Prevention vs. Treatment

How to Shift our Mindset about Food Waste

Presented by Dr. Aurora Dawn Benton

NACE Experience Conference

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Dr. Aurora Dawn Benton

More than just food waste!

- Materials waste reduction
- Environmentally preferable purchasing
- Supplier diversity and buy local programs
- GHG Inventory and carbon neutral strategies
- Sustainability Certification
- Sustainability curriculum development (EIC Sustainable Event Professional Certificate and others)

Astrapto means to *illuminate*.

Mission: *shed light* on a path for your sustainability journey.

Core belief: *anyone*, in any position can drive positive impact!
Sustainability can and should be practical and approachable.

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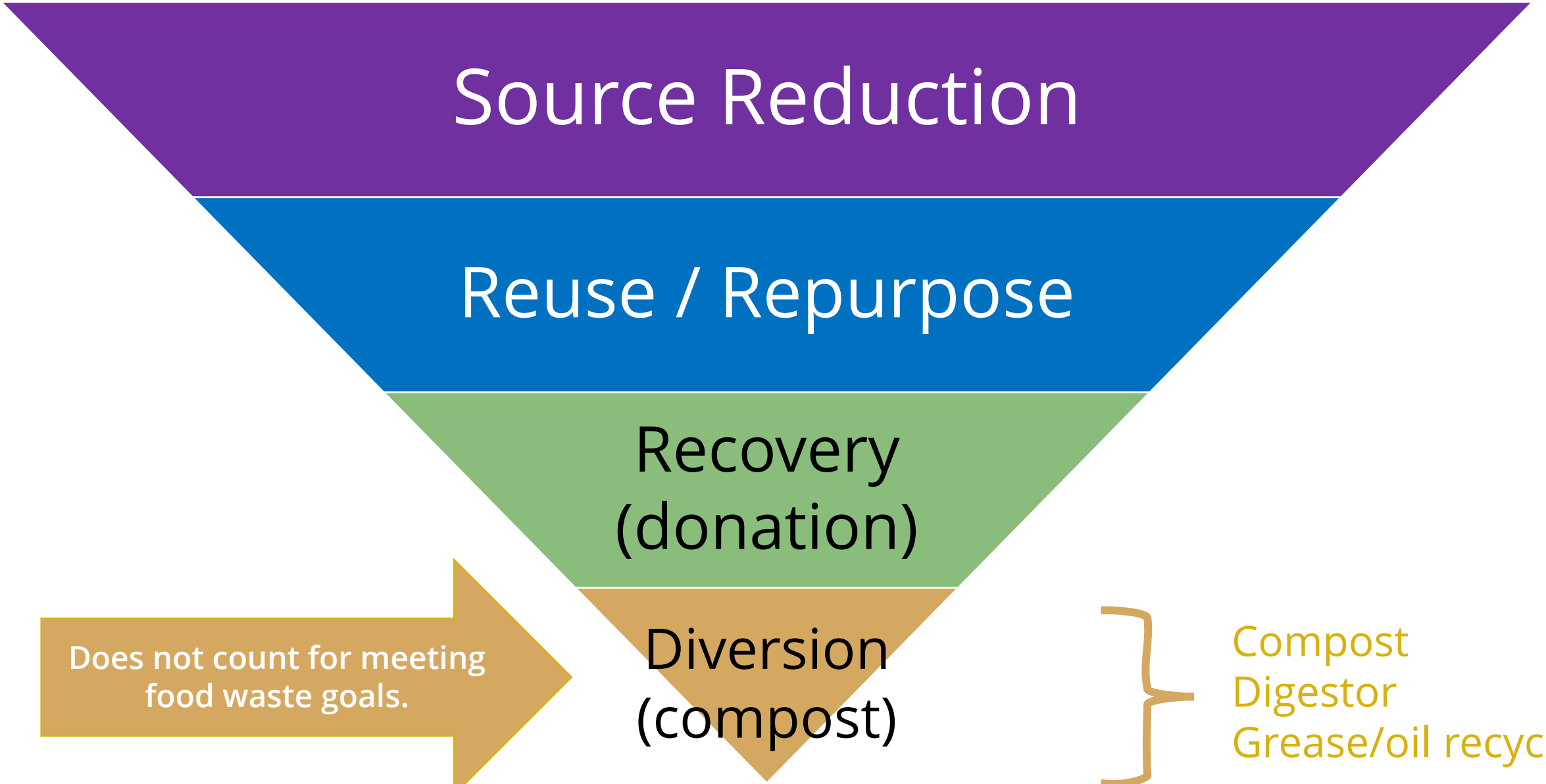
Food Waste Reduction Methodology



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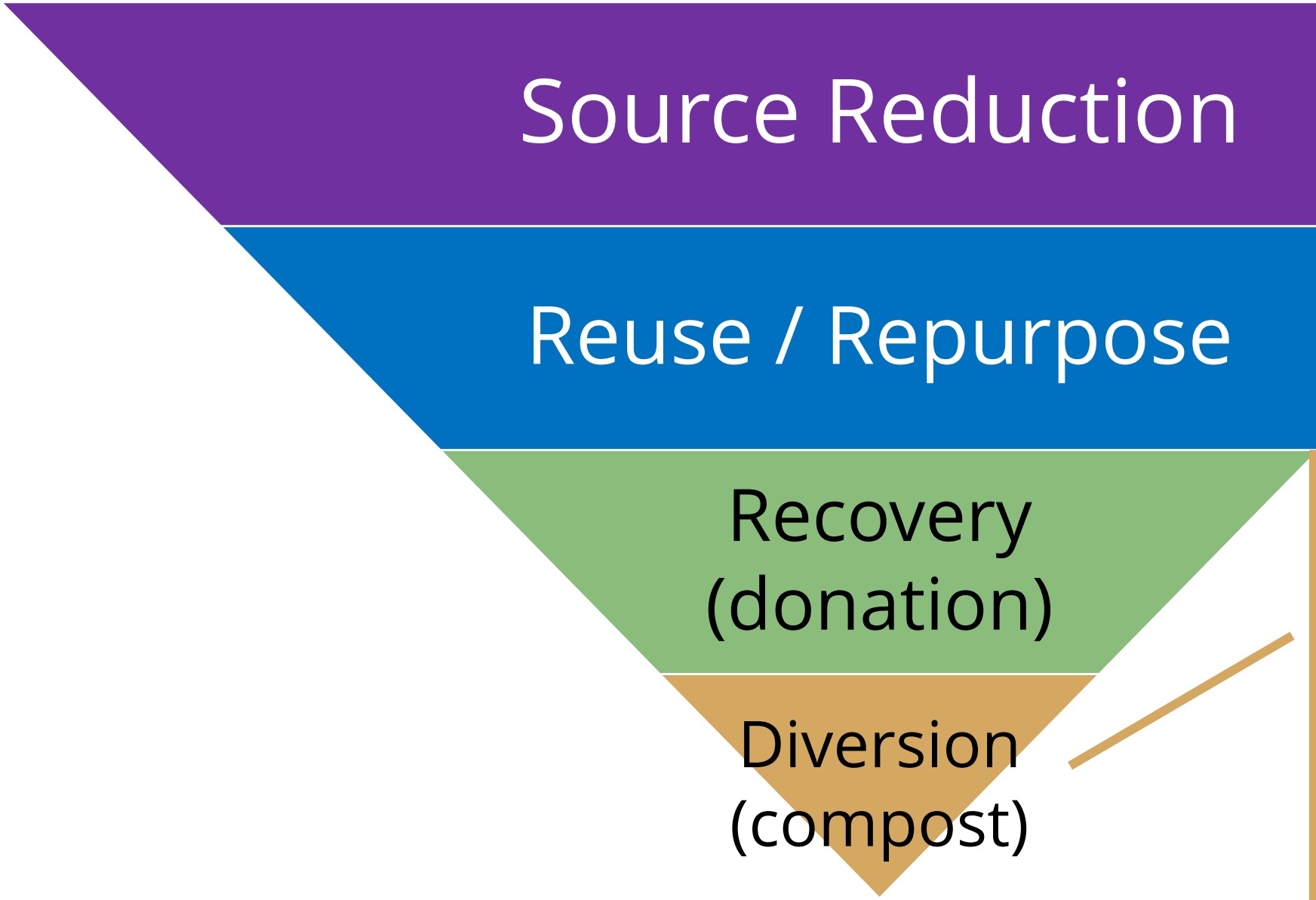

"For the last few years, the digestor meant 'we don't have food waste'. But now the mindset is the digestor is just a piece of the solution, but not the primary focus. It's there to catch what we didn't catch in the forefront. Changing that mentality has been one of the biggest takeaways."

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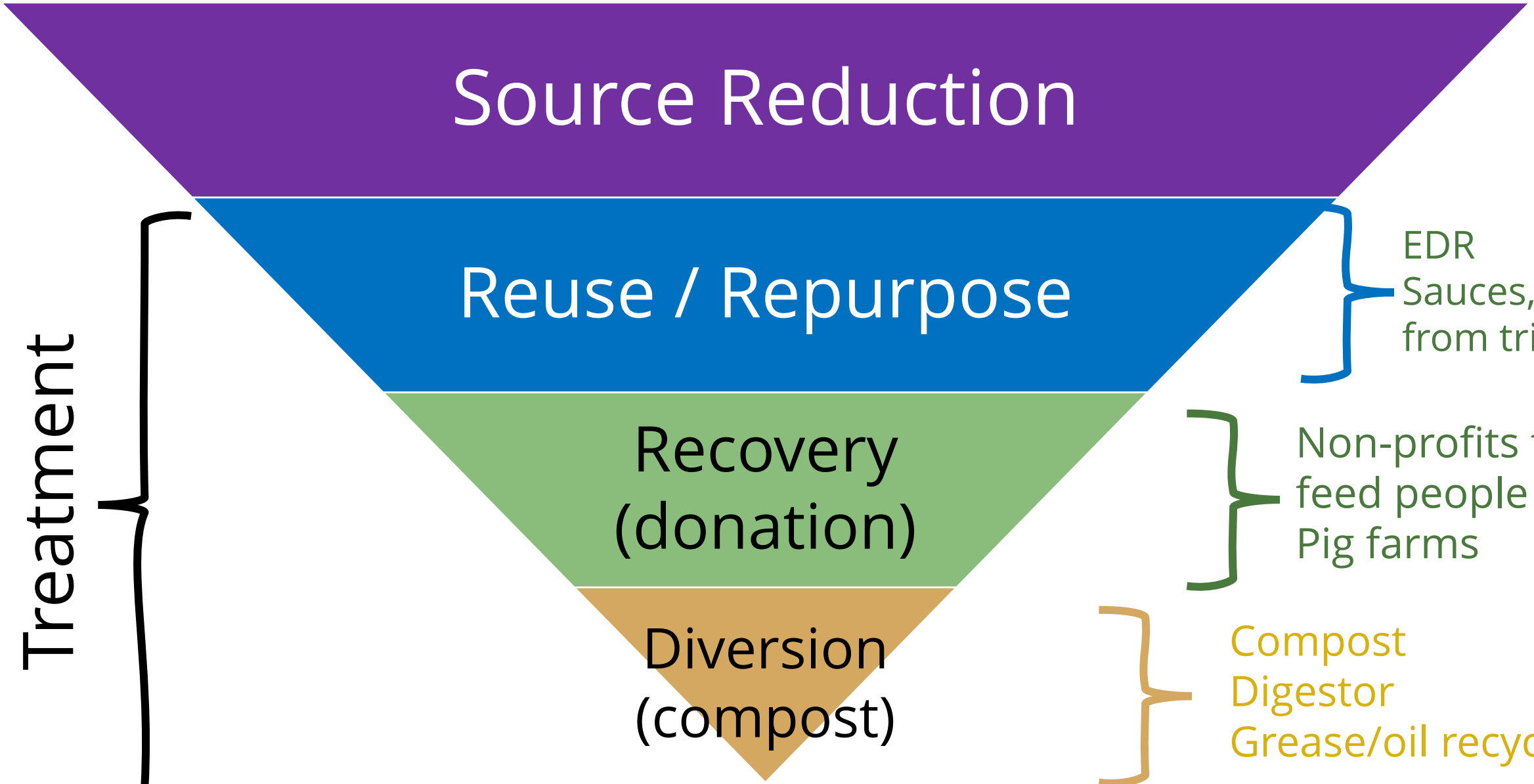

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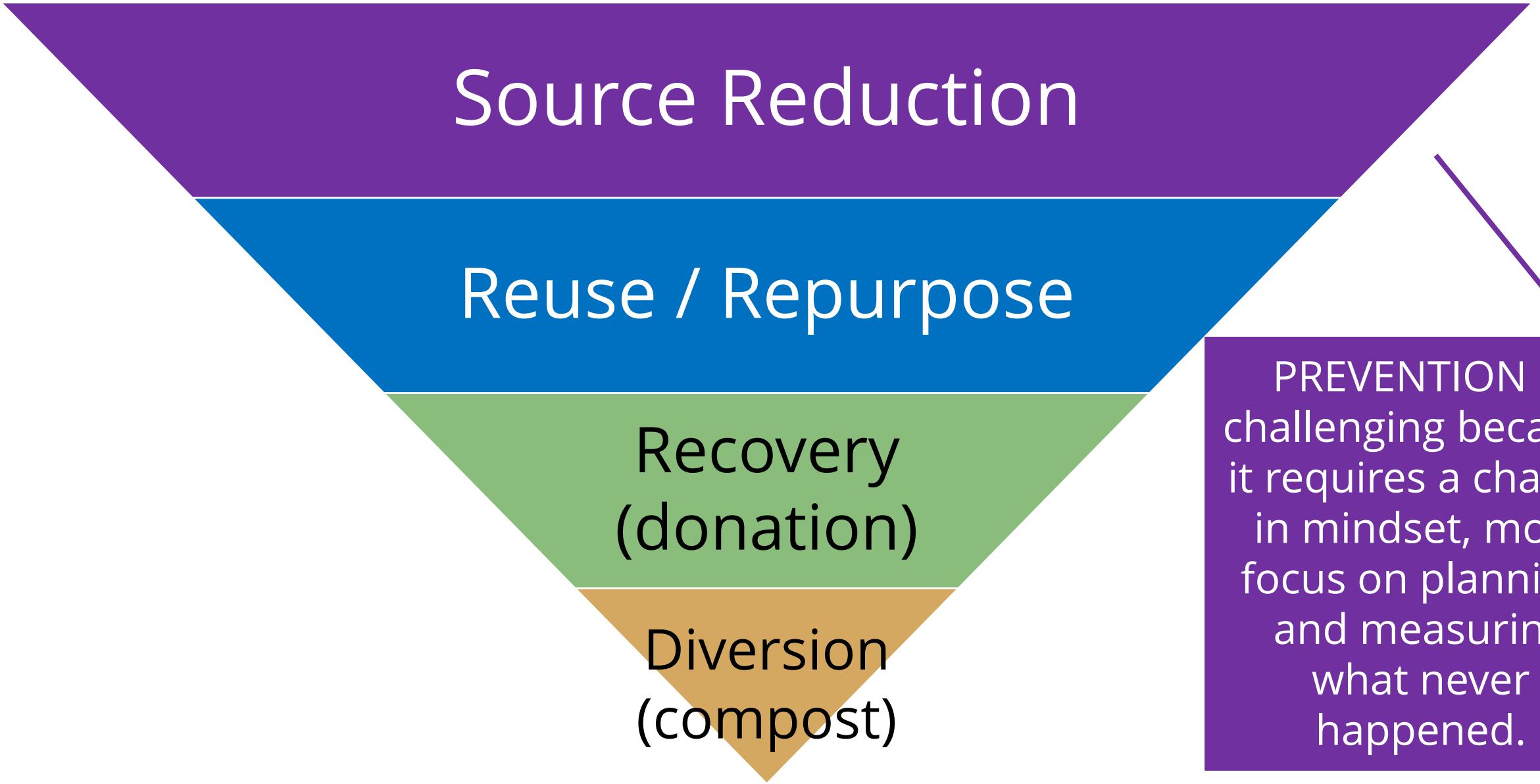


PREVENTION is challenging because it requires a change in mindset, more focus on planning, and measuring what never happened.

Breaking Old Habits

Let’s do things differently.

The downside of abundant hospitality

- Overproduction
- Overages and no-shows
- Portions and disproportions

Wasteful practices

- Inconsistent and across the board overages
- Pre-set/pre-pour/ pre-slice
- F&B scheduling and placement
- Service style and replenishment
- Portions without math or design

Key Themes for Lasting Change

- Awareness!!!!
- Culture & Communication
- Solve one problem at a time!
- Audits and Photos

Awareness

Seeing what’s always been there.

A new perspective on an old problem

"From my previous experience, I got used to seeing food waste. ***You wake up to fact that you do get used to it for so long and get to the point that you take it as a normal daily routine of the operation. And then you realize that it's not normal. It's something that you can control.*** *Why do you think that is normal? That is not really normal, it's really a waste."*

From...

"It's 100% driven by the client. They need an answer and ***you kind of push your way through the answer, but don't really know the details****."*

To...

"It's made me more confident to talk to my clients. That's been a great benefit and I look forward to getting more and more information so I can be more proactive with my clients as we go forward."

Culture and Communication

The key to any successful change.

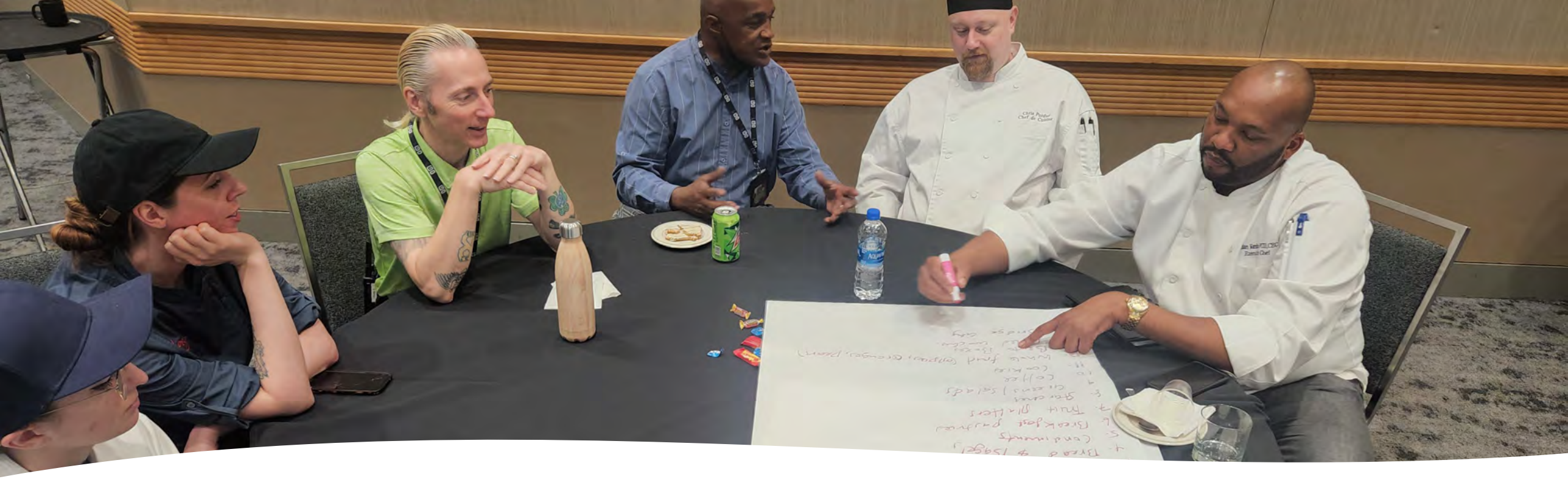
Let’s start with the bad news.

Culture change takes time!

Another meeting? YES! ANOTHER meeting!

- *"The struggle we've had with communication in general is finding time to meet….a lot of meetings get canceled….it was the one time we were able to all come together and get on the same page."*
- *"Going forward, we do need to audit and have more meetings with the kitchen and catering team to really fine tune some things."*
- *"This is just another talking point that we can add into this monthly meeting that we were planning on getting on the books anyway."*
- *"We need to spend more time together as a team. The benefit of having the catering team in the meeting is we'll do an F&B meeting, which is really just banquets and the kitchen. But catering is not usually part of that."*
- *"I definitely think we need more meetings, like maybe a monthly meeting or even biweekly, even if it's just a 15 minute catch up to go over one or two audits we've done."*
- *"It would be helpful to have more cross-functional conversations and bring these things up in BEO meetings. The key would be to have a discussion so there is trust and confidence in the changes."*

Don't expect anything to change if you can't make time to meet about it.



Involve EVERYONE!

"We were doing so many great things already, but then to pull in ***all of our staff was one of the biggest Wows for us to see - our wait staff, our stewards, our dishwasher, everybody thinking it, everybody what we're doing and why we're doing it****."*

Chefs: The Solution and The Problem

- Intuition and professional knowledge.
- Most staff feel it’s not okay or their role to share feedback with the kitchen.
- Many chefs are not exactly open to feedback.
- Chef’s process is often a “black box”; staff have little insight into how decisions are made. A lot of stuff is not documented or measured.
- Line cooks are assumed to know what the chef knows and do what the chef would do.

The good news, once culinary is on board...

*"**It's easier to go back to the kitchen with feedback. Where before it would be a little awkward to go and say 'you produced too much.'** It has opened up those conversations and allowing us to be more transparent with each other. It's not like we're trying to tell you everything you're doing is wrong, but **they're actually taking that feedback and you can see the adjustments they've made**."*

Culture change needs to be industry-wide.

Planners also have a responsibility.

*"**It's hard for our salespeople to be that honest with planners** and say, 'you know what, 9 pounds of potatoes went back, but your group ate all of the bacon and the sausage.' There's nothing wrong with telling them that, but we think we shouldn't tell them how much was wasted. **People are afraid, but we need to be more open about it. It's not that we're withholding anything from them and it comes down to tougher conversations with our planners**."*

These are not easy conversations.

What do you think?

What are the top 10 most wasted food and beverage items at your events?

Prolifically Problematic Items

The same things over and over and over and over and over ...

Prolifically Problematic Items

The 80/20 Rule

Bread, bagels, pastries

Desserts and cookies

Fruit – whole, platters, displays, bowls

Salad greens, toppings, dressings, condiments

Cheese and charcuterie boards

Quick changes = quick wins

"We often have 10 tops and used to put 10 rolls out. At the end of the night we were throwing away quite a bit of rolls. We reduced to 7 rolls per table. And from 2 butter plates per table to 1, which reduces labor needed to cut butter and scrape waste off dishes. ***The first night we did it, we saved about 130 rolls not to mention all the butter we were able to put back in the fridge. It's interesting to see something that started off as, 'hey, let's try this for a night and see what happens' to now it doesn't even get brought up, it's just what we do.***"

This *prevented* almost 9000 rolls in the first 9 months!

Bagels: *I always knew but I didn't know* how *much.*

- Over order, but how much to cut back?
- Portion sizes
- Toaster bottleneck
- Condiment waste!

Cheap, filler foods.

Volume does not equal value.

Cantaloupe and Honeydew ALWAYS the most wasteful!

Hotel Staff: “*But melon is cheap.*”

Me: “*Congratulations, you didn’t pay much for that trash.*” (mic drop)

I can’t condone this much condiment!!

Cheese and Charcuterie Boards

- High environmental footprint
- High food costs
- Gets messy quickly
- Mechanics of eating

One-size-fits-all vessels.
Fill up whatever vessel selected.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

It’s true what they say, you manage what you measure.

Emphasize Environmental Impact

- One gallon of milk requires 144 gallons of water to make
- The dairy industry = 2% of the US's total GHGs

- Event audit
  - 29 tables, 203 guest settings
  - Passed apps followed by lunch

- Butter results
  - ✓ 29 8oz jars filled less than halfway
  - ✓ Waste = 2.8 lbs. or 44.8 oz

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- Cheesecake results
  - ✓ Original serving = 7.2 oz (with garnish) or 91 lbs.
  - ✓ Waste = 43 lbs.

Photos in Focus

Seeing is believing.

Pictures speak 1000 words and may save $1000!

- Adding PHOTOS to post-event reports for a compelling feedback loop
- SEEING waste and NOTICING problems leads to FIXING them

"We don't pre-pour or do pre-sets."

Later that day...

Before and After

Small events are problematic because menu/service specs tend to be set for 1-50, 50 to 100, etc.

Desserts are pretty consistently a source of waste in the events industry

Before and After Lunch

Sliders Photo Audit

- Many people took the fried fish or fried vegetable off the bun.
- Recommendation: make those standalone items
- Additional studies would confirm: Do people not like the bread? Trying reduce starch?
- Would results be different with this menu as lunch or dinner rather than reception?

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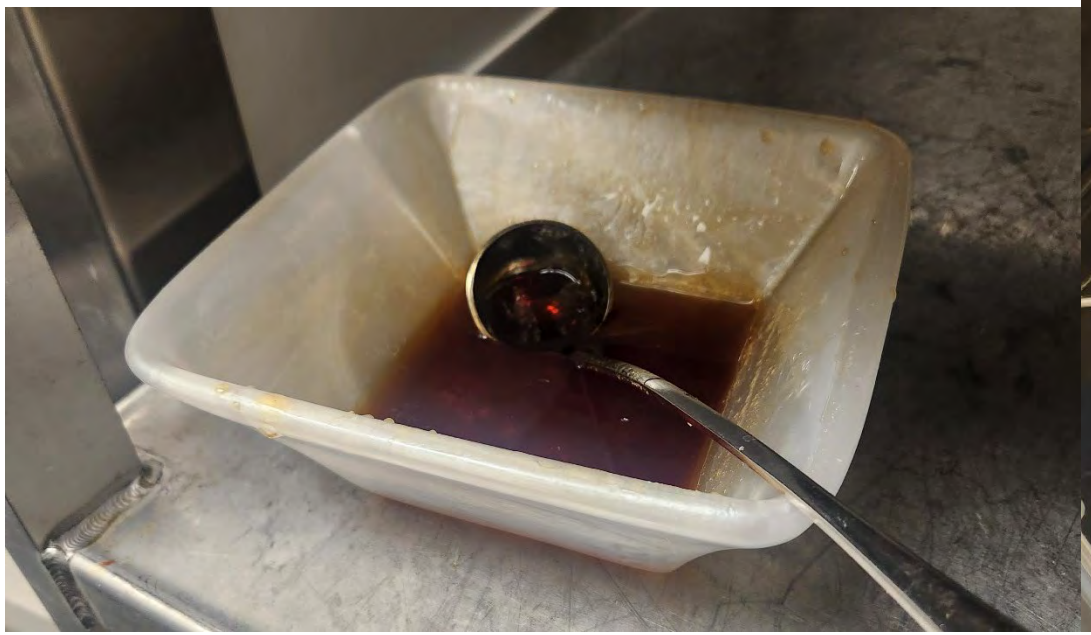
Sliders Photo Audit

- Don’t forget the condiments
- Photo at end of service – some barely touched.
- Why?

Syrup!



Normally use large blue pot (1 per line) but pivoted to small bowl (1 per line)
1 gallon = 3 small bowls OR one large pot
6 lines would have been 6 large pots (or about 6 gallons)
8 total smaller bowls of syrup were used = about 2.6 gallons
About 60% waste PREVENTION!!!
Syrup is $56.64/gallon = savings of $192.58
After this event, switched to an insulated coffee pot style pourer. Any syrup remaining is used in hot side and bakery recipes.

Butter!

Day 1

Estimated 1 pound of butter in standard vessel

Most bowls at least half full at the end of service

And some barely touched (staff meal setup)

Day 2

Decision made to reduce vessel (about 1/3 size)

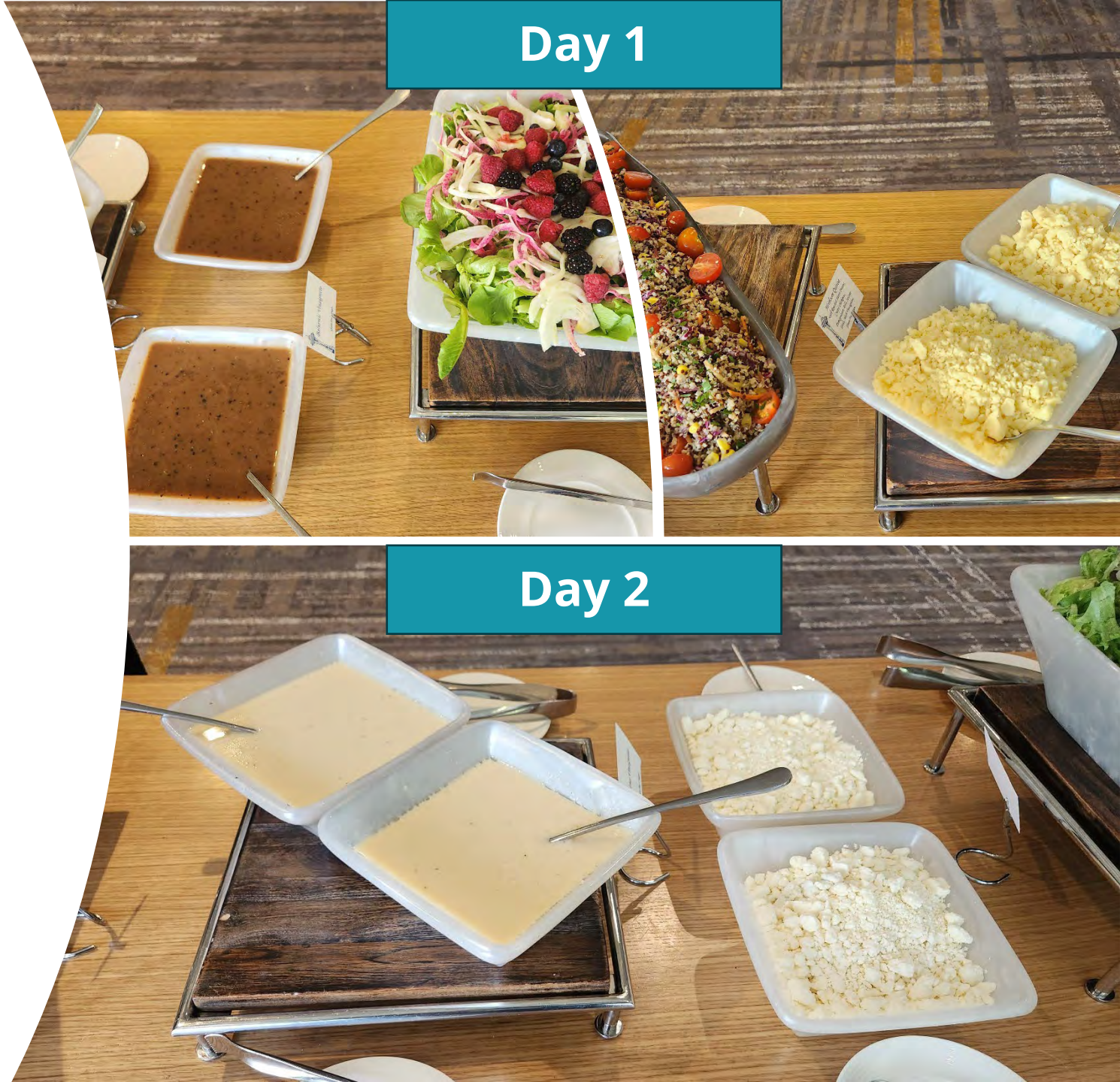
Plenty left, no risk of running too low. (consolidated two lines to one)

Day 3

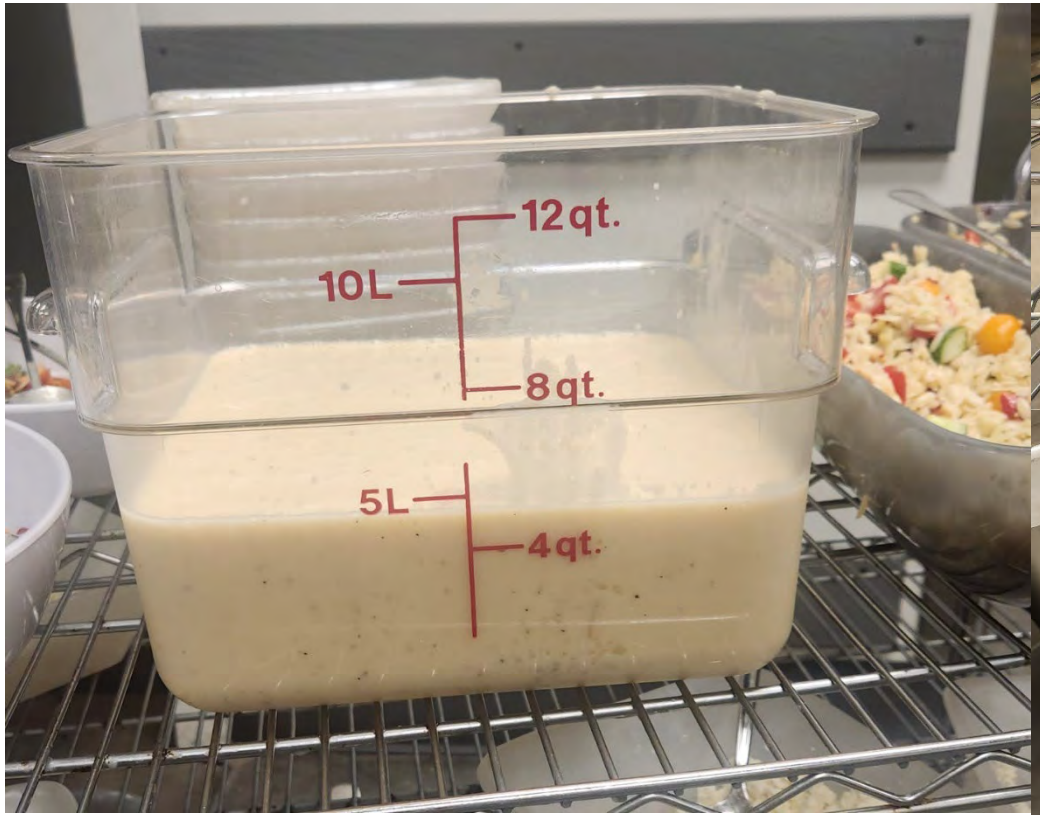
Continue with smaller vessel. Waste on Day 3 was about a 1.43 lb. Waste for Day 1 can be estimated at 3x that. 1 pound = $3.24.

Challenge: Salads, Toppings, and Dressing

- Typically doubled up. In a two-day event, both days were set up the same.
- One of the most wasteful items we see.
- Reason: saves time, better guest experience



Salad Dressing Opportunity

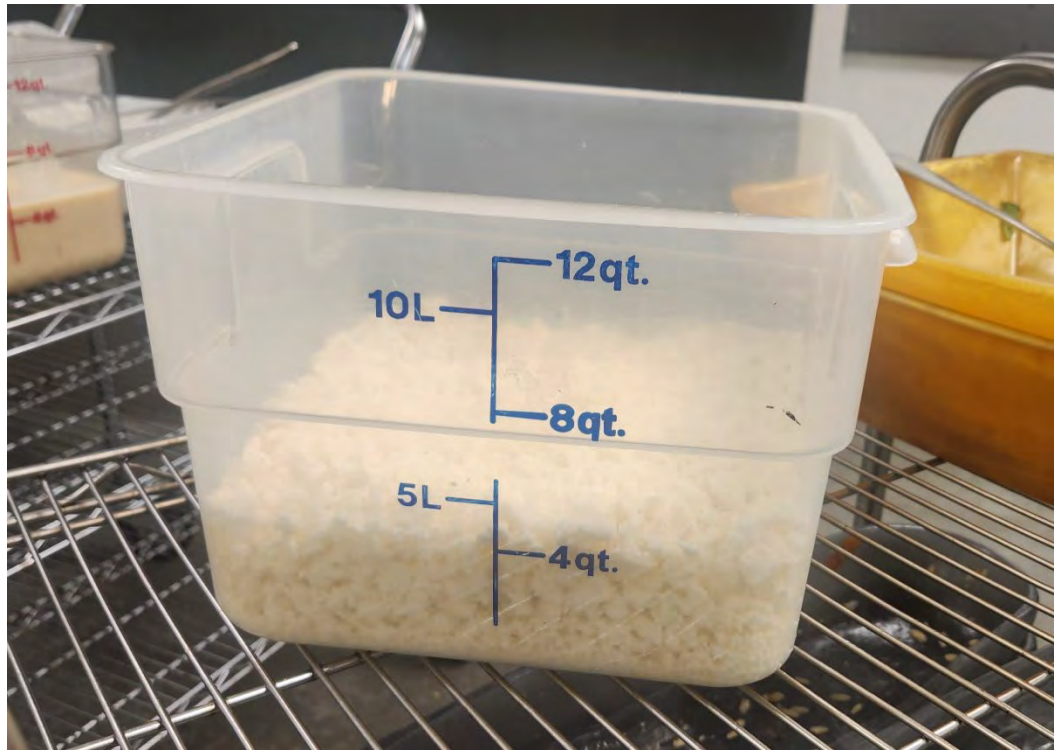


If an average of 9 quarts per week = 468 quarts (117 gallons) per year **= $2230** (MINIMUM, likely waste is higher than 9 quarts per week)

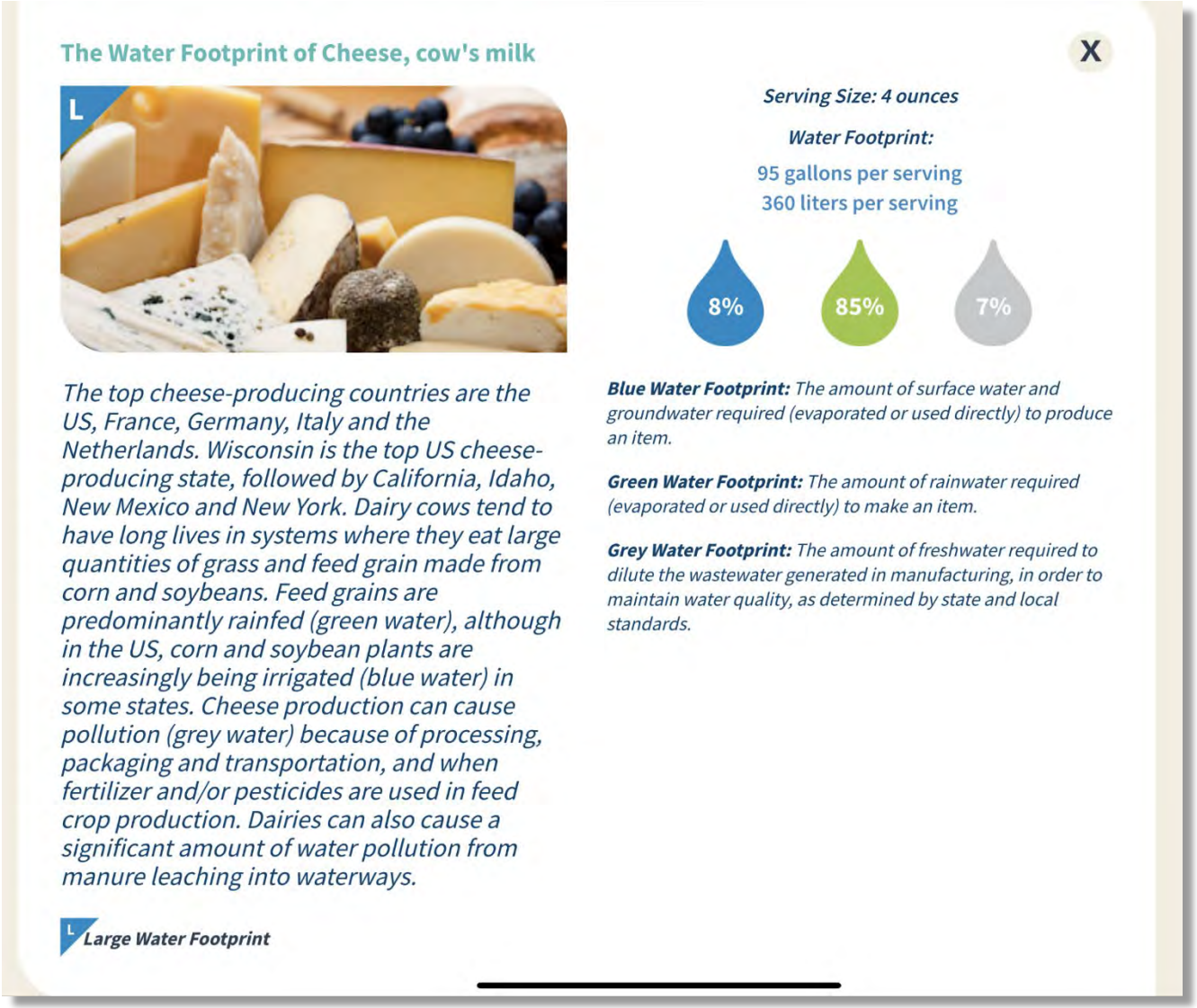
There were 11 bowls of recoverable salad dressing. Great! But…

- Is there a consistent process to get these back or is it just easier to throw it out?
- How much water and labor is needed to wash bowls that didn't need to be filled?
- Single use, non-recyclable plastic covering on each extra bowl.

The impact of waste: water footprint



Water required to make 6 pounds of cow's milk cheese: ***more than 2000 GALLONS***



Photos must be informative, NOT punitive.

"At the beginning the stewarding team were a little worried because they thought, 'why are they taking pictures? Are we in trouble? Somebody's gonna take us to HR.' But now they understand that it's nothing to be afraid of. It's helpful because at the end of the day, it's going to prevent extra work. They became familiar with the system, and now everything is moving along smoothly."

Remember: Fix one problem at a time!

The best way to get consistent practice is to not overwhelm people with too much change at once.

Let's Connect

Thank you!

Reach out for more info

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