

Preventing Problematic Event Waste

Background

GreenBiz Group is a media and events company that accelerates the just transition to a clean economy. Circularity 23, a conference advancing circular economy concepts, was the perfect venue for the planning team to have a deeper focus on food waste. The event was held at the Hyatt Regency Seattle on June 5-7.

Prior to the event, both the conference planners and hotel catering teams went through food waste prevention training by Astrapto, a sustainability consultancy specializing in hospitality and events. At the event, Astrapto conducted food waste audits and Copia™ facilitated food donations.

A New Numbers Paradigm

The focus of event audits was prolifically problematic items (see insert right). Because these tend to be lower cost and popular items, they are often over-ordered and overproduced. At each step along the decision chain of an event, numbers are often padded. Why? Fear of running out!

For Circularity 23, both sides closely managed their numbers - estimated attendance, guarantees, production, and portion sizes. As a result there was virtually **no waste of pastries, desserts, and cut fruit**. Whole fruit was also offered, which was **100% recoverable and reusable**.

Currently, this is too close for comfort for catering teams who have spent decades operating on the principle of abundance and hospitality. Indeed, financial incentives exist to overproduce and overserve (e.g., refunds are issued if food runs out or low).

More data on consumption patterns, dietary trends, food cost savings, and regularly wasted items must be collected to build trust in a new approach to food and beverage service that could result in empty platters. Similarly, event planners are not keen to see food run low; therefore, industry-wide awareness and culture change are needed.

circularity

JUNE 5 - 7, 2023

HYATT REGENCY
SEATTLE, WA



"The food waste training and on-site food waste photo audits lead by the Astrapto team were incredibly valuable not only for Circularity 23, but for our future events as well. Our learnings have and will continue to enable us to live out our values at our conferences, prioritizing sustainability at every level of our operations."

--Jessica Coons, Conference Coordinator

Prolifically Problematic Items at Events

Industry pilots and research conducted by the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment (PCFWC) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have repeatedly revealed a common set of wasteful menu items or components. Catering staff and event planners alike recognize these as prolifically problematic. The top items include

- pastries and desserts
- fruit, salads, and toppings
- sauces and condiments
- cheese and charcuterie boards

While everyone concedes food waste is a problem worth solving, in an industry that is still recovering from COVID whiplash, it is vital that we begin by solving the biggest problems first.



Vessel Efficiency

Sauces and condiments, which includes syrup and butter, are also prolifically wasteful. Before breakfast on Day 1, a chef and a banquet captain discussed a change in the vessel used for syrup.

This simple change prevented waste by 60%.

Heightened awareness of such waste led the team to pivot the butter vessels on Day 2, going from the large square bowl to a vessel about 1/3 its size. Again, this was **more than a 60% reduction in waste.**

Another smart plating choice is to put only one type of fruit on each platter or vessel. This reduces the likelihood that less popular fruit will be wasted in the replenishment process and also makes it easier to accommodate preferences for some types of fruit over others.

Rather than a traditional audit approach of relying primarily on weights of wasted food, Astrapto's approach was to make the audit primarily observational. Waste becomes "white noise" for hotel teams and **seeing** waste from a new perspective drives real-time, quick pivots that prevent waste.

Numbers do matter though, and the **estimated annual savings of downsizing to these smaller syrup and butter vessels is more than \$10K annually.**



Before

Vessels are often chosen and filled to the brim for aesthetics...



After

...small adjustments in vessel size lead to big savings over time.

Community Impact

The PCFWC and WWF work with hotels has revealed few hotels donate food to local organizations. Hotel staff often say this is due to liability concerns, labor shortages, or operational challenges, but that they are motivated to donate unserved food if the clients requests it.

GreenBiz and Hyatt partnered with Copia™ to facilitate donations or surplus food from Circularity 23. It benefited a local organization, Praisalujah, and resulted in:

- Total pounds donated: 602
- Total meals donated: 501
- Total pounds CO2 diverted: 1,854
- Total gallons water saved: 137,000

"Sustainability is a journey and we strive to get better every day. Working with our suppliers and local non-profits, we continue to improve sustainability efforts and reduce negative effects on the environment. This program was a fantastic experience for our team to have a heightened awareness about how small changes can drastically affect our footprint. We will continue to learn and create new policies with the knowledge we gained."

--Brian Pusztai, Area Chef
Hyatt Regency Seattle

