



The Ort Report

What is ort? According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, ort is defined as, "a morsel left at a meal." The ort report is an important part of the outdoor education program at Lorado Taft. Its purpose is to help students realize some of the other implications that go along with food waste. By the time students come to Taft, most understand that food costs money, but do not fully realize the other resources that go into food production. Therefore, while students are at Taft, we weigh the food that students waste at the meals during their stay.

After each meal, the hoppers scrape the food and liquid waste from the plates and glasses of the students at their tables into a bucket. At the end of the meal, the bucket is weighed. The result is announced to the group and charted on a bar graph in the dining hall. This is not a competition; there is only one bucket for all the students in the dining hall. Our goal is to allow students to see how the bits of food and liquids that they leave behind can add up. Then, we hope that the students will begin to understand how they can make simple decisions about how much food to initially take from the serving dishes, knowing that they can always have seconds. The ultimate goal, however, is for the students to take this learning home with them, making sound decisions that will decrease the amount of food and other resources they waste.

The following is a list of pre- and/or post- activities that will help reinforce the concepts of the Ort Report.

What else is in there? Have the students research the resources (petroleum and natural products in packaging, metals in machinery, chemicals and additives, soil quality, water, energy, etc.) that go into food production in the United States and prepare a presentation or display about their results.

Do we waste food at school? If possible, weigh the food and/or liquid waste generated by the students in their school lunches. Have the students explore ways that they can reduce their waste.

Where does it go? Many local recycling centers allow groups to tour the facility. The EduCycle Center in Grayslake is one such facility. Not only can you see how the waste is sorted for recycling, but they also have an educational center where students can learn more about reducing waste, recycling, and landfills. Contact your local recycling center or waste management facility to arrange a field trip for your class.

Can food be recycled? Wasted food that ends up in a landfill takes decades to decompose. However, some of the food waste that we generate can be recycled. Have the students research composting, and then start a composting or vermicomposting project at your school or in your classroom. Vermicomposting is not too difficult, and takes up little space. Ask your Taft representative for more information.

