

# Elior review dishes up savings

**Elior's catering operation at the MOD's Bovington site was achieving impressively low levels of production food waste, but managing customer behaviour was more problematic. WRAP's review resulted in savings of £11,000 per year, which Elior has dedicated to providing better quality food at the same cost.**

Feeding hungry soldiers takes military planning. Nutritional and affordable meals are crucial to the service, but at the Ministry Of Defence (MOD) Bovington site, contract caterer Elior was also achieving exceptionally low food waste production figures. However, when WRAP conducted a Resource Optimisation Review, it identified plate waste amounting to £11,000 a year.

Jo Anne Robertson, Wessex Contract Director, Elior Defence, said the review, and particularly the plate waste findings, had changed the way she thought about waste: "We hadn't expected anything near the kind of monies that were found. It has made me think of waste generation from a commercial aspect, which in our service business wouldn't be the norm. You may think about waste from a corporate social responsibility point of view, or from a morality point of view, but certainly I don't think there was very much emphasis given to it around a commercial aspect, and that is a very big change for our business."

## Background

Bovington is one of the two largest military sites in Wessex. It serves as a ground for armoured vehicle training and provides messes for living, eating and socialising.

### Key benefits

- Realise cost savings
- Reduce carbon impacts
- Reduce waste arisings
- Healthier meal options
- Improved performance



**TRAX, the main catering facility at Bovington, typically serves 300 covers per service**

The suite of catering options at Bovington includes restaurants, bars, cafes, vending points and shops. The main catering facility is TRAX, which is open seven days a week, serves three meals a day and, typically, 300 covers per service.

As the appointed FM services provider, Elior provides soft FM services including catering and waste management. At less than three per cent, the company was able to boast exceptionally low levels of food waste generated in production, but turned to WRAP for advice in terms of taking waste prevention to the next level.

Robertson explained: "I wanted to look at areas that would add value to the contract. There were two drivers to taking part in the review: the moral aspect of wasting food – is it right to waste food when there are people in the world starving to death? And secondly, could we reduce landfill further by reducing the amount of plate waste generated?"

"We decided to stop looking at what was influencing our profit and take a look at what was happening to food once it was purchased. To our horror, we found that plate waste was monumental and WRAP was instrumental in helping us to establish how much of the food we sell is going into the bin. Once we'd validated the amount of plate waste being thrown away, we were able to create a different business solution."

The new model not only significantly reduced plate wastage, but also kick started a whole new offering for the civil servants, military staff and contractors on site, giving them better value for money by diverting the cost savings generated into higher quality meal offerings.

### Recycling rates

Like many organisations with disparate sites and inherited systems, the Wessex region MOD contract had operated inconsistent waste management practices across its premises. In 2012, for example, the Bovington site reported a recycling figure of just 1.3 per cent, compared with 53 per cent across the MOD in general.

*WRAP suggested measuring the quantity of solid food waste arising, estimating that reducing this would result in savings of over £8,000 per year. However, the actual savings generated reached £11,000, far beyond expectation.*

A new recycling strategy has now been rolled out, incorporating three waste streams – mixed recycling, general waste and glass – and recycling is running at an all-time high of 38.8 per cent.

### Challenges

Predicting the number of diners expected is a fine art for any catering facility. Even with access to the military bed count, the Elior catering manager cannot be certain of the number of residents arriving for a particular meal. Batch cooking offers the solution. Once the service has finished, food waste is blast chilled or transferred to a different unit for inclusion in a meal later in the day.

Contamination of waste streams had also proved problematic. Robertson said: "We have had real problems with contamination

### Key actions

- Measure solid food waste
- Eliminate self-service option
- Introduce new recycling systems
- Build on client relationship to assist in planning

in the public areas and have done a lot of work with our waste provider SITA to address that. One potential solution is to put clear bins on site so that when you pop your rubbish in it is very visible, which sounds like a good idea to me."

### Food waste reduction

Elior is rightly proud of its low pre-sales food waste percentage, which equates to £4,268, or 1.4 per cent of total sales over a 12-month period. This is achieved through a range of actions such as interdepartmental exchanges between sites, portioning of bread to reduce wastage, and effective use of the Saffron system, which helps to make orders more accurate through the specification of ingredients and quantities using a recipe plan.

Stock control is strictly adhered to, with ingredients imminently reaching their best before date redistributed to other catering facilities, while batch cooking gives chefs a contingency against a smaller number of covers arriving than anticipated; instead of 100 meals prepared at once, 50 might be cooked, followed by batches of 10 as required.

While contract and menu restrictions offer limited opportunities for food re-use, efforts are made, where possible, to re-use leftovers, such as including fruit salad packaged in pots into an evening dessert. Robertson highlighted the fact that involving the team means that staff actively seek ways to make the most of food items.

She said: "I formed a Green Team from people on the shop floor, because I felt that the best way to influence our workforce of circa 850-1,000 people would be from themselves. It was incredibly successful and has surpassed my expectations. Only the other week, one of the chefs stopped me to say how much tuna fish was being wasted

on a certain day – a lot of the sites close down for the weekend on a Friday, so they have been finding themselves clearing out the fridges. The solution to the tuna waste is that they now cook a tuna flan, which is frozen for use the following week, or the outstanding produce goes to the main kitchens which remain open, and they cook specials to use up any products.”

### Food waste

Food waste was believed to make up around 90 per cent of the waste stream from the kitchen areas at TRAX and other catering facilities, totalling around 341 tonnes per year. WRAP estimated that 49.4 tonnes of this food waste was finding its way into the general waste stream, with an associated disposal cost of £5,928.

Robertson said that working with WRAP had provided strong data and helped to validate the amount of food that was being thrown away once it had been sold, which in turn provoked discussion over the model in use. As a result, Elixir has been able to introduce a trial that aims to remove the waste, while ploughing the money saved into higher quality meals with more modern menus. Plate waste is now down by two-thirds and the new meal system has so far proved successful.

*“I am sure that the statistics generated by WRAP to evidence plate waste significantly influenced the positive approach by the MOD in granting us the opportunity to try a different way to feed soldiers.”*

Jo Anne Robertson  
Wessex Contract Director  
Elixir Defence

### WRAP interventions

WRAP’s primary solution to the issue of plate waste was to eliminate the self-service option used for carbohydrates and vegetables. In many cases, customers helped themselves to large quantities, which they then failed to eat – as many as one in five had leftovers on plates, which represented around 15 per cent of a typical meal. Reducing this waste was estimated to result in cost savings of £10,074 or a CO<sub>2</sub>e reduction of 130 tonnes.



Plate waste was the main contributor to food waste generation

In addition to contributing to plate waste, self service also adds to contamination of serving containers. For example, once chips are dropped into a baked beans container, the dish is classified as contaminated and then needs to be replaced.

In terms of disposal, however, Robertson said work still remains: “What we haven’t been able to do yet, sadly, is to find a supplier that actually disposes of food waste for the same price, or less, than the current price of going to landfill. That is the golden nugget to significantly change our recycling percentages.

However, she maintains that the exercise will continue to benefit Elixir – and its clients in the future, especially as the MOD looks to modify the way it allocates FM contracts: “Project Hestia will see the MOD restructure the geographical areas of contract lets, with probably five big contenders looking to operate the new super contracts. We’re going to need to show that we can deliver more than the contract stipulations, and demonstrate the commercial aspect, tried and tested. So it’s really important for us to be building case studies to include in our sales bid, to validate what we have done and the outcomes.”

*“The biggest advantage for me, working with WRAP, was being able to put commercial figures to the system, that made the likes of me look up and get excited. I’m not sure that we would have been able to come up with such a structured, easy to follow result. We had an idea, they graphed it, structured it, formalised it, and made the whole thing come to life.”*

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**Waste & Resources  
Action Programme**

The Old Academy  
21 Horse Fair  
Banbury, Oxon  
OX16 0AH

Tel: 01295 819 900  
Fax: 01295 819 911  
E-mail: [info@wrap.org.uk](mailto:info@wrap.org.uk)

Helpline freephone  
0808 100 2040

[www.wrap.org.uk/fm](http://www.wrap.org.uk/fm)

