

Award-winning food recycling program benefits environment—and pigs!

Derrick Florence knew exactly where the half-eaten waffle he was throwing away at the lunchroom's sorting station was going. The signs with pictures of a pig helped.

"It's for the farmers and the pigs," said the third-grader from Stephen Foster Elementary School.

Each day volunteers help students at the school deposit their uneaten food, empty milk cartons, apple cores and other items into one of three receptacles at the sorting station. The food waste is dehydrated and processed on campus in a composting accelerator, a machine that speeds up decomposition. The end product is then shipped to a local farm to be used as animal feed.



With a grant of more than \$37,000 from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the 'Waste Reduction Project' was established as a pilot program at Stephen Foster Elementary in the spring. So far this school year, nearly 1300 lbs. of food waste has been recycled.

Some Stephen Foster students have created a video and PowerPoint presentation to help their peers understand how the program works and why it's important. Students have even been provided with activities they can do at home, like creating composters out of soda bottles.

The program's success has earned the district's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Department a statewide Innovative Idea Award from the Florida School Nutrition Association.

The goal for FNS is to get more schools separating waste in the lunchroom so that it can be brought to the machine at Foster for processing. It would also mean more students would be made aware of the benefits of composting.

"We are excited about this pilot program and teaching students the value of being environmentally conscious and how their part in the process is essential," said Maria Eunice, the director of Food and Nutrition Services. "It is gratifying to see the students taking ownership and making this pilot successful."

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