

# Spotlight

# Watching Their Waste

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Much time and money is spent on all of the food brought onto the campus of Lindsey Wilson College (LWC). A lot of that food is simply thrown out and put to no further use. There are people who see this as a tragedy for both the college's budget and the needy in the surrounding community.

One of these people is Abby Keller, a junior at LWC. "One of the biggest things for me is all this food is being wasted when there are people even in this community that could benefit from the food that we so carelessly throw away," Keller said.

Another one of these people is Doug Keaton, instructor of energy technology career at LWC. He believes that if students played a larger role in separating their food scraps from their other trash in the Cranmer Dining Center, the staff would be able to focus on other things and save time and money.

"[Saving] time and money is always good for everybody's budget," Keaton said.

Although the staff at the Dining Center does a lot to reuse what they can, Keller says she sees them throw out a lot of the leftover dessert foods.

"For example, even after every meal, I'll see most of the dessert stuff, even if maybe a cake has one piece, they'll put it through that [disposal] window," Keller said.

Keller may not think things look so well from the dessert counter, but Jeff Willis, director of business services and food services at LWC, and Keaton said that the Dining Center does very well with the other foods.

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According to Willis, there is very little extra food because the Dining Center keeps production records and "progressively cook[s] throughout the meal periods." He admits that numbers do not stay constant, but the Dining Center usually manages to have no more than eight to ten extra portions of each food item at the end of every meal period.

"Now if something happens such as we have a hotel pan full of spaghetti at the end of the meal that we didn't anticipate, that will go into a pasta dish the next meal and go onto the short line," Willis said. "If it's an item such as baked chicken, it'll be pulled off the bone and go into chicken and dumplings the next time it arises."

According to Willis, the Dining Center puts out less than a gallon of waste per meal.

The Dining Center is also supportive of Keaton's sustainability efforts, which he says would not be successful without that support.

"I don't think anybody does a better job at providing good quality food for our students than Jeff and our staff," Keaton said. "Jeff Willis is watching every dime that he spends and he's always looking for those options. We collect waste vegetable oil from the campus for the biodiesel

processing, and that only works because we have a partnership with Jeff."

The staff also keeps paper products separate from food scraps for Keaton's compost pile behind Turner, which he currently only runs during the spring semesters. Keaton's compost is then given away to people in the community and used to grow a garden. The food from that garden is also given away, and the Dining Center uses some of the melons during the summer.

Keaton said he gave away twelve truck bed loads of compost to 30 to 40 different people last year. The peppers and tomatoes from the garden were given to the local restaurant Fiesta Mexico, and melons were given away to members of the community and to friends and family of Keaton.

At the end of the school year, Keaton and his students also take the unopened leftover food in the dorms and donate it to a local church food pantry.

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As far as student waste at the Dining Center is concerned, Willis said that this year is the best one ever, with student waste at an all-time low.

Willis estimates that food waste has reduced by 15 percent over the past two years. He said it has gotten a little better every year, but this year was a drastic change.

More specifically, Willis said that they collect about 15 gallons of waste at breakfast. At lunch, they collect about 55 gallons. At dinner, they collect around 45 gallons.

"It would seem like there is a concentrated effort by our students to make sure that they don't waste," Willis said. "We have less people asking for more portions."

Although those numbers add up to 115 gallons per day and 575 gallons per work week, Willis still finds them to be an improvement that cannot get much better.

Willis believes this improvement is a generational occurrence.

"I think it's because this group of students is just more educated or more caring about the environment and they want to play their own role in making sure we don't waste," Willis said.

Keaton believes it is also related to his new sustainability classes and groups. Two whole groups of freshmen, the class of 2017 and the class of 2018, have now come into the

college and been involved in the sustainability program in some way.

"I think we are doing better at not wasting food because students who are taking the sustainability classes are hearing that and spreading that message," Keaton said. "I think that that's having a cultural change."

As far as the Blue Raider Café in the Student Union Building is concerned, Willis and Keller believe that there is little to no student waste because each item is paid for individually by portion.

The Café itself uses up all of its food because it is prepared to order and not precooked, Willis said.

Very seldom does food go bad and have to be thrown out.

"We ran into some waste with some salads at the beginning of opening Blue Raider Café," Willis said. "We ran into some waste with that because it just didn't move [sell]. And after we got that resolved, and those are no longer on the menu, I don't know of another instance where we've had waste."

Although this year is the best year so far in terms of food waste, Keaton believes it will and should continue to get better.

"I think that when this fall rolls around and the class of '19 gets here, and they hear the message, we will see even more improvement next year," Keaton said.

A specific change that Keaton thinks should be made is for the campus to start using different disposable dishes in the Dining Center and Café.

"When we talk about food waste, I think that's another aspect of food waste," Keaton said. "We typically only think about what's on the plate, we don't think about the plate. Or we think about what's in the cup, but we don't think about the cup."

Keaton noted that styrofoam cups are not compostable or recyclable, so paper cups may be a better option. Introducing bamboo eating utensils is another possibility, although it may not currently be financially feasible to use them full time in the Dining Center. They could, however, be used in the Café to bring awareness to students.

Keaton also said that having the Dining Center buy organic food locally could decrease the college's "carbon footprint" and teaching people to like eating healthier could reduce food waste.

"When people like what they eat, they don't throw much of it away," Keaton said.

There are several other changes that Keller would like to see at the college. These include educating students on the topic of food waste and helping them understand it, bringing the issue up at a Student Government meeting, getting smaller portions in the food lines, having the Food Services staff keep better track of how much food they make, giving extra food to the local food pantry, and composting.

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Although Keaton, his students, and the food staff already do some of these things, Keaton said that he would like to see improvement. For example, he said he already composts, but he would like to move into doing it year-round for more students to be more active in it.

Connected to this, Keaton believes that the process of food disposal is the only thing that could be improved at the Dining Center, because the quantity and quality are great where they are.

"What would be a big help, and Jeff and I spoke about this, is if students, when they were bringing their plate back [and] if there was a place, [...] would go ahead and knock their food into the waste basket," Keaton said. "That would be the way the students could improve the entire process. That really cuts down on the process behind the scenes... saving time and money."



## Gallons of FoodWaste



**115** gallons every day  
**575** gallons every work week