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Extra Credit Day 13

Food insecurity is a major issue in the United States and around the world. It has always marveled me how, as a country, we have so many people living below the poverty line, not getting enough food, and then still have such a high amount of food waste made by more privileged people. In the town where I live, there is a 38% poverty rate (datausa.io). However, one must also take into consideration that they most likely count college students living on their own as being in poverty, as they often do not make a large profit. At my high school, we do not do much in terms of food waste. In the past, we have had food waste go to a landfill. However, this year, my AP Environmental Science teacher, Amanda Figolah, partnered with a local composting company (Green Camino) to begin to implement a composting program in our school. As we are still at the beginning of the project, the amount of food actually composted is low compared to that which is thrown away, but we hope that the program will gain more popularity as we get it rolling.

A group of students (me included) recently went to Green Camino's headquarters to clean off old pickle buckets that would be reused as compost bins. We took the adhesive labels off, washed the buckets and then put the Green Camino logo on them. Green Camino even donated money for every bucket cleaned to the environmental club at my school. We are planning on using that donation to fund upcoming environmental projects, whether that be doing a lake clean-up, buying reusable straws to sell to our peers, or taking an educational trip to the university to learn more about higher education in Environmental Science, etc.

I talked to a student who is food insecure about the issue and his stance on it supported my ideas. He talked about how his ability to get breakfast depended on whether the bus was late getting to school or not. There are so many things that too many people take for granted, not realizing that they could be inhibiting someone from getting food. For example, if someone was late running out to the bus and made it wait or if someone was being immature and made the bus stop for some insignificant reason, he would not be able to eat that morning. He told me about how during school, he usually gets to eat because of the school provided meals, but over the weekend it is a different story. He said that there is most often not enough food for everyone in his family to eat, and being the oldest child, he is usually the one who doesn't get to eat enough. I take for granted coming home and knowing that there is food in the fridge, or I could go out and buy something to eat if I wanted to, and I think many others do as well. Talking with him made me so much more aware of the privileges that I have every day, and made me motivated to change.

My plan to reduce the amount of food waste at my school consists of two parts. The first one may sound simple, but it is actually much harder to do, and even more difficult to do effectively: informing the student body about the issue. Many people at the school ignore the announcements that come on the intercoms, so it is hard to reach everyone and have it make a difference. I would suggest telling everyone's homeroom teachers to read a short speech written by one of the environmental leaders at our school. The second part of the issue is expanding the compost program. If we can get this available to all of the students, and not just the faculty and some students, as it is now, people will at least begin to think about what they are throwing away and how they could change their footprint.

I talked with my AP Environmental Science teacher, Amanda Figolah, about the issue and she and I brainstormed more about the composting project and then she also told me that I could talk with one of the women in dining services about food waste. She told me about how she is also completely for composting and reducing food waste, but being a public school makes it difficult to get new major scale projects going. After the conversation with her, I wanted to see how much I could do, so I wrote a letter to the administration in our school to see if any changes could be made. I have not gotten a response yet, as I sent the letter today, but I am excited to hear back from them, even if it is a rejection, as at least the idea would be planted in their heads.

For my three images, with the help of the Digital Media class, I set up a camera above one of the 8 trash bins in our school's cafeteria and took a timelapse of one of the three lunches at our school. The pictures show at the beginning of the time people begin to throw away trash, halfway through, and at the end of lunch.





One of the trash bins filled up in about 15 minutes. This is a lot of waste, and SO much of it can be recycled, composted, or reused! Imagine this times 8 to get how much waste we produce in one lunch and then times 3 to imagine how much waste we produce on a daily basis simply in the cafeterias. If people were more aware of what they were throwing away and what they could do with it instead, we would create MUCH LESS waste. Let's get to recycling, composting, and reusing to make out school more sustainable!

