



Case Study: West Liberty Foods Food Company Achieves Rare “Landfill-Free” Designation

When West Liberty Foods, an Iowa-based foodservice company, earned “landfill-free” status for its Tremonton, Utah processing facility in early 2012, it reached an environmental milestone few in any industry today can match.

In seeking third-party verification for the Tremonton plant’s unique effort, West Liberty Foods turned to NSF International, who through their partnership with NSF International International Strategic Registrations (NSF-ISR) provided the customized auditing services necessary to assure the company would meet its goal. As of September 2014, the NSF Sustainability division manages the Landfill Free program.

Today, the Tremonton facility diverts up to 3.5 million pounds of waste annually from the local landfill, and West Liberty Foods serves as an industry role model and informed authority on corporate stewardship.

The Challenge

Michele Boney, West Liberty Foods’ environmental compliance officer, recalls the day in May 2011 when company President and CEO Ed Garrett asked, “Can we be landfill-free by the end of the year?” Discussion quickly moved on to the even bigger question, “How?” This set in motion an unprecedented effort by Boney and her team to understand the ins and outs – literally – of everything passing through its Tremonton plant.

First, the environmental compliance group looked at its existing waste disposal and recycling practices. “We did a ‘dumpster dive’ to follow our waste stream,” Boney says. “We sorted through everything, from the plant to the front office, to determine what was there and where (other than landfill) it could go.” One task involved unloading and sorting garbage bags full of cafeteria waste, an effort that identified eight distinct categories for recycling, reuse, composting or incineration.

Next, the group prepared a list of every vendor and recycling service that handles its waste. The team soon realized it had no process for tracking where everything went once it left the Tremonton facility.

The Solution

At this point West Liberty Foods called in NSF International to “follow the trail” of the waste and establish the requirements for certified landfill-free status.

The company initially worked with NSF in 2004, when its turkey processing facility became the first facility of its kind in the US to earn ISO 14001 certification. Now auditor Bryan Dayton stepped in to gather the relevant information to quantify and substantiate the company’s landfill-free initiative.



“We looked at the Tremonton facility from a regulatory perspective to make sure the facility had properly characterized its waste streams and were properly managing their wastes in accordance with applicable laws. We identified 60 different waste streams,” Dayton explains. “We also required the Tremonton facility to verify that all recycling, reuse and disposal facilities that received their waste held the necessary federal, state and local permits and licenses.” Dayton’s audit also required written documentation from each company detailing how its waste materials were handled, so that the amount of waste to landfill could be quantified.



The NSF audit further determined that any waste that was not recycled, reused or composted went to a waste-to-energy incinerator to generate steam and electricity. In addition to selling the steam heat to a nearby Air Force base and using the electricity to power its plant, the incineration company also resourcefully used the leftover ash to cap its own landfill.

In order to achieve and maintain its landfill-free status, West Liberty Foods agreed to place recycling bins throughout its Tremonton facility and train employees in their use; to keep waste shipment records on file; to conduct waste inspections twice daily and maintain written records; and to report any related issues to management. Boney says the majority of the employees supported the landfill-free initiative.

The Results

Through its extensive efforts to reduce its environmental footprint, West Liberty Foods' Tremonton facility officially received landfill-free status in early 2012, a verified designation that confirms the plant sends less than one percent of its waste to landfills. The company's Mount Pleasant, Iowa plant achieved the same honor in mid-2012.

Based in part to its landfill-free designation and commitment to the environment, West Liberty Foods was named the 2012 Vendor of the Year by restaurant chain Subway and its Independent Purchasing Cooperative. West Liberty Foods was also cited for its work with Subway on product improvement and food safety initiatives, as well as its commitment to corporate social responsibility.

In acknowledging the benefits of third-party verification, Boney cites the value of corporate transparency. "It proves to everyone that we opened our doors to validate our waste reduction efforts," she says. The initiative has earned the praise of West Liberty Foods customers, along with significant media coverage and requests for more information from other companies.

Boney describes her work with NSF as "a great experience. The NSF team has taught us a lot and really helped us to improve our processes."

