

# Case Study: Love Food on Campus - university food waste avoidance project

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**COUNCIL NAME**

Hunter Joint  
Organisation of  
Councils

**WEB ADDRESS**

[www.hccrems.com.au](http://www.hccrems.com.au)

## Overview

Hunter Councils, in partnership with the University of Newcastle (UoN), delivered the "Love Food on Campus" project targeting students living on campus. The project investigated what students are buying, eating, cooking and wasting, and most importantly determined what motivates them to change practices. Students were engaged through food waste film screenings, cooking demonstrations, waste audits and the development of a tailor-made low waste cookbook, meal planner and shopping list toolkit.

## Background

The EPA's NSW Food Waste Avoidance Benchmark study shows that the community's knowledge of the scale and impact of food waste is limited, along with knowledge of how to avoid it. The research revealed that NSW households waste on average \$1,036 worth of edible food each year. This amounts to more than \$2.5 billion each year across the state. The top food wasting group was 18-24 year olds.

Hunter Councils targeted this age group by partnering with the University of Newcastle to address the practices of residential students. This group is a 'captive audience' influenced by systems implemented by the residential assistance staff at the University. This project aimed to:

1. Determine how much food waste and what type was being generated by residential students at the University of Newcastle.
2. Meaningfully engage with students to understand their values and why waste may be occurring.
3. Determine what information and support students need to make changes to waste behaviour.
4. Develop resources and engage with residential students to support behaviour change.

## Implementation

The project leveraged existing UoN staff and student committees to ensure the project was appropriately tailored, and there was an active network willing to disseminate information on the project activities. Student engagement activities included:

- A project launch including a film night featuring waste conscious catering.
- Participation in existing UoN student events (residential student BBQs, Green Week, Mental Health Fair, Health Fair, National Nutrition Week, "Res Fest" - residential student festival and the Long Lunch event).
- Focus groups that identified a lack of cooking skills amongst the target group, minimal understanding of the seasonality of food, and little knowledge of how to maximise the use of fresh food.
- Waste audits which found significant amounts of food waste in red lid bins; well above the NSW average (up to 67% of total weight was food waste); lack of understanding and

## REFERENCES

[www.hccrems.com.au/product-category/waste](http://www.hccrems.com.au/product-category/waste)

[www.epa.nsw.gov.au/managewaste/house-food-garden.htm](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/managewaste/house-food-garden.htm)

adoption of correct waste separation among residents. The audits identified the opportunity to divert large volumes of organic material at UoN from landfill and recover resources for other purposes.

- Cooking workshops focused on food waste avoidance strategies including buying whole ingredients and using offcuts, peelings or bones for soups and stocks. Students were invited to put into practice the tips they learned during the demonstration
- A student [food waste avoidance toolkit](#) was produced consisting of a student sustainable cookbook, kitchen companion, shopping list, and meal planner.

The entire project was delivered over a 12 month period. This was challenging given the limited availability in the student schedule after holidays and exam periods. The project received \$60,000 investment from the NSW Environmental Trust, with over \$75,000 from external investment and in-kind support (Hunter Councils, UoN Staff, UoN student volunteers). The university also invested an additional \$7,000 into the project to ensure the student kit could be provided to all residential students at two other campuses.

## Outcomes

Waste audits were conducted at the beginning and end of the project. Food waste was 67% of the waste stream prior to the project, and 40% at the end of the project. The project developed of an active 'community of practice' where residential students support each other to cook healthy meals without creating food waste. Residential mentors will continue to work with residents to deliver zero waste cook-ups each month. Over 4,000 students have received the toolkit of food waste avoidance resources. This, along with the involvement of the student committees, provides confidence the project will continue to be rolled out to subsequent student groups.

## Key Learnings

There were a number of specific challenges faced when delivering this project, which are unique to the University environment:

- Universities are political environments, and management of multiple relationships were required to ensure appropriate support from facility staff, environment staff, curriculum advisors, student group liaison and residential living staff.
- Time issues related to holiday periods, and exam and study periods meant there were restricted 'windows of opportunity' in which project activities could be delivered.
- Long advertising lead time was required to generate enough interest for students to deviate from their normal routine. 'Piggy backing' off already scheduled University events provided the best attendance.

## Contact

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**This project was the 2017 winner of the Behaviour Change in Waste Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards**