

Evaluating the Effectiveness of SWACO's “Save More Than Food” Campaign

CHANGING FOOD WASTE AWARENESS AND BEHAVIORS IN UPPER ARLINGTON




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day, central Ohioans send nearly a million pounds of food waste to the local landfill, resulting in the waste of natural resources used to produce food while also significantly contributing to greenhouse gas production, a function of organic material breaking down in the landfill. In 2018, the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) brought dozens of central Ohio organizations together to address the issue of food waste. Together they formed the Central Ohio Food Waste Initiative (COFWI) and identified 20 strategies for cutting food waste in half by 2030. The **Save More Than Food campaign (SMTF or Campaign)** was one of the



earliest outcomes of the initiative. The Campaign is comprised of public outreach, both advertising and educational, along with a micro-website that houses a growing number of resources on food waste prevention, donation, and composting specific to central Ohioans. The goal of the Campaign is to connect local residents, schools, businesses and other stakeholders to resources they need to reduce food waste where they are.

In the spring and summer of 2021, SWACO evaluated the effectiveness of the Campaign in the city of Upper Arlington, Ohio, using grant funding provided by the U.S. EPA. This evaluation was conducted in partnership with The Ohio State University and the city of Upper Arlington. The Campaign consisted of materials mailed to residential homes, a newsletter and social media communications published by the City, and paid advertising specific to Upper Arlington residents. Three versions of SMTF educational materials were tested with residents:

-  a base campaign,
-  the base campaign along with additional food waste prevention materials,
-  and, a third version with all of the previous campaign materials plus additional materials focused on composting.



Measurements of food waste generated at the household level were taken across Upper Arlington residences before implementing the Campaign, and again afterwards, to evaluate any changes that occurred as a result of the Campaign. Additionally, surveys were used to assess changes in residents' awareness of food waste as an issue and their attitudes and knowledge about the topic.

HERE ARE SOME KEY FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH IN UPPER ARLINGTON:



THE AMOUNT OF FOOD WASTE COLLECTED THROUGH UPPER ARLINGTON'S FOOD WASTE DROP-OFF COLLECTION PROGRAM INCREASED BY 40% OVER THE COURSE OF THE INITIATIVE.

Food waste generated by Upper Arlington households decreased by 21% between the spring and summer of 2021.

All households demonstrated a decline in food waste generated. Households that received additional Campaign materials about food waste prevention and composting had a 53% reduction in wasted "edible food" (e.g., excluding pits, bones and peels).

Participation in the food waste drop-off collection program increased by about 40%.

The amount of food waste collected through Upper Arlington's food waste drop-off collection program increased by 40% over the course of the initiative. The use of the program was one of the activities promoted by the Campaign. Accordingly, it's estimated that participation in the program grew from under 200 households in April 2021, at the beginning of the initiative, to nearly 350 by July 2021.

Self-reported attitudes and knowledge didn't change, but food waste decreased anyway.

Surprisingly, attitudes about food waste and knowledge about food waste prevention behaviors didn't change much over the course of the initiative. Despite these findings, audits show that household food waste decreased over the course of the Campaign. Even if residents didn't report changes in their knowledge or attitudes, behaviors changed for the better.

Which version of the Campaign residents were exposed to did not have statistically significant effects on reducing food waste.

From the spring to the summer, Upper Arlington residents reported wasting 52% less edible food than a national sample.

Food waste typically increases from the Spring to the Summer as more fresh foods are available and people gather for celebrations and events. However, residents in Upper Arlington reported wasting 16% less edible food in the Summer than during the Spring. Compared to a national control group, who reported a 44% increase in wasted edible food over the same time period, Upper Arlington residents generated about half as much food



57% of residents surveyed thought the Save More Than Food campaign was effective at increasing awareness about food waste as an issue. 40% thought it drove action as well.

Prior to the Campaign, under 7% of respondents were aware of SMTF. This number jumped to 42% by July after the implementation of the Campaign in the community. Of those residents who were aware of the Campaign, 57% thought the initiative was effective in driving awareness around food waste and 40% thought it was effective in driving action around the issue.

THESE OBSERVATIONS FROM UPPER ARLINGTON ARE ENCOURAGING.

While we continue to refine messaging and outreach that engages different audiences, we know there is a lot of enthusiasm around food waste prevention, food rescue, food waste diversion, and the positive impacts of composting on the soil and the environment as a whole. With the success of the Save More Than Food campaign in Upper Arlington, SWACO is working to replicate these results in communities across central Ohio by providing residents with the knowledge and tools on how to reduce food waste while simultaneously supporting communities in creating diversion pathways.

LOOKING AHEAD

Organics diversion presents one of the best opportunities for central Ohio to reach its goal to divert 75% of all generated materials from the landfill by 2032 and as such, is a growing priority for the 41 communities in SWACO's jurisdiction, including the city of Columbus, the largest city in the Solid Waste District and Ohio. In 2021, Columbus issued a Climate Action Plan, which sets forth a goal of reducing food waste by 50% by 2030 and 90% by 2050. The Columbus Climate Action Plan is just one example of the prioritization that central Ohio communities are giving this issue.

In 2023, SWACO will make continued investment in the Save More Than Food public education and advertising campaign and website and will work to directly support communities by expanding the capacity available within the region to compost food waste.

To that end, SWACO is undergoing a two-step competitive process to identify a private partner with whom to design, build and operate a composting facility that would accept Franklin County food waste, yard waste and other compostable materials generated by the residents and businesses of central Ohio. We are also developing additional programs, incentives and policies to support businesses, schools and communities that want to prevent food waste and divert it from the landfill.

[Find the full academic report here.](#)

**THE CLIMATE ACTION PLAN
SETS FORTH A GOAL OF
REDUCING FOOD WASTE BY 50%
BY 2030 AND 90% BY 2050**