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## ***Food Donation and Composting Program Case Study*** **The Lenox Hotel** **Boston, MA**

### At-a-Glance:

- The Lenox Hotel is highly-rated among green hotels in the United States for its numerous sustainability initiatives.
- Since May 2014, The Lenox Hotel has diverted food scraps from three on-site restaurants to Rocky Hill Farm for composting. The hotel is now diverting 156 tons of food scraps to compost per year.
- The Lenox Hotel expanded their food recovery efforts to begin donating surplus food to feed families in need through a partnership with Boston Rescue Mission.

*Open since 1900, The Lenox Hotel has a rich history, but also looks to make an impact today through its dedication to personalized customer service and numerous sustainable initiatives. The hotel has been recycling since the 1980s, has electric vehicle charging stations, and produces honey from bee hives on its roof. As of 2015, TripAdvisor ranks The Lenox Hotel as one of the top 10 greenest hotels in the United States. This case study focuses on the food materials diversion program at The Lenox Hotel's three restaurants which began in 2014 and expanded in 2018 to include food donation.*

### **Diversion Programs**

The Lenox Hotel runs a host of impressive waste diversion initiatives. For example, staff recycle used vegetable oil into fuel for a biodiesel shuttle service. Each room has a recycling bin, and only 100% recyclable and chlorine-free paper towels, tissues and napkins are used. During the restoration of The Lenox Hotel's historic façade, 60 tons of brick, mortar and terra cotta were recycled.

In May 2014, The Lenox Hotel implemented a food scrap diversion program. The program targets food scraps generated from meal preparation, as well as post-consumer plate scrapings. The food material is captured through an easy kitchen and dish room collection system. The Lenox Hotel's food scrap hauler picks up the separated food material and takes it to be composted. Because of the downtown location, it is vital to maintain a clean and pest free collection program. As a result, the hotel uses lined, locking carts for collection. The Lenox Hotel has successfully maintained the food scrap diversion program since its implementation, increasing annual diversion from 91 tons to 156 tons over four years.

In 2018, the hotel expanded the scope of its food recovery efforts to begin donating surplus edible food to support those in need. The hotel's



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banquet manager and chef identified this opportunity as they began to notice excess, edible food being collected for composting. Aware of the large number of food insecure individuals in the Boston community, The Lenox Hotel sought to begin a donation program by reaching out to RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts (RecyclingWorks) and the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic for more information. Through these partnerships, The Lenox Hotel established a relationship with the local Boston Rescue Mission and began donating up to 80 meals worth of excess food per month.



### **Employee Training**

The Lenox Hotel provided educational signage and regular, personalized instruction for staff to ensure effective participation in their waste diversion programs. As the hotel expanded its recovery efforts, it supplemented training with instruction on food donation procedures, including date labeling and safe storage temperature. Staff adapted quickly to the protocols of the new programs. Today, The Lenox Hotel management continues to provide ongoing training to ensure staff remain engaged and up to speed on current program specifications.

### **Program Logistics**

The Lenox Hotel program utilizes a very easy and basic system to divert food scraps from disposal. Each workstation has a small clear plastic container on the counter to collect food scraps generated from prepping and cooking operations. Staff combine these containers of organic material into interim lined 20 gallon green carts. When full, staff take these carts outside and consolidate them into locking 64

gallon green carts that the hauler picks up three times a week. The 20 gallon green carts are also placed next to the dirty dishes cart and dishwashing area for easy plate scraping.

Convenient sizing and placement of the containers contribute to the success of the program. Director of Responsibility Samantha Sorrin and Executive Chef Sean MacAlpine have been instrumental in ensuring that The Lenox Hotel food scrap diversion program runs smoothly and efficiently. Both endorse the food materials collection system for its ease and cost-savings. Also, monitoring the food trimmings has had an extra benefit for The Lenox Hotel's kitchen — staff can evaluate preparation methods to conduct more accurate forecasting and minimize waste.



Through their partnership with Boston Rescue Mission, The Lenox Hotel is able to conveniently donate food by requesting on demand pick-up. Hotel staff store trays of excess food in a cold fridge at the end of the day, ensuring they are kept within the safe temperature range. The Lenox Hotel staff simply sends Boston Rescue Mission a text message to arrange a pick-up, indicating what type and amount of excess food they have available. Boston Rescue Mission volunteers collect the excess food from the hotel, transport it at safe temperatures, and distribute it to members of the local community in need of a meal.



Visit [food donation guidance](#) to learn more about starting a food donation program at your organization.

### Implementation Challenges

The Lenox Hotel has addressed several challenges while growing and maintaining a mature food waste diversion program. The Lenox Hotel's building layout creates ongoing challenges for the transportation of food materials. Staff must carry compost bins down two flights of stairs out to the alley, which can be difficult with large amounts of heavy, wet food materials. To overcome this challenge, staff monitor and adjust levels in the containers to keep the weight manageable. As the composition of The Lenox Hotel's waste changed, the hotel's management faced the decision of when to decrease trash collection frequency. Initially, the hotel's split trash and recycling compactor was serviced twice a week. Staff monitored weights and compactor pressures for two months before feeling confident that they could adjust hauling frequency. Finally, The Lenox Hotel has encountered the common challenge of ensuring staff are fully trained and engaged in the food waste diversion program. Management performs regular training for both new and experienced staff on collection procedures, including which materials can be collected for diversion.



The Lenox Hotel encountered questions about food donation laws and liability protection as they considered implementing a food donation program. Would they be protected legally if someone became ill after consuming their donated food? Through conversations with RecyclingWorks and the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, they found the answer was "yes". [There are several laws providing protection](#) at the federal and state level, including The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (42 U.S.C. § 1791), which encourages food donations by providing liability protections for businesses that donate food to nonprofit organizations. Massachusetts provides additional protections for food donations under Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 94 § 328. After addressing these concerns, they were able to begin donating food with confidence.

### Program Evaluation

The Lenox Hotel reports that they divert 6,000 pounds per week of food materials for composting. They have noticed a 20% increase since the program started, which they attribute to improved employee awareness and adoption of the program.

By diverting food materials out of the trash, The Lenox Hotel has been able to reduce waste pickup frequency from twice to once a week and then to an on-call basis. Reduced waste tonnages and increased recycling diversion also offset the compost service rates, initially saving \$164/month in total waste costs. This savings is due to a combination of factors including food materials diversion, increased recycling and eliminating third party access to the dumpster. Even though not all the savings can be attributed to food diversion, the evaluation of the whole waste service is what led to all of the changes.

The Lenox Hotel has also noticed an overall improvement in cleanliness of the waste area as a result of implementing this new program. Food scraps are contained in the carts and removed from the site at a greater frequency than the trash. Based on the success of the diversion program in the three restaurants, Director of Responsibility Samantha Sorrin has expanded the program to the employee cafeteria and the banquet kitchen.