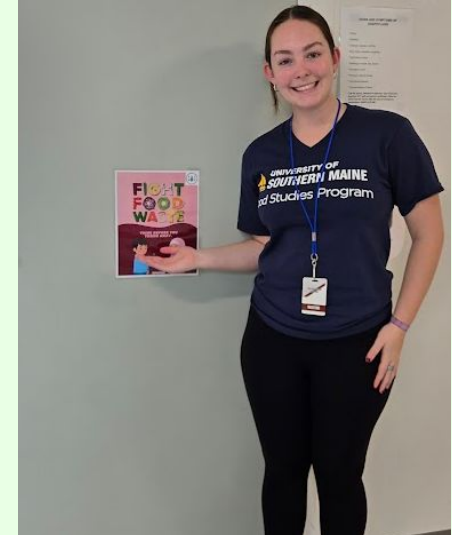




# Small Hands, Big Impact: Focusing on Elementary Students to Reduce Food Waste & Increase Environmental Literacy

A presentation on **Students Supporting Students**



Images source: Jamie Picardy (2025).

# → Today's agenda

- Stakeholders & Collaboration
- Understanding the Problem
- Our Strategy
- Successes & Highlights
- Next Steps



Image source: Jamie Picardy (2025).

# Meet the Researchers



**Ben Moore**

Student Intern

Ben is passionate about raising awareness of overlooked environmental issues, particularly waste management, and believes education can happen anywhere—whether in the classroom, during fieldwork, or at large-scale events. At the New England Environmental Finance Center, Ben aims to empower students and educators in Portland's under-resourced communities by developing practical, actionable lessons on food.



**Landen Jorgensen**

Student Intern

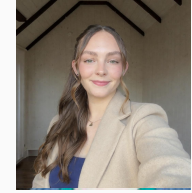
Landen is a senior at the University of Southern Maine. He has previously worked as an intern with the New England Environmental Finance Center in schools on sustainable best practices for food waste, and is now hoping to expand the environmental education program development. Landen is driven to support equitable collaborations around community climate action planning



**Grace Gagnon**

Student Intern

Grace Gagnon is a junior at the University of Southern Maine studying Environmental Planning and Policy. She is passionate about strengthening communities through inclusive, place-based environmental learning. Grace has hands-on experience in farming and environmental education, and her background in community-based roles has strengthened her ability to connect with and support diverse communities. Currently, she is developing environmental literacy curriculum to create accessible lesson plans for underserved communities.



**Skylar Maloney**

Student Intern

Skylar Maloney is a senior at the University of Southern Maine studying Environmental Planning and Policy. Her passions include strengthening the connection between local food systems and advocating for food security. She has experience in agroecology, business sustainability, and environmental education. Her current work focuses on developing agriculture based lesson plans that connect students in under-resourced communities to both the scientific and cultural dimensions of food systems.

# → Other Involved Parties

## Advisor Mentors:

- Jamie Picardy with the University of Southern Maine
- Luke Truman with New England Environmental Finance Center
- Lilly Kendall with Cultivating Community

## School partnerships:



Fall 2025



Spring 2026

# → Food Waste in the Global Context ←

- Food waste has far-reaching impacts, including environmental consequences (such as input resources like fertilizer and fresh water), economic burdens (like the cost of management), and social challenges (such as exacerbating food insecurity).
- Research shows that elementary-age students generate the highest levels of food waste in school settings (Wilkie et al., 2014).
- A 2025 study by ReFED, a U.S.-based nonprofit, revealed that the number of meals lost annually in the U.S. could feed one-third of the country's population for an entire year (ReFED, 2025).

# → Our Strategy in Gorham

- Focus on direct, school-wide initiatives to develop the infrastructure for a Waste Champion to sustain this work.
- Establish a baseline of what works and what doesn't, and develop general content-building guidelines for interns. This will help us build our own skill sets to effectively engage a larger community and create a greater impact.



Image source: Jamie Picardy (2025).

# → Our Strategy in Portland

- Implement class-specific lessons to build general environmental literacy, fostering a well-rounded understanding of food waste. This approach aims to engage more students, regardless of their academic interests.
- Build deeper relationships with the students we serve to make lessons more efficient and impactful.

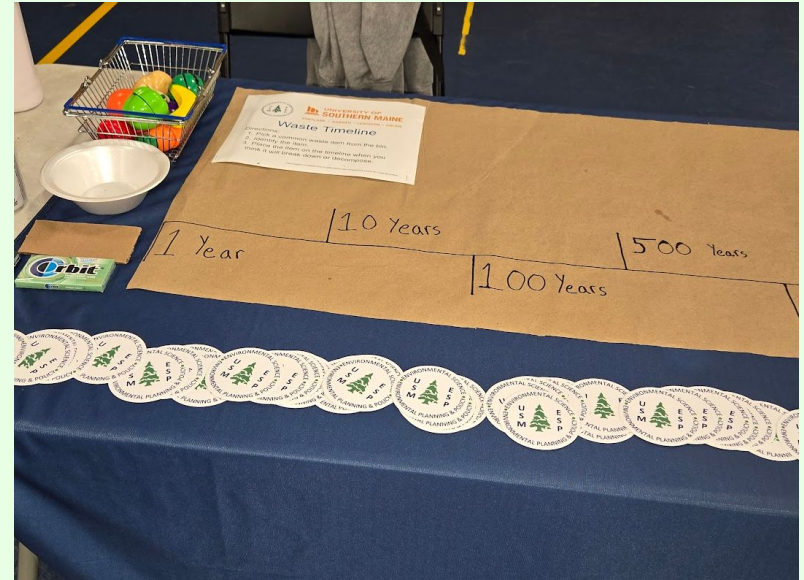


Image source: Jamie Picardy (2026).

# → Our Educational Campaigns

- School Wall Flyers
- Lunchroom Interactive Poster
- Morning Announcements
- Lunch Table Tents
- Lesson Designs
- STE(A)M Tabling
- Leadership Support
  - Principals & Assistant Principals
  - Nutrition Director and Kitchen Staff
  - Facilities Staff
  - Teachers



Image source: Jamie Picardy (2026).

# Example of Our Flyers



# Examples of Lunchroom Table Tents

Join the Food Waste Warriors—help stop food waste today!



Food Waste Fact: Wasting food means wasting water and energy too! Take just what you'll eat.



**DON'T WASTE FOOD**

Reduce Food Waste:  
Can your table have  
zero food waste  
today?



Nearly half the  
fruits and veggies  
grown are thrown  
out—let's change  
that!



# Example of Our Interactive Poster



Image source: Ben Moore (2025).

# → Measuring Success: Quantitative & Qualitative Data in Gorham ←

- We conducted a baseline waste audit before any intervention and performed a follow-up audit after our 3 week initiative.
- Both audits followed the methodologies outlined in the U.S. EPA's A Guide to Conducting and Analyzing a Food Waste Assessment and LeanPath's How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit (U.S. EPA, 2014; LeanPath, n.d.).

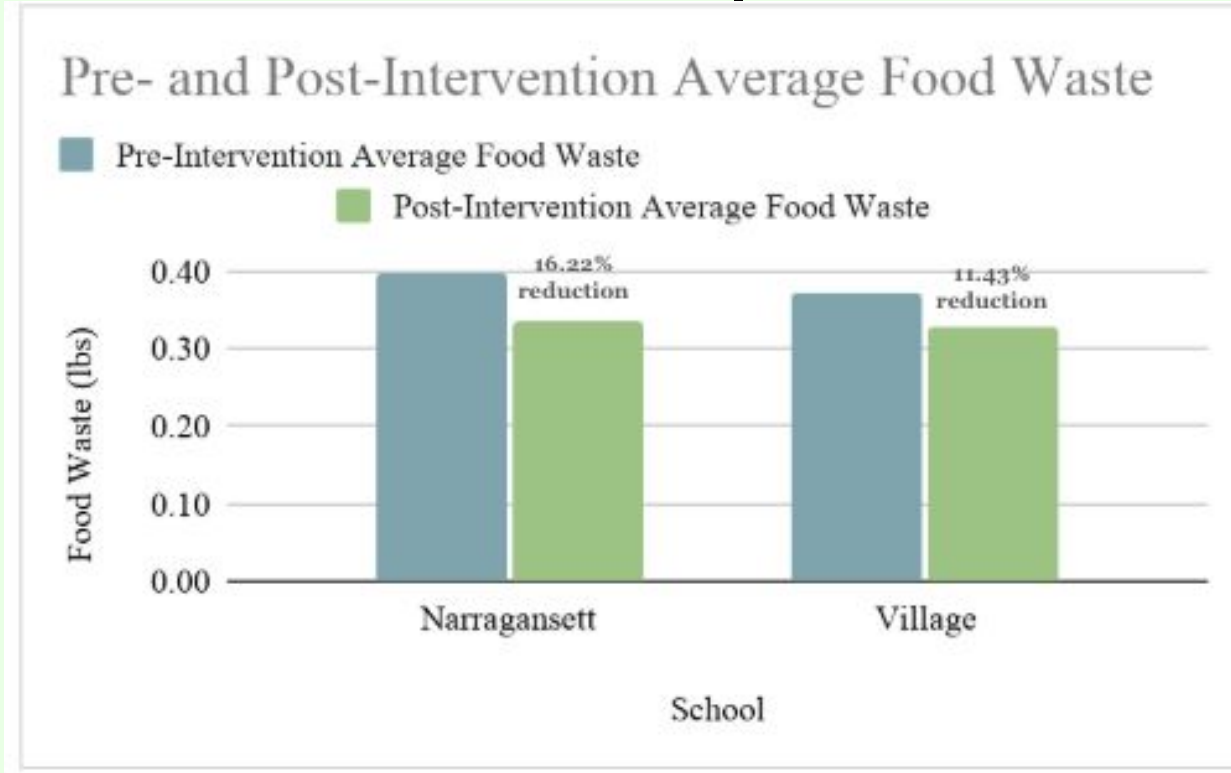


Image source: Jamie Picardy (2025).

# Exploring Qualitative Data From Gorham

- At Village Elementary, administrators reported that the daily morning announcements were most effective at engaging students and most straightforward to implement.
- Both schools observed that their younger students were less able to engage with text-based materials and suggested implementing food waste education for them.
- Administrators at both schools emphasized the need for more advanced notice to fully incorporate the lesson plans into their curricula, noting that such notice would increase educator participation and reduce disruption to their existing curricula.

# Quantitative Data for Gorham (Visualized Comparison)



Average food waste (lbs) before and after the intervention at two schools.

# Monitoring and Ensuring Success in Portland

- Key Context:
  - We are still actively conducting our Portland study and intervention. Therefore full results are not yet available.
- Ensuring Success:
  - Advance Planning: Providing ample notice for lessons and activities.
  - Classroom Immersion: Spending time in classrooms (even outside lesson plans) to better understand the school environment and tailor lessons for greater impact.

# → Next Steps ←

- Fully integrate and compare findings from Gorham and Portland to identify common themes and insights. Professor Picardy will expand this pilot project next year with Gorham Schools.
- Documentation & Publication: Compile lessons and findings into an accessible format, with the goal of publishing to share our work widely.
- Advocacy & Inspiration: Continue to present our work to inspire others to take action and contribute to the cause.

Our study and internships would not have been possible without the mentorship of Jamie Picardy and Vanessa Levesque, and the openness of the Gorham School and Portland Schools districts including: the administration team, lunch staff & custodians, and the nutrition director. In Portland Paige Simenz's & Natasha Vandegrift's willingness for the interns carry out lessons have been greatly appreciated!

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