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Food Services and Office of Sustainability continues to push change to support campus goals

By Harley Nefe

Food Services and the Office of Sustainability at Appalachian State University are working on releasing new messages that will educate the public on how to be more sustainable.

This semester, Food Services will place new inserts in the napkin dispensers that educate on straw usage.

“It’s the ripple effect,” Jennifer Maxwell, Office of Sustainability program manager, said. “You get educated about something, and then you educate your peers, and all of a sudden it makes more sense.”

Food Services presented new cups that are compostable and switched over to paper straws on request that are compostable and biodegradable. The implementation of new cups and straws are two of the most recent events of change to occur.

“We’re doing something all the time,” Stephanie Lee, food services communication specialist, said. “Food Services has been dedicated to sustainability as long as the university has been.”

Appalachian State University has a Zero Waste commitment. In 2012, the campus set a goal to have a 90 percent landfill diversion by 2022. The 10 percent is a buffer for waste that the university cannot control, such as the packaging of things that come onto campus.

“It’s a lofty goal, but it’s one that we can use when we are trying to create change,” Maxwell said. “I try to worry less about us getting to that number, and more about the fact that we are on the path to get there, and we will eventually get there. Right now, our diversion hovers around 40 percent.”

To help with the Zero Waste initiative, Food Services and the Office of Sustainability are trying to spread the news about the impact everyone has on our environment and create more of an awareness of what can be done to help.

“Hopefully, the more we can be consistent with messaging, the more helpful it will be to get behavioral change,” Maxwell said.

Around Appalachian State University’s campus, there is new color-coded signage that explains what can be recycled or composted.

“We are really trying to get the story out,” Maxwell said. “That may be why it feels like it’s much more important now. The support and the campus-wide commitment has grown. It’s a part of our strategic plan that sustainability is at the core.”

The latest focus on campus is composting.

“Recycling has kind of become the norm now, and composting is the next piece,” Maxwell said. “Once we get things in place, and it’s super easy to sort, then we will be able to do some public collection.”

Lee agreed that having composting bins for the public “is a dream” for Food Services. However, to reach the next step, it’s important to understand the proper way to dispose of waste, Lee said.

“If anyone who is eating with us would just be careful with how they sort their tray,” Lee said. “The more people who can sort their trays, the better. The more we can spread the word, the more helpful.”