

Catering for zero waste



As one of the world's leading universities, the University of Cambridge aims for excellence in everything it does. In November 2015, the University's catering services switched to Vegware's compostable foodservice packaging in order to go zero waste.

Compostable packaging: the key to zero waste in catering

Before changing to Vegware, the University of Cambridge experienced high levels of contamination in their recycling streams. Recycling conventional food packaging is challenging due to the mix of different materials and food. Most food packaging inevitably destined for landfill or incineration.

All of Vegware's packaging is made from plants, not plastic, and designed to be recycled with food waste. This eliminates the issues typical of conventional packaging recycling – all the packaging goes into the food waste bin, and there's no need to separate, sort or clean.

Vegware's environmental team helped the University of Cambridge identify the right collector and processing facility for their used compostable packaging and food waste. The University staff had demanded food waste collections for years, but it hadn't proved viable due to the relatively low volumes produced. Introducing Vegware raised the volumes of compostable waste and allowed collections to begin at a number of sites.

- 7 catering services
- 6,500 sales transactions a day
- 1,500 departmental events a year



Engagement

Communication is the key to ensuring an organisation as big as the University of Cambridge goes zero waste. Vegware ran a number of Green Day communication events, engaging staff and students with posters and a 'waste sorting challenge'. We also created bespoke bin signage to show exactly what goes in each bin – ensuring low levels of contamination at the composting facility.

Engagement was then rolled out more widely by the University's Environment and Energy Section, who ran a 'spotlight on waste' month, visiting a number of departments to talk about the issue of waste and about the new Vegware initiative. Vegware and related waste issues were also featured in monthly newsletters and in communications with the Environment and energy coordinators network.



Outcomes

The University of Cambridge is the first in the UK to implement this zero waste approach to foodservice.

The Vegware scheme has provided a platform to promote the University's sustainability aspirations. The University has found it's the perfect conversation starter to engage staff on environmental sustainability and to act as a talking point around the issue of waste and recycling. The work has also received recognition by being shortlisted for a 2016 Green Gown Award.

Vegware are continuing their work with the University's Environment and Energy Section to ensure the scheme continues to be a success. Happily, other departments and colleges within the university are following suit!



By switching to Vegware's compostable packaging, every month the University Catering service...

- Saves 1.5 tonnes of carbon
- Saves 710 kilos of virgin materials
- Composts 1.5 tonnes of used packaging

Food waste recycling is the most economical way of disposal by far.



WRAP 2015 Gate Fees Report



"The University Catering Service's commitment to sustainability contributes to enhancing the staff and student experience, and Vegware is a key part of this. The consideration of greater sustainability throughout the food chain inside the University helps encourage positive lifestyle changes outside of it for both students and staff."

- University Catering Manager



Watch the film!

www.vimeo.com/vegware/cambridgeuni