

About the 2019 Food Recovery Challenge National Award Winners

Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, Environmental Programs Division

Los Angeles, California

Data-driven Winner, State, Tribal and Local Government

As a regional entity serving 88 cities and a population of more than 10 million people, the County of Los Angeles (LA) continually pursues ways to make its communities more resilient. This commitment drives the need to identify new ways to address greenhouse gases, waste generation and pollution.

The ‘Scrape Your Plate’ pilot program was launched in 2017 to help LA County Public Works employees divert food waste from area landfills through organics recycling. At the program’s inception, food waste was collected in the cafeteria and dining area of the agency’s headquarters in Alhambra, California. A year later, ‘Scrape Your Plate’ expanded to include 20 on-campus breakrooms and special events at field facilities across LA County.



LA County Public Works collaborated with LA County Sanitation Districts to use existing anaerobic digestion infrastructure to convert 13,700 pounds of food waste to electricity. Worm composting bins diverted an additional 1,200 pounds of food waste and another 340 pounds were source reduced by improved planning by kitchen staff.

“LA County Public Works has a vision for vibrant, waste-conscious communities served by cutting-edge 21st century infrastructure,” said LA County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella. *“That includes developing programs and innovative approaches to waste reduction in partnership with local cities and under the guidance of our Board of Supervisors.”*

Getting employees and visitors to properly separate food waste, trash and recycling was a challenge at first. But the project team significantly reduced cross-contamination by increasing on-site signage and peer-to-peer outreach. To further encourage these new social behaviors, an educational video was developed. LA County Public Works is now working to expand the program to recycle other types of organic waste, including food-soiled paper.

“We hope the success of the organics recycling effort here at LA County Public Works can serve as an example to other agencies, businesses and institutions,” Pestrella said.