Trays Causing Waste in Rutgers’ Dining Hall

Rutgers University students’ volunteer initiative to reduce food, water and energy waste by eliminating trays in one campus dining hall.

Tag Words: “Rutgers tray-less”, “Rutgers dining halls”, “Rutgers green initiatives”

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Summary

We feel as students that Rutgers University, New Brunswick should demonstrate a high level of social responsibility. We encourage the university to examine all of its’ functions in order to cut down wastage when possible. Like many other universities, Rutgers has four dining halls in which food, water and energy are being constantly wasted. It is significant to Rutgers and the sake of the environment for the university to adopt a policy for tray-less dining halls. Understandably, this initiative should be pilot testing and we have devised a simple strategy to go about getting this accomplished.
The Issue: Waste from Trays (Matthew Minder)

A number of major universities across the nation are ditching their dining hall trays in an effort to reduce food waste as well as lower water and energy consumption (1). You may be asking yourself, ‘how would tray-less dining accomplish this?’ Think about it. Dining hall patrons sometimes have eyes that are bigger than their stomachs. By providing enough space for multiple dishes and glasses, trays encourage an all-you-can-eat mindset. Oftentimes, diners run out of space before their tray is cleared, leaving some food merely sampled. Other times students eat to capacity, and then realize that they were actually full well before their third plate of fries. The removal of trays would eliminate this type of mistake and facilitate more reasonable, not to mention healthy, eating habits. In order to find tray-less dining success stories, simply look into some universities that have already removed them. NYU found that they were able to reduce food waste from 4.03 ounces per tray to less than 2.37 ounces (2). In addition to producing less waste, dining halls cut down on water and energy use when they don’t have to wash dirty trays. UNC was able to save thousands of gallons of water monthly after removing their trays (2). It is unrealistic to assume that all will be willing to quit the tray cold turkey. This point raises the issue of how to incorporate tray-less dining into traditional dining halls without scaring students off. Many schools, like Harvard, begin by instituting “Tray-less Days” to show diners that a life without trays is not only possible, but also convenient (3). Others, such as the University of Florida, sparked change by raising awareness about the amount of waste generated by tray use (2). It has been estimated that within the next five years, most of the nation’s 4,000 colleges and universities will join pioneers like Skidmore College (1), and cut trays from their dining services (2). The question now is when will Rutgers get the picture and toss theirs?

Sources:
(2) http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2008-07-22-trays-college-cafeterias_N.htm
(3) http://www.thecrimson.harvard.edu/article/2008/2/4/quincy-dining-hall-goes-trayless-the/\n
The Service Project: Outreach Nick Gayliard

Although the plan to remove trays doesn’t absolutely require University students to agree with the practice, there are a number of reasons that it is preferable that they do. First off, the University should obviously try to make students happy and address the student body’s needs. Keeping things convenient and user-friendly is a very good way to do this and trays may currently be seen as such. Second, removing dining hall trays is a cost-negative solution to save food, lower costs for the University, and lessen our negative impact on the environment. It is beneficial to increase student awareness of these types of problems and their potential solutions in order to increase general concern and participation towards “greener” practices. Thirdly, student support, while not strictly necessary, will make the transition much smoother. If students are in agreement with the idea, they will be less likely to protest and request the tray system to be reinstated. They will be more likely to quickly learn to cope with the tray-less environment and enjoy its benefits. Lastly, having widespread student support will help to convince the Dining Hall Services that removing the trays is a good idea.

In order to spread awareness and gain student support, we have made a mini-marketing campaign. We have created a Facebook group to gain student support and to hopefully explain
to students the various benefits of removing trays from dining halls. We will also be conducting a poll at the Nielsen Dining Hall and publishing an editorial in the Daily Targum to spread the word about the issue. The Targum article is designed to reach out to as many students as possible and make them aware of the issue. The poll is going to be used to (hopefully) show that students using Nielsen Dining Hall will be comfortable with the concept of tray-less dining, since the initial plan is to have Tray-less Tuesdays at Nielsen. Hopefully the combination of these things will result in some students giving direct feedback either through e-mail based on the editorial or through the Facebook group. This information can then be used to tailor the program to ensure that it is optimal for Rutgers students as well as the University Dining Services.

Methods Shannon Mulrooney

As a group we decided taking a survey would be the best idea to use. By taking a survey we are able to sample randomly and evaluate what the current Rutgers’s University students feel about tray-less dining here on campus. Here is an example of the survey we will have the students fill out and when we hand the survey to them we will also ask they to leave any and all feedback on the back of the survey so we can take in consideration their reasons and justifications regarding tray-less dining on campus if they want to write them down.

1. Please read the following and answer the questions pertaining to the Rutgers University Dining Halls and eating procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use trays at the dining hall?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you concerned about food and water waste here at Rutgers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you feel you tend to waste more food because your tray holds more?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you think if we didn’t have trays in the dining hall, people would waste less food?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you alter your eating habits to help conserve food and water waste at the Rutgers Dining Hall?</td>
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My group and I feel that tray-less dining is the way to go. Rutgers’s University wouldn’t be the first college to go tray-less. There are a number of other colleges that are trying to implement tray-less dining and there are colleges that have already succeed that challenge. For instance, Colby College for the last few years has been implementing ‘Tray-less Thursdays’. However, Tulane University in L.A., has accomplished being tray free since 2008 (www.wastedfood.com/trayless).

After we conduct the survey, we will be able to analyze the student body’s opinion. Where we can collect the data and create charts to express the student’s opinion in a clear format.

Part III: Strategy
Lauren Snedeker

When trying to impact society by encouraging positive behavior change, two realistic approaches exist. Community outreach workers can help foster behavior change by direct implementation of a program or on the other hand, they can pilot test a program. Although both are applicable to the success of this initiative, it is believed that the technique of pilot testing would better accurately examine student’s feelings about tray-less dining at Neilson dining hall.
Fortunately, many universities have implemented a tray-less policy at their dining halls so the proposed strategy has all ready been tested for efficiency. American University’s Department of Environmental Science composed an experiment in 2009 to survey student’s response to tray-less dining (1). It is proposed that on six separate days between October and November of 2010 (the fall semester) during lunch and dinner trays will be made selectively available and unavailable. Randomizing this experiment will produce more accurate, unprepared responses to be expressed by students. The lunch and dinner time period have been selected due to the fact that these are believed to be times when the highest volume of students enters Neilson dining hall. Additionally, it is believed that the most food, water and energy is used and wasted during these time periods.

Part IV: The Future
Lauren Snedeker

This is to be implemented between October and November of 2010. Observational data will be collected during these six days in order to inform the researchers of student’s opinions. The first 30 diners at the start of the observation time will be surveyed; whether or not they complained and/or noticed, etc. When trays are available, the first 30 diners’ food waste will be weighed as well as number of bowls, plates, cups and silverware counted. The results of comparing how many cutlery and the weight of food waste is present when using trays and not using trays will help demonstrate the need for future tray removal. It is intended that these results will be released to students and faculty to further explain the significance of tray removal at Neilson Dining Hall and in the future all dining halls at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Unfortunately, Rutgers University dining hall managers and members of this initiative were unable to schedule a meeting prior to submission of this proposal. Below is a copy of an email in which one member sent to the manager of the Neilson Dining Hall on the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences Campus. The lack of interest demonstrated by administration that members have reached out to at Rutgers University is disappointing, however planning continues to allow for this idea to reach the right hands. It has now been clear that more strategic contacts are necessary for this initiative to even been considered. Additionally, it is intended for this proposal to reach the green purchasing manager at Rutgers University. As an activist in the “Recyclemania” event on campus and with dedication to this effort, it is believed that following the next meeting the possibility of Rutgers University to begin a feat of tray-less dining will move one step forward toward being achieved.

References

(1) http://www.american.edu/finance/sustainability/upload/trayless-report-09-0423.pdf
**Editorials**

Dear Joe,
I understand that Rutgers uses continuously running dishwashers in the dining halls. There are other schools that do that as well that have removed trays and ended up running their washers less often, or fewer washers. Tufts University is an example. Another thing that is greatly reduced is the amount of food waste. There are a few different reports and studies, but a study from ARAMARK showed that the average food waste eliminated is between 25-30% per meal. Considering how many meals are served at Rutgers, this is pretty significant. The idea of educating students is a good one, but I don't think that would work that well. Realistically, if the trays are there, they will be used, even if the students realize it's wasteful. Especially if everyone else is using trays, no one will want to deal with the minor inconvenience alone. I think it wouldn't really hurt to run a pilot program in one dining hall to at least see if it would result in significant savings. Is there any way our group could set up a meeting with a dining services representative sometime soon? Either the end of this week, or next week?
Thanks so much for your time and response,Nick

Classipedias

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Shannon Mulrooney

**Trayless Dining: Yay or Nay**

During this spring semester at Rutgers University, our Ethnic in Science class had us form groups. In these groups we needed to decide on a current issue to help promote a positive change in society. Our group decided to try and tackle trayless dining here on Cook Campus in the Neilson Dining hall.

We have been in contact with the Rutgers Dining Administration and are trying to implement a trial period where there are no trays in the dining hall. We want to try and randomize the days throughout a month, possibly 6 days if we can. After we do our test experiment, we plan on handing out surveys asking them to rate their experiences and to see if trayless dining was effective or not.

My group and I feel that trayless dining is the way to go. Rutgers’s University wouldn’t be the first college to go trayless. There are a number of other colleges that have already succeeded. There are also other colleges that are in the works of implementing trayless dining.

We hope to one day implement trayless dining here at the Rutgers University’s dining halls in the future. We feel that there are many benefits in going trayless. Going trayless would conserve food and water wastes, save money and is considered eco friendly. Going trayless would be a benefit for everyone.

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**Opinion**

Submitted by Lauren R. Snedeker

Now that University students need “deeper pockets”, it is time for frugality to prevail. It
is time for faculty bulldogs and the student pups to look inward, outward, upward and downward for anything that may save us a buck. Gov. Chris Christie proposed a few days ago that in order to solve state problems, state funding of Rutgers will need to take a hard hit. Similarly, if you are wondering whether or not this will increase your tuition, it will. Even in-staters, the precious pride of New Jersey will be paying more affirming the University to be rated as having the second highest average tuition fees for in-state students.

Administration turns their heads around and defends that they do not have too much staff. Well, that could be true that they don't, but turn a little bit further around to examine unnecessary costs. When one learns about budgeting, one is pointed to what can be cut out. Specifically, what will help the long run quick. Eureka! There is something that large Universities all over the state are learning to deal without; dining hall trays! It is a simple concept really. Schools like the University of Delaware and the University of Maine have already been there, trashed that. A preliminary plan can include tossing the trays for two days out of the week. After doing this for a period of time, students were tested to see if they could deal with carrying plates, bowls and going back for more instead of loading up.

This brings me to my next point. What better way to save money than to cut the cost of washing the trays? Clemson reported to save about 4,585 gallons of water for one single tray-less week. Also, about a 38% reduction in food waste (1,546 pounds) was reported for the same week. So, not only would we be saving money so the University didn't have to do shady things, we would also be saving the environment one tray at a time.

I urge you to consider how you can help. You don't have to donate money, or remember a reusable canvass bag wherever you go. You just need to speak up.