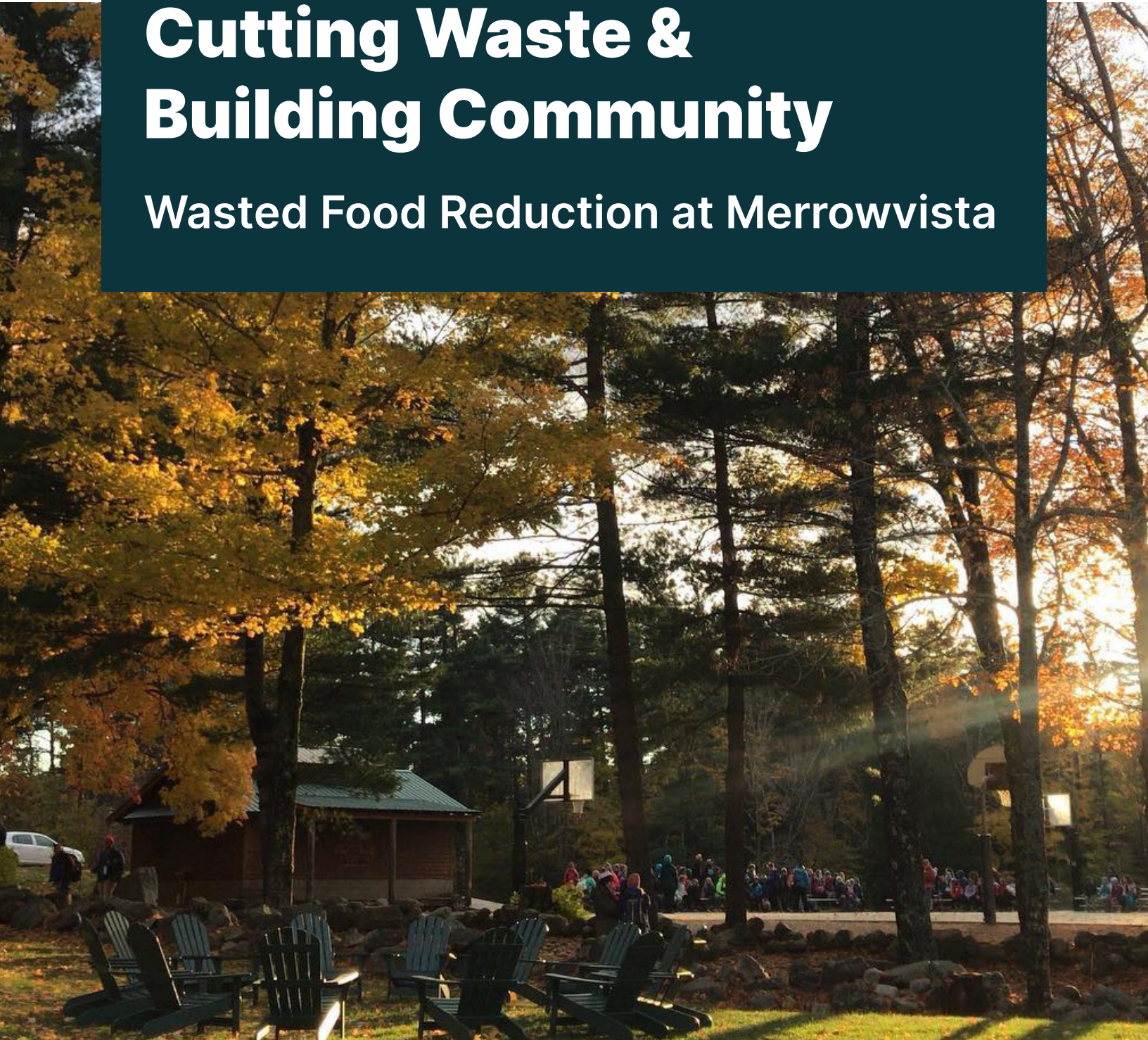




Cutting Waste & Building Community

Wasted Food Reduction at Merrowvista



The Merrowvista Community & Waste Reduction Values

Nestled amidst the Ossipee Mountains of New Hampshire, [Merrowvista](#), part of American Youth Foundation, sprawls across more than 600 acres of pristine wilderness. This camp and conference center includes a network of scenic trails and a shimmering lake inviting waterfront activity.

Merrowvista seamlessly blends nature and community, offering year-round programming that ranges from serene retreats to school and family offerings, to college programs. Merrowvista's busiest season is the summer, during which they host a camp program for youth. This summer camp hosts hundreds of participants and runs from late June to early August.

With a keen eye on wasted food reduction, the camp takes proactive steps to minimize and reclaim food that would have otherwise been discarded. Involving camp participants in composting and other food waste reduction programs, Merrowvista invites everyone along on a journey toward a more sustainable future.



At-A-Glance

A Waste Reduction Consultant from CET visited Merrowvista in November 2023. During the visit, they observed where and how wasted food is generated, as well as the existing systems in place for its prevention, management, and recovery. Since the visit, CET has been collaborating with Merrowvista to enhance and expand upon these initiatives.

Key information:

- Merrowvista prevents wasted food through meal planning and educational messaging about meal portioning.
- The camp collects food scraps and composts a portion of them in on-site tumblers. CET is helping the camp expand this program to capture all food scraps that are generated at the camp.
- Merrowvista donates surplus food to local organizations, particularly at the end of the year before the camp closes down for the winter.
- The camp makes concerted efforts to engage and educate staff and camp participants in their composting and wasted food reduction initiatives.



Preventing Plate Waste

At Merrowvista, the communal dining experience is not just about sharing meals—it's also an opportunity to encourage mindful consumption and reduce wasted food. Merrowvista has one large dining hall where camp participants and staff enjoy family-style meals. Before each meal, the kitchen staff anticipate the number of people who will be dining and prepare food accordingly. The camp's largest source of wasted food is what goes uneaten on participants' plates, or "plate waste", which the camp is taking proactive steps to minimize. To support this initiative, CET is helping Merrowvista develop targeted education and signage.

Merrowvista's staff members are actively engaging camp participants in conversations about meal portioning and waste reduction. Emphasizing the importance of taking only what they will consume, participants are encouraged to start small and return for additional servings if desired. To reinforce this message, CET and Merrowvista are collaborating on the creation of a table tent that can be placed on each table in the dining hall. These tents will provide visual reminders of the camp's commitment to waste reduction, offering practical tips and encouragement to make conscious choices about portion sizes. Additionally, CET supplied Merrowvista with examples of food waste tracking, food purchasing, and meal planning tools to further prevent wasted food at the source.

Composting Food Scraps

Merrowvista's dining hall is equipped with a designated "waste sorting station" where individuals can sort food remnants from dishware, recyclables, and trash. Clear signage guides diners on proper sorting practices, ensuring that plate scrapings and food scraps find their way into the dedicated buckets.

Once filled, the food scraps buckets are brought to one of five outdoor composting tumblers. These specialized tumblers can transform produce, meat, cheese, and dairy scraps into a nutrient-rich soil amendment.

At Merrowvista, there is a strong commitment to educating both participants and staff about the benefits of composting. Through education on the carbon sequestration and soil health benefits of composting, in addition to practical demonstrations on source separation, camp participants are encouraged to engage in the composting process. Campers participate in this program hands-on by bringing food scrap buckets to the tumblers, loading the material in, and turning the contents to mix and aerate them.

Based on the capacity of Merrowvista's five composting tumblers, the camp can add about three 5-gallon buckets of food scraps to the system per day. This equates to about 168 pounds of food scraps per week. Currently, this system cannot capture all of Merrowvista's wasted food, so the camp is collaborating with CET on additional diversion options for the remaining food scraps.

At the height of its summer season, the camp generates around 2.3 tons of wasted food per week. The majority of this is dining hall plate waste, but it also includes prep food scraps from the kitchen. Some of these back-of-house food scraps are collected by kitchen staff personally and given to their chickens and other animals. With a strong source separation program already in place, the camp is well-positioned to expand its wasted food diversion program.

Composting Program Expansion

CET is helping Merrowvista explore ways to capture additional food scraps. As one option, CET provided an overview of on-site composting systems that could accommodate a larger

amount of food scraps, such as aerated static piles and large in-vessel systems. CET also provided a list of local food scraps haulers that could pick up this material on a set schedule and bring it to a larger composting or anaerobic digestion operation.

To further aid Merrowvista's composting program, CET offered guidance on improving source separation in both the back-of-house (kitchen) and front-of-house (dining hall) settings. For the back-of-house, CET provided guidance on the types of containers to use and advised on the ideal placement of these containers.



For front-of-house, CET offered numerous tips and tricks for successful sorting stations, including:

- Appoint a food waste champion to oversee the program and address any inquiries.
- Monitor sorting stations to correct contamination, utilizing participant teams, volunteers, or staff.
- Ensure bins are clearly labeled with text and images for easy identification (CET provides customizable waste bin signage that can be translated into different languages!).
- Maintain space on both sides of sorting stations for participant lines.
- Clean sorting stations daily and rinse bins weekly.
- Educate participants to reduce contamination, involve them in signage creation and training, and designate "Lunch Leaders" to assist in waste sorting using gloves and tongs.

Merrowvista is committed to eventually capturing all of their food scraps in a sustainable cycle, and CET will continue supporting them in exploring different strategies to achieve that goal.



Donating Surplus Food

When Merrowvista finds itself with surplus food items and ingredients, they ensure these resources do not go to waste. Through partnerships with local organizations, this excess food is donated to those who can use and enjoy it.

When CET began working with Merrowvista in December 2023, coinciding with the camp's winter closure, there were several perfectly good food items in surplus. These included refrigerated goods like yogurt and cheese, frozen goods such as corn, peas, and hamburger buns, and dry goods such as mayonnaise, taco shells, and cereal.

After researching local organizations, CET connected Merrowvista with Agape Ministries, which runs a nearby food pantry. Agape Ministries accepted many of the frozen and shelf-stable goods. Following this successful donation, Merrowvista ended up establishing a recurring food donation partnership with Agape Ministries. Agape expressed a willingness to pick food up from the camp and indicated an interest in leftover prepared meals in addition to the foods they had already accepted. Going forward, this will be a fruitful partnership for food utilization and waste minimization!



Merrowvista As a Model, CET As a Partner

With a reverence for its stunning natural landscape, Merrowvista is committed to environmental stewardship by expanding its wasted food recovery programs. To maximize impact, the camp engages its participants every step of the way.

If your organization, business, or school is interested in receiving free support on food waste reduction programs, contact CET at **888-813-8552** or wastedfood@cetonline.org.

