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Starting Oct. 15, this image will be a thing of the past, as the Verney Woolley dining hall begins a pilot program for trayless dining.

Trays soon to be a memory at V-Dub

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Following a national trend, the Verney-Woolley Dining Hall plans to stop using trays in an effort to reduce energy, water and food waste. The pilot program will begin Oct. 15 and is scheduled to last until the end of the semester.

"Removing the trays means that we don't have to wash those trays," said Facilities Management Student Recycling Coordinator Kai Morrell '11, who is also a coordinator with EcoReps, a student group that advocates green initiatives on campus. "We save all of that water. We save all of that energy to run those dishwashers. We save all of the chemicals that are in those soaps that wash the dishes."

According to Aramark Higher Education Food Services, which distributes food at hundreds of dining halls, it takes a third to a half gallon of water to wash one tray. Aramark also found that trayless dining can reduce food waste by 25 to 30 percent. There was no data available on Brown's specific resource usage.

"There's something about having to actually carry your plate back to your table that makes people take less food," Morrell said.

Dining Services will stress this environmental message. Dinner on Oct. 15, the first trayless meal, will have a "Waste Not, Want Not" theme. "The focus of the meal is going to be sustainable foods, like fresh, local foods, and the trayless dining is going to go in with that," Morrell said.

"Those benefits are real and important to dining and the University financially, but more importantly, to everyone environmentally," said David Mittelman '09, a summer sustainability intern with Facilities Management who pushed for trayless dining.

In making this change, Brown joins the national trend of colleges eliminating trays from their dining halls.

On March 19, The Herald reported experiments with removing trays at the University of Connecticut,

North Carolina State University, Colby College and Alfred University in New York, all of which yielded favorable results. In July, Aramark announced that it estimates that over half of its 500 campus clients will take trays out of their dining halls this year. The no-trays movement has gained attention from USA Today, Time Magazine and National Public Radio.

In spite of the national trend and environmental and financial benefits, Dining Services anticipates mixed reaction.

"We know this will represent a significant change, and change can be difficult to deal with," wrote Ann Hoffman, Dining Services' director of administration and human resources, in an e-mail to The Herald. "We will survey the customers and evaluate how well it's going before deciding whether or not to make that a permanent change."

Mittelton was optimistic: "I understand the concern with change, but people adapt really quickly. There are a lot of students that forgo the use of trays to begin with."

Since the trayless dining initiative was announced, V-Dub staff has already stopped using trays. "They know that it's possible, that it's easy, and it's not really that big of a change," Morrell said.

Some V-Dub diners have their reservations, though.

"I don't appreciate it because I always get more than one plate of food," said Aaron Ruffin '12.

James Williams '10 was initially stunned, saying, "Woah?! How am I going to get my food?!"

Williams added he thinks the idea is "terrible," saying, "Trays make it easier to carry everything. I hold my silverware, my drinks and my plates at one time."

"Students at Brown are always going to waste food. It doesn't matter if you have a tray or not," he added.

Hoffman wrote that Dining Services "will certainly take suggestions from diners as to things we can do to make it easier for them immediately upon startup."

She wrote that trays will still be available for students with disabilities or medical issues.

Some students are starting to come to terms with the change.

Brendan Checkett '11 acknowledged that trayless dining "is a good idea, but it's kind of a hassle."

"I don't even use a tray that often because they're really bulky," said Katrina Toal '12.

For now, trayless dining will only be implemented at VerneyWoolley. "We like to use VerneyWoolley as a guinea pig," Willis said. The Sharpe Refectory is not only much larger, but trays are necessary to transport dirty dishes to the lower level for washing. The V-Dub, on the other hand, has only one level and uses a conveyor belt system to transport dishes.

"What works at Verney-Woolley doesn't always work (at the Ratty)," Willis said.

Student groups with environmental agendas are excited about trayless dining.

"If there were a way to expand it that (emPower) can play a strong role in, I would go back to people and say, 'This is something that we should really focus on,'" said Michael Glassman '09, former Undergraduate Council of Students president and leader of emPower, a group that aims to reduce Brown's contribution to global warming. "It sounds like this is already happening, which is awesome."

EcoReps, which focuses on making Brown a greener campus, will help implement trayless dining. EcoReps members will be at the V-Dub to hand out informational flyers and answer questions the week before trayless dining goes into effect.

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