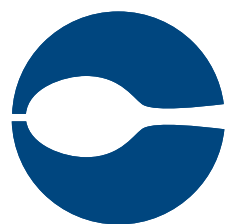


# Making it Better for New Orleans and Inforum: A Centerplate Sustainability Showcase



## Centerplate

Making It Better To Be There Since 1929.®



September, 2019

Centerplate, the exclusive caterer at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, recently embarked on a journey of transforming their culture to build on sustainability initiatives already in place. The leadership team and key line staff went through extensive food waste prevention and reduction training to adopt the Environmental Protection Agency's Food Recovery Hierarchy as a framework for prioritizing initiatives.

Everyone knows the events industry generates waste. The spirit of hospitality and the desire to offer attendees and guests delicious, nutritious meals drives Centerplate to produce both quality and abundance. Recognizing that by adjusting their practices without compromising the guest experience, they can minimize waste and maximize the amount of food recovered to feed the local community. Orleans Parish has a food insecurity rate of 22.8%, one of the highest in the nation. As an economic driver of the community, the convention center is pleased to contribute to the social well-being of its fellow citizens through the food donations highlighted in this report.

Given the timing of Centerplate's training, their increased attention to food waste, and the importance of Inforum as a significant, multi-venue client, they chose to showcase their efforts in this post-show report. Inforum was a 5-day event at the end of September 2019, during which more than 30,000 meals were served. For this event, Centerplate tracked performance using wood waste audits. This led to recovering and donating 4,000 pounds of food, including 9 cases of bottled water, and diverting more than 28,000 pounds of waste from landfill through composting, on behalf of Inforum.

The hope is that Centerplate's experience and findings contribute to an overall shift in the industry towards better food waste prevention and reduction, increased donation opportunities, and improved diversion processes and standards. The next step in this journey is to use this data to prevent waste in the future through improved menu planning and production techniques. Centerplate invites you to join them as they endeavor to lead the New Orleans hospitality community towards a brighter, more sustainable future.

This report was produced by Astrapto LLC, a sustainability consultancy serving the hospitality and events industry. Astrapto's team has trained Centerplate staff on food waste reduction at a number of venues and compiled the information for this report during the Inforum event in New Orleans in September, 2019. For more information on Astrapto, visit [www.astrapto.com](http://www.astrapto.com)



ASTRAPTO

## Source Reduction through Measurement and Improved Planning



The food recovery hierarchy (pictured here) shows source reduction as the first priority; however, many venues are mainly focused on donations and composting. Centerplate at the New Orleans Convention Center has now embraced a regular practice of food waste audits, which enables them to quantify menu items and service approaches they may have suspected to be wasteful.

The Centerplate Team needed data to implement specific interventions and have different kinds of conversations with clients and vendors. Through the lens of food waste, Centerplate is revisiting its processes and has discovered small changes that will lead to positive social and environmental impact. For example:

- **Grapes** – cutting grapes into smaller clusters makes it easier for guests to take a few and leave less on the tray destined for compost.
- **Shrimp and grits** – a small error in signage led to an error in service. Guests want *shrimp 'n grits*, not a bowl of shrimp and a bowl of grits.
- **Breakfast meats** – performing a picture audit (snapping photos of the buffet service while it's in progress) showed the time stamp of events and captured fresh pans of sausage and bacon being replenished when the buffet lines had dwindled. More meats are there if needed, but if not, it's better to feed people than send to compost.
- **Salad dressings** – the variety, the vessel, the serving spoon...all contribute to potential waste.
- **Toppings** – buffets are often designed with uniform bowls for salad or oatmeal toppings; however, guests do not tend to eat them at the same rate. For example, someone might put two spoons of sugar, a spoon of nuts, and a spoon of dried fruit on their oatmeal, but only a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Centerplate's commitment is to track and use food waste data to continuously improve and educate staff through pre-shift and departmental meetings, as well as educate clients during site visits, tastings, and pre-con meetings.

Ask us about our prevention initiatives on your next visit!



*"There is a prevalence of 'we've always done it this way' behaviors across the hospitality industry. I often go into a facility and hear a self-congratulatory description of the composting program. Then I introduce them to the food recovery hierarchy and their eyes open and the realization is, 'oh, this is so much more than compost!' I loved working with the Centerplate team in New Orleans because they saw the importance of using data to make smarter choices and prevent waste in the first place."*

Dr. Aurora Dawn Benton, founder of Astrapto

## Source Reduction through Local Procurement

While 'buy local' programs continue to be a trend that catches the attention of travelers and attendees, buying local is also a food waste reduction strategy because shorter supply chains lead to less waste. Sourcing ingredients locally ensures items are selected at their peak ripeness, which results in a better tasting and more nutritious meal. Local purveyors enable Centerplate to deliver the classic New Orleans cuisine guests expect when visiting. Through procurement for events, Centerplate:

- **Supports** the regional economy through large scale ordering. For Inforum, 49,522 pieces of baked goods were ordered from local *La Louisiane Bakery*.
- **Features** the freshest, highest quality ingredients such as local Gulf fish and seafood from *New Orleans Fish House*, used to make Centerplate's delicious Crawfish Cream Sauce and Cornmeal Encrusted Catfish.
- **Preserves** the tradition of family farms, such as *Liuzza Produce Farm*, *Sirmon Farms*, and *Kleinpeter Farms Dairy*.



*"New Orleans Fish House is proud to partner with the New Orleans Convention Center. We supply the finest seafood and specialty products to the finest establishments all over the United States. The New Orleans Convention Center supports local businesses like ours and has allowed our family business, along with all of its employees, to continue the legacy that we have built over the past generations. Sustainability is very important to us, and with the help of our partnership with Centerplate, we can continue to educate our customers about the importance of sustainability, and all the products that are indigenous to our local waters."*

- Joshua Borges, New Orleans Fish House



*"As a small local, petite bakery we are not only greatly impacted by our relationship with Centerplate but blessed that our partnership supports 57 families year round with full time careers. Everything is made fresh daily and delivered to the local New Orleans Market. We are able to offer products unique to our market and to our customers' needs. All produced with the freshest ingredients, high quality and delivered when needed."*

*Sustainability to us is not new, we have been delivering to Centerplate in natural gas vans since 2015. We deliver items in reusable plastic trays, we recycle cardboard, and we do NOT use any Styrofoam. We financially support a wide group of charities. We recycle our scraps and older product to feed nearby farm animals. Our whole partnership with Centerplate is based on sustainability, its one big circle between the local community, visiting attendees, and our family."*

- Joel Hron, La Louisiane Bakery



## Feeding Our Neighbors through Event Donations

The most impactful practice Centerplate can implement and improve is taking excess food that has been safely stored and donate it to local organizations that feed the hungry. Their primary partner in this endeavor is Bethel Colony South Transformation Ministries, a mission that aids in the recovery and restoration of those who struggle with addictions. Bethel Colony serves over 300 people every day. Furthermore, when the donations are particularly large, Bethel taps into a network of community organizations who need food for their constituents.

*"We've been working with the convention center for about 10 years. We've developed a relationship; we understand their needs and they bless us with what they have. We could not afford to eat the food we are able to enjoy from the convention center. The food is always top quality, always fresh. We really value what they can't use; it's a treasure to us. It's a big deal when we get brisket, etouffee, gumbo, or bread pudding. That means a lot to us. There are times when we were not sure how we would feed our people and the convention center calls and we can get it in the hands of those in need."*

- Pastor Mel Jones

**On behalf of Inforum, Centerplate managed a donation of 4,000 pounds of food to the community.**

What makes this relationship with Bethel unique is the process that has developed with them over time. Most donations in the events industry consist of transferring donated food into some type of disposable vessel (e.g. aluminum pans, plastic bags, boxes, etc.). Bethel takes the hotel pans, serves their populations, places excess in their containers, then cleans and returns the serviceware. During Inforum, this saved a tremendous amount of time and labor, as well as the many disposables that would have likely ended up in landfill. Disposables are an inevitable part of the foodservice industry so every effort towards reuse is a step in the right direction. Centerplate encourages other communities to build relationships with their food bank and other non-profits, and together explore ways to reduce their footprint.

Many in the hospitality industry still refuse to donate food, for fear of liability. The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act is a federal statute that protects companies that donate. Here's a special message to hospitality companies in New Orleans, from Pastor Mel Jones: *"We really need you to do this. It's not just the homeless population downtown but the people in many communities who live paycheck to paycheck and cannot fully provide for their families. Something that you throw away can make a major impact. We can take the food you are getting rid of and distribute it to them. We can also take the liability and share our food safety practices."*



## Diverting from Landfill with Recycling and Compost



The last stop on the food recovery journey is to make every effort to divert waste from the landfill. Centerplate was already composting, but through observations and audits, determined a significant opportunity to increase composting capacity. After adding compost bins and pickups from a local partner, Composting Network, Centerplate more than tripled the potential compost weight. During Inforum 2019, more than 28,000 pounds was composted.

After training and raising awareness and excitement for this effort staff are taking initiative and going above and beyond with little management intervention. During Inforum, Centerplate staff monitored and weighed waste and convention center teams set up a separation station on the dock for ensuring compost and recycling were in the right containers and had minimal contamination. This strong partnership of venue, caterer, and local waste management is an important component of the overall endeavor to divert from landfill.

## What's Next?

This journey is not over. With the emphasis on shifting the internal culture towards more sustainable management of food and resources, Centerplate is ready to take it to the next level. Moving forward, Centerplate hopes to make improvements in the following ways:

- The responsibility of food waste reduction is shared with many stakeholders. This case study data can be a catalyst for a different type of dialogue around menu planning, service approaches, sourcing, and much more. There is a "fear of running out" mentality that Centerplate wants to overcome with sound data collection and improved reporting practices.
- There is still much to be done to alter guest consumption behavior. Centerplate continues to put hospitality and client satisfaction first, while exploring new techniques, equipment, and innovations in buffet and foodservice management follow closely behind.
- Ideally, Centerplate will adjust the ratio of excess food recovered for donation compared to food waste to compost or landfill. Refining measurement processes and reporting will enable specific goals to be set.
- The hope is to find options to divert some food currently going to compost into a program to feed animals. If you know of a New Orleans area farmer interested in such a partnership, let Centerplate know.

To learn more, please contact Molly Crouch, Director of Sustainability at [molly.crouch@centerplate.com](mailto:molly.crouch@centerplate.com)

*"In taking on this program only a short time ago, we have truly been enlightened on how to tie all the integral pieces together to ensure that our team fully understands the processes and the overall scope of managing our waste. It has changed the mindset of our staff as well as our management to be able to handle such a large show as Inforum. It is not a small task, simply managing the food and beverages for this show. It is another level of heightened accomplishment to know that we were able to greatly reduce the waste going to the landfill, increase the amount of composting, and even more importantly vastly increase the amount of food donated. This program has given our team the knowledge and confidence to know we are capable of doing this every day, for every show, and is allowing us to make the difference that we so devoutly want to make."*



*Jack Lyon, General Manager, Centerplate*