

# Working to keep more food waste out of landfills

BY RON SYLVESTER

The Wichita Eagle



Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle

Paul Freimuth, chef for Hyatt's HARVEST Kitchen, talks about food waste and recycling Tuesday, Mar. 22, 2011 to a group attending the 17th annual WORKS! Conference on Recycling, Composting, Household Hazardous Waste and Renewable Energy



Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle |  
Conference attendees tour the Hyatt's HARVEST Kitchen Tuesday, Mar. 22, 2011, during part of the 17th annual WORKS! Conference on Recycling, Composting, Household Hazardous Waste and Renewable Energy that runs through Thursday.



Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle  
Kris Hicks, right, with the KDHE Bureau of Waste Management, audits food waste from the Hyatt's HARVEST Kitchen with Stan Slaughter, center, and Tim Evans Tuesday, Mar. 22, 2011.



Mike Hutmacher/The Wichita Eagle |  
Kris Hicks, with the KDHE Bureau of Waste Management, audits food waste from the Hyatt's HARVEST Kitchen.

Kris Hicks says managing food waste at home is easy, but not as much when she travels. "At home I can just put it in the container under the sink and take it to the compost," Hicks said. "But when I'm in a hotel, what do I do with a banana peel? It ends up going into the trash."

Hicks knows how those banana peels pile up. She's an education specialist at the Bureau of Waste Management of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. There's more food waste going into landfills than plastics, metals or electronics, Hicks said Tuesday at the Hyatt Regency Wichita.

The Hyatt is hosting the 17th annual Works Conference on Recycling, Composting, Household Hazardous Waste and Renewable Energy this week. Among the hotel's guests are players competing in the NCAA women's basketball tournament and a rural-banking convention.

As part of Tuesday's conference, Hicks had the Hyatt collect all of its food waste for half a day and put it in bags outside the back dock area.

The state is working with the Hyatt on establishing a food diversion program in Wichita to add to its expanding corporate environmental programs.

The Hyatt is already ahead of most lodging facilities, Hicks said.

"When we usually have this conference, we have to bring our own recycling bins and take it all with us when we leave," she said. "Here, they had that."

The Hyatt's corporate "green teams" at more than 180 hotels worldwide have already made an impact, said Mike Gruning, director of engineering for the downtown Wichita hotel. Gruning said recycling and waste management has cut trash service significantly. "We've gone from emptying our container two or three times a month to once a month," Gruning said. "We want to get it down to once every six weeks."

Hicks said that's where managing food waste helps the most.

Food accounts for 14 percent of the more than 230 million tons of garbage ending up in U.S. landfills each year, Hicks said. Plastics contribute 12.3 percent and metals 8.6 percent, according to a 2009 study by the Environmental Protection Agency.

An audit at the Hyatt in August showed food accounted for nearly half of the hotel's waste, with an estimated 100 to 300 pounds each day, Hicks said.

Some of the food is still good, Hicks said, and could go to feed the hungry. Some businesses, she said, have partnered with local food banks.

Other waste can be composted, either on site or by a community service. But Hicks said large-scale composting businesses aren't plentiful in Kansas.

Oil and grease can be turned into fuel, and other food waste can be used in agriculture.

That's an option Nation Pizza employs in McPherson. The food manufacturer sends its leftovers to a farmer in Moundridge, said James Cook, of McPherson Area Solid Waste.

"He pays us a hauling fee, and he mixes it with his cattle feed," Cook said.

Nation Pizza also makes items such as cookie dough, which the farmer also takes.

"We asked him what to do with the chocolate," Cook said. "And he told us the cows eat that, too."