

SEAWORLD'S FOOD FISH WASTE REDUCTION INITIATIVE

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Abstract

Preventing food waste is an important component of our feed sustainability program. Small amounts of waste in local areas can add up to huge amounts of wasted food over time, especially when multiplied over a large number of animal areas. Disposing of excess food is costly, both to purchase, handle, and in some cases, to pay disposal fees for. In addition, we seek to have our impact on the planet, especially the oceans, be as minimal as possible.

Therefore, a program to minimize the waste of food, particularly of fish and seafood items was adopted. A coordinated effort including each animal area was assigned to monitor waste and generate ideas to reduce waste. Several ideas were tested, and plans were improved before reaching the final plan. Unsuccessful strategies included calling neighboring animal areas to ask if they needed extra fish (labor intensive, cross-contamination concerns, and not always being able to find a home for the fish) and taking fish to a central cooler for re-distribution (similar issues). Successful current strategies include: reducing breakout (thawed) fish amounts to next lowest whole box amount, then filling in missing amounts using Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) fish. Although IQF fish is more expensive, this strategy enables us to not throw away partial boxes of fish and therefore saves money and fish overall. Food fish, held overnight for responding to potential emergencies were thawed separately later in the day so that they could be used for the first morning feeding instead of being disposed of due to food safety concerns because of having been thawed for >24 hours. In some areas, the use of these emergency food fish was discontinued in lieu of using IQF fish, which can be rapidly thawed by adding water.

In addition to taking an ethically and responsible approach to optimizing a precious food resource, these changes have resulted in an estimated \$180,000 annual savings across all taxa and parks. Additional, albeit smaller, food fish efficiencies are being explored by the husbandry teams as they have become enthusiastic about this idea. In addition, we have placed renewed emphasis on training everyone about fish quality and proper handling so that good fish isn't discarded due to poor care.