

ECO-WARE PROGRAM HISTORY

The Eco-Ware story begins in the fall of 2009 at the University Marché. Because of the structure of the Marché, the meals it serves are 100% take-out, making it the ideal location to incubate a program like Eco-Ware. Erica Spiegel, Manager of Solid Waste and Recycling for UVM, approached the UVM Dining team and asked if reusable take-out containers had ever been considered. Recognizing the practicality of the idea, UVM Dining Retail Operations Director Tom Oliver began planning the 1st pilot program for the spring of 2009. While initially met with enthusiasm, participation in the program quickly declined to the point that, by the end of the pilot, only a few of people were active users. Upon hearing about the pilot program, Walter Poleman, Director of UVM's GreenHouse Residential Learning Community and instructor of the Honor College course An Ecological Approach to Living Well in Place, approached Tom Oliver and asked if his class could participate in the development of the program. Recognizing the benefit of this kind of grassroots support, Tom began planning the second pilot with the help of several Honors College students.

With an upgraded container and student support, expectations were high for the second pilot, but the results seemed to be about the same. A third pilot was planned, this time relying on a team of four Honors College students with additional support from UVM's GreenHouse Community. The third pilot saw an increase in signage and publicity, collection of statistical information, a further upgrade to the container, the development of a Facebook page, distribution of a key tag and the coining of a snappy name: Eco-Ware.

By the end of the third pilot we learned a few things: participants wanted a stronger and more durable container with a tighter seal to prevent leaks and one with fewer nooks and crannies that would be easier to clean. We addressed this by upgrading to the same container used by our Sodexo peers at Southern New Hampshire University. Additionally, only 35% of the containers were returned, a significant loss that suggested any Eco-Ware model implemented would have to hold participants accountable for having more than one container.

We looked at similar programs at other schools and found that the best programs are financially self-sufficient, since they don't rely on continuous cash infusions to keep them running. The containers themselves, each costing around \$3.50, are much higher quality containers than we used in the pilot programs. The Eco-Ware buy in level of \$7.50 covers the cost of the first container, the container we have waiting for the exchange, the cow tags that are used for the exchange, and some of the additional dishwasher supplies/labor costs of cleaning the containers. Since the plates and to-go boxes cost around \$.05 each, a \$.05 cent discount was implemented for every Eco-Ware meal purchased. Unless the container or cow tag is lost, \$7.50 is all it costs to participate in the Eco-Ware program. Replacements are not given at a discount because there is no way to verify.

After three pilots The Eco-Ware program was officially launched on January 17, 2011 at the University Marché and Brennan's. When this became a success the program was rolled out campus wide and the discount was increased to \$.15 per use. Soup containers were added to the program and are available at no extra fee but multiple containers cannot be used by the same person simultaneously without multiple memberships.