

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW: The Los Angeles County Food Donation and Food Waste Recycling Program facilitates food donation, food waste collection, and recycling at businesses and County facilities.

CHALLENGE: Disposing organic waste, such as food waste in landfills, results in emissions of methane, which is 72 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of atmospheric warming. According to the California Air Resources Board, reducing methane emissions provides immediate climate benefits. Los Angeles County disposes an estimated 3.5 million tons of organic waste annually, partly due to having the largest shortfall in organics recycling infrastructure of any county in California, according to CalRecycle. To address this issue, County of Los Angeles Public Works (Public Works) launched the Food Donation and Recovery Outreach Program (Food DROP) to connect businesses in the unincorporated County with food recovery agencies to facilitate the donation of food to the food insecure, which includes 1 in 7 people in the County. For food unsuitable to eat, Public Works developed programs to collect and recycle food waste from businesses and County facilities.

SOLUTION: To develop Food DROP, Public Works surveyed and visited over 200 food donation/recovery non-profits in 2017 and selected 50 as partners. Public Works launched the FoodDROPLA.com website to provide resources to businesses donating food. Public Works also visited 150 large food generators and connected them each with 3 non-profits that best fit their needs. To develop the pilot commercial food waste collection program (Pilot), workshops were conducted in 2016 with waste haulers to inform them about their role in the program, including identifying and enrolling businesses, and training customers and staff on how to separate food waste. Public Works supplied internal food waste collection bins to participating businesses. In 2017, Public Works implemented the Scrape Your Plate program to collect food waste from its Headquarters (HQ), including the cafeteria kitchen, cafeteria dining area, 20 breakrooms, and special events at Public Works HQ and field facilities.

INNOVATION: Public Works launched the "A Day Without Hunger" campaign in partnership with ESPNLA and the Los Angeles Lakers to promote Food DROP through the radio and social media. As part of the campaign, Public Works hosted several events to distribute recovered food to

residents. Public Works collaborated with the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts (LACSD) to use existing anaerobic digestion infrastructure at a wastewater treatment plant to convert food waste into electricity. Public Works provides a \$60 per ton rebate for commercial food waste, reducing the tipping fee paid by haulers to just \$10 per ton. Businesses do not pay to participate in the Pilot and save a substantial amount of money by reducing their trash collection services. Public Works provides credits to participating haulers to offset the amount they would pay in franchise fees. These credits are verified using weight tickets issued by LACSD. Contaminated loads exceeding LACSD's standards do not receive credits. Scrape Your Plate is the first food waste collection program implemented at any County facility. Public Works coordinated with its hauler to direct the food waste to LACSD for recycling. Public Works staff educated employees in person, by email, and through posted signs on how to separate food waste and avoid contamination to ensure it can easily be recycled.

RESULTS: Food DROP has recovered almost 30 tons of edible food. The Pilot and Scrape Your Plate have diverted over 1,500 tons of food waste, preventing over 900 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent of emissions, which is comparable to removing over 190 passenger vehicles from the road for a year or conserving the annual energy consumption from 18 homes.

REPLICABILITY: The Food DROP website includes a toolkit to allow other jurisdictions to replicate Food DROP. Other jurisdictions can replicate the Pilot using nearby organics recycling facilities and similar methods of funding, training, reporting, and verification. To allow other County facilities to replicate Scrape Your Plate, Public Works and the County Internal Services Department (ISD) now require all contracted County facility haulers to provide organics collection services upon request by any County facility at an extra cost. Public Works launched an organics recycling website (dpw.lacounty.gov/epd/organics/) for County facilities. In March 2019, LAC+USC Medical Center initiated food waste collection.

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