After eliminating plastics from their dining services in 2009, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst needed compostable foodservice products that truly lived up to their claims.

Introduction
With 28,000 students and nearly 6,000 faculty members, The University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass) is one of the largest public universities in New England. UMass uses three words to describe its dining operations: Healthy, Sustainable, and Delicious. Within university foodservice, UMass is highly regarded for local and ethical sourcing—purchasing ingredients that are produced locally, and working with vendors who demonstrate responsibility for their employees, communities and the environment.

Every day dining service provides

17k students
45k meals

Chris Howland, Director of Purchasing and Marketing, oversees the $25 million procurement budget for Auxiliary Enterprises, umbrella organization under which Dining Services falls to serve over 45,000 meals per day to more than 17,000 students on the university’s meal plan, plus faculty, staff and campus guests. “We want to create an experience that is exciting and healthy for the students,” Chris says. “At this juncture in their lives, they are forming habits. We are trying to introduce them to types of food and initiatives that they may not try on their own.”

Problem
“Our students are millennials,” Chris notes, “and one of the most important things to them is knowing that the earth will be here for future generations.” So five years ago, UMass abandoned plastic cutlery and tableware in favor of compostables, made from plants, which would turn into soil rather than waste in a commercial composting facility.

However, they began receiving feedback from their waste management provider that their compostables weren’t breaking down. Chris was one of the people who led the charge to switch to World Centric. “All compostables are not equal,” he notes. “Manufacturers may say that their products are compostable, but in reality these items don’t necessarily do what they say they do.”

UMass wanted to continue to compost their food waste, but needed a supplier that they could trust.

Find out how we did it.
Solution

Chris met World Centric at Performance Food Group’s Sustainability Summit. “World Centric had the scientific studies done and the information right there [to demonstrate their compostability],” says Chris. “We then used waste management as a testing ground just to make sure.” Quality was also a factor in the decision to switch. We looked at several other new suppliers for our compostables, but “World Centric’s cutlery was hands down a lot better than the other products we used to source which were too pliable and would often break. World Centric’s utensils and their fiber products had a good presentation value too.”

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Conclusion

UMass foodservice now composts more than they throw away — diverting 68-70% of material from landfill to composting facilities, where it turns into soil. Their leadership in the composting of food waste also put them out in front of Massachusetts’ commercial food waste disposal ban (in effect as of October 1, 2014) that requires any entity that disposes of at least 1 ton of organic material per week to divert that waste to energy-generating and composting facilities.

UMass has been publicly recognized for its strides in sustainability and dining services. For the second consecutive year, the Princeton Review has listed UMass Amherst in its ‘Green Honor Roll’ and in 2014, UMass Dining ranked in the top two for campus dining nationwide.