

Tulane Hospitality launches composting initiative with Schmelly's Dirt Farm

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A new partnership between Tulane and Schmelly's Dirt Farm will divert thousands of pounds of organic waste from landfills annually, creating nutrient-rich compost for local gardens. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Tulane Hospitality, Tulane University's dining partner, launched a new composting program with Schmelly's Dirt Farm, a local company that turns food waste into nutrient-rich soil. The partnership supports Tulane's goal of operating a world-class dining program and advances the university's sustainability and waste-reduction efforts led by the Tulane Office of Sustainability.

“With the support of Schmelly’s and Tulane students, faculty and staff, this program will significantly improve the sustainability of our operation,” Tulane Hospitality Sustainability Manager Emily Slazer said. “For example, we slice and serve fresh pineapple and melon daily, generating about 250 pounds of fruit skins alone. Composting the fruit skins will cut our emissions by about one metric ton of CO₂e each month.”

Tulane began developing the program in March 2025. It is launching at the start of the fall 2025 semester with compost collection at the university’s two main residential dining halls, the Malkin-Sacks Commons and Green Wave Grille. Staff will separate leftover plate waste, kitchen scraps and other organic material from the main waste stream and send it to Schmelly’s for composting.

“Expanding composting services at our uptown residential dining halls is one of several ways we are raising our sustainability efforts in dining,” Tulane Office of Sustainability Director Jordan Stewart said. “The Commons is our most environmentally friendly dining location, with reusable dishes and serveware and expanded compost collections for all types of food waste.”

The Schmelly’s Dirt Farm partnership forms part of a broader sustainability initiative by Tulane Hospitality and the Office of Sustainability to reduce the university’s environmental footprint. Students, faculty and staff can choose reusable meal containers at select on-campus retail locations, eliminating paper and plastic waste. Tulane Hospitality also posts educational displays showing daily food waste amounts at the Commons dish return stations.

“Schmelly’s Dirt Farm is dedicated to rescuing valuable food scraps from landfills and turning them into nutrient-rich fertilizer for the community,” Schmelly’s Client Relations Assistant Basil Rutz said. “By working with Tulane, we can divert thousands of pounds of waste each year. Holistic sustainability is the direction New Orleans needs to move toward, and we’re excited to be part of this step.”

The Malkin-Sacks Commons holds LEED Silver certification, reflecting green building design and construction practices that improve campus spaces and reduce operational impacts.

This composting partnership reinforces Tulane Hospitality’s commitment to innovative, community-driven solutions and marks another step toward a more environmentally responsible campus.

About Tulane Hospitality

Tulane Hospitality oversees all campus dining operations at Tulane University, including residential dining, campus retail locations, concessions and catering. The department is committed to operating a world-class dining program with high-quality, sustainable food experiences that support student well-being and environmental stewardship.