaurant shares the building with 14 apartment tenants, who are on board with the restaurant's organic diversion program because it is clean and there is no overflow.

Adaptability

The Red Fern's food recovery program has expanded over the years to meet the capacity of the growing business. The program is also flexible to accommodate the restaurant's 50% increase in outside summer seating. During the busy summer months, The Red Fern increases the number of weekly pick-ups to account for the larger volume of generated food scraps. To avoid contamination (bits of trash or recycling in food waste containers), employees are properly trained on which items go in the food bin. They are also trained to have eyes on the bins throughout the day and to pick out any bits of non-food items. This ensures food scraps are in good condition for processing.

Organics Diversion

Natural Upcycling, an organics hauling company, picks up the wheeled carts weekly and replaces them with clean carts. Natural Upcycling delivers the food waste to Noblehurst Green Energy, an anaerobic digester adjacent to Noblehurst Farms complex in Linwood. The food scraps are mixed with other organic material, and fed into a digester where microorganisms break down the organic matter and create methane gas. According to Noblehurst Green Energy, this methane fuels a generator which produces enough electricity to power approximately 300 homes.

Other Sustainability Initiatives

The Red Fern runs a sustainable operation and is in the process of applying for New York Green Business Certification from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Other sustainable practices at The Red Fern include:

- Using green cleaning products
- Sourcing local non-food items
- Installing energy efficient LED bulbs
- Providing compostable ware and plastic bags upon request
- Purchasing all dishes and silverware second hand

Results

The Red Fern benefits financially, socially, and environmentally from their food recovery program. The restaurant's food waste prevention practices and food donation program improves (and greens!) their bottom line. Staff, customers, and the community whole-heartedly value the restaurant's stewardship. Since the restaurant opened in 2013, they have diverted more than 40,000 pounds of food scraps from landfill, which is equivalent to taking roughly 423 cars off the road for a week.



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