SUSTAINABILITY

WHEN WATER DOESN'T WORK

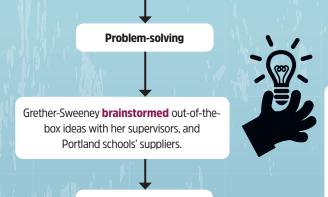
Limited access to this vital resource is changing FSDs' everyday challenges.

Water trickles down to almost every aspect of feeding-from sourcing to transportation to cooking-and when stagnant, can completely alter standard operation. Unsafe infrastructure and rolling droughts have seeped into what it means



In June, Portland Public Schools in Oregon joined the headlines with districts such as Flint Community Schools in Flint, Mich., when unsafe levels of lead were discovered in the districts' water system. "It really impacted us the most in preparing fruits and vegetables, because you can't wash them," says Gitta Grether-Sweeney, senior director of nutrition services for PPS.

California's yearslong drought led Mike Thornton, campus dining director at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Calif., to make tough calls when planning the new Vista Grande Dining Complex, opening in 2018. "My advice is to **invest wisely** and do the analysis for how you get the most return with tight budgets," Thornton says. "[With] some changes, you can invest \$100,000, and the savings in water with the equipment changed out might be 4%. Meanwhile, you can find equipment that will save you 75% water, and it's less of an investment."



Solutions

Cal Poly has a drought advisory committee,

where delegates from dining, housing, agricultural operations and a student organization take a holistic look at water conservation opportunities.

Solutions

Problem-solving

Instead of switching to exclusively canned or frozen produce, nutrition services opted to work with a produce company

that would wash and cut fruits such as watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew and distribute it to schools.

Portland schools had used fresh herbs and ingredients, such as cilantro, garlic and green onions, but anything that had to be washed was stripped from recipes.

Communicating the conservation message to staff might be just as important as coming up with a plan. Thornton opts for **low-tech signage** and **setting the tone from the top down** to convey the department's water conservation mission. "When we change out equipment, we convey to the staff exactly why we're doing it," he says.

Cal Poly's Vista Grande will have low-flow toilets, urinals and faucets, and rain and water sensors to save extra water on landscaping. But it also focuses more on energy conservation, which will reduce water consumption as a byproduct.



Downsides

The partnership came at a **steep cost**. "We spent a small fortune," Grether-Sweeney says. "For two or three invoices, we paid \$100,000 for fruits and vegetables, when it would've only cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000."



Several **on-site gardens** once supplied some fresh fruits and veggies. Though the Oregon Health Authority deemed the food safe, schools still have no way to wash it. "I've just told people to give it away, because I can't serve it," Grether-Sweeney says.