

Buffets a huge culprit of food waste

By Linda Himmelstein, New York Times

Lawrence Eells, the executive chef at the Hyatt Regency Orlando, in Florida, would like his kitchen, or at least its operations, to be as lean as his roast beef. So in April, he welcomed a team of researchers looking at ways to reduce food waste, especially around the abundant all-you-can-eat buffets.

Experts from Ideo, the global design firm known for such creations as Apple's first mouse and Ikea's kitchen of the future, studied all facets of the buffet, from food preparation and presentation to the eating patterns of guests. The idea was to try to measure exactly how much food was consumed or repurposed, versus thrown away. They also aimed to pinpoint areas where innovations might help cut waste.

Their initial finding – that guests ate just over half of the food put out – surprised almost everyone. Perhaps even more striking was that only 10 to 15 percent of the leftovers could be donated or repurposed because of food safety regulations, while the rest ended up in the garbage. The sizable waste generated by coffee, juices and other liquids added to the conundrum.

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