Putting “Zero Waste” Principles into Practice at the Idaho AND Meeting

By Irana Hawkins, PhD, MPH, RDN

When I was invited to speak at the Idaho Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Annual Meeting in April on the topic, “Putting Zero Waste Principles Into Dietetics Practice”, I asked the conference organizers if they were interested in walking the talk and they said, “Yes!”.

In an era where food waste is rampant in the U.S. and plastics pollution from food and beverage containers negatively impacts wildlife and the natural environment (1-3), Registered Dietitian Nutritionists can protect planetary health and conserve natural resources in our everyday practice.

I created a strategic plan for reducing waste and the conference organizer, Jill Rice, worked diligently to implement that plan. To eliminate disposable tableware and plastic water bottles during the conference, meals and beverages were served using durable tableware and participants were encouraged to “Go Green” from the outset. Jill eliminated the food waste associated with catering by forecasting for “just enough”. She eliminated leftovers by undercutting her order for the entrees and skipping the extra meals she would normally order for potential drop-ins. However, dessert posed a challenge, as one hundred lemon bars were not eaten at lunchtime.

To avoid wasting them, they were served again at the evening social. Additional leftover lemon bars and 3 bags of fresh vegetables were then donated to Boise’s Interfaith Sanctuary Shelter & Supportive Services afterwards.

In addition to the lecture and offering guidance in implementing zero waste practices, I hosted a VN DPG table where I enjoyed speaking with many Idaho Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics members including Idaho VN DPG members Daria Pori and Carol Briggs. Daria is the Chief Clinical Dietitian at the VA Medical Center in Boise and is passionate about plant-based cuisine. Carol owns an apple orchard in Emmett, Idaho named “Candy Apple Orchard”. School children visit the orchard on field trips, which are a great way for kids to learn to appreciate whole plant foods that come straight from the Earth.

Many that stopped by the VN DPG exhibit table were eager to win Sharon Palmer’s book that was raffled, Plant-Powered for Life. Many thanks go to Jill Rice and the Idaho Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Planning Committee for their impressive efforts—to Sharon Palmer for her generosity—and the VN DPG Speaker’s Bureau Committee for their support!

References available at end of newsletter.


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