

Food Loss Prevention Options for Restaurants

Below is a list of ideas and activities that restaurants may consider implementing to help prevent food loss and waste. Contact your local EPA representative for log sheets, signs, and other tools.

- Perform a food waste audit.** See what's being thrown out and why.
 - Pick a day and gather a few extra staff members, buckets, log sheet and a weight scale. Stand at the trash can(s) and record what is being thrown out, how much is being discarded and the reason the food is being disposed (ask your customers why they threw out food!).
 - In the kitchen, have only one food waste trash can and provide each staff member a small container to fill with food waste at their station. Before they empty their container, have staff weigh it and record the amount, type and reason the waste is being discarded on a log sheet located near the trash can.
 - Use this information to adjust menus, purchasing and portion size.

- Call a meeting to discuss food waste prevention strategies with kitchen staff.** Get their thoughts and ideas.

Prep and Storage Tips

- Reduce batch sizes.** Batch cooking is preparing meals ahead of time and storing them for future use.
- Use cook-to-order instead of bulk-cooking** either all day or toward the end of the day.
- Incorporate leftovers from the day before.** Steak one day can be used for beef stew the next day.
- Train staff on knife skills** to make more efficient knife cuts to use more of the food being prepared.
- Use as much of the food as possible.** Cook up carrot greens and don't peel cucumbers or potatoes.
- Reconstitute stalky vegetables that have wilted** by immersing them in warm water (100° F) for 15 minutes.
- Freeze surplus and fresh fruits and veggies** near the end of peak freshness for later use instead of throwing them away.
- Marinate meats** to extend their shelf life for a few more days.
- Finish preparation at the line.** Do not finish the food item until it's ready to go on the line so you can more easily use leftover ingredients in different recipes later.
- Different foods like different storage conditions.** Refresh staff on storage techniques for different foods (e.g., don't store tomatoes and lettuce in the same container or near each other).
- Use see-through storage containers** to allow staff to see what is available and to keep an eye on freshness.
- Eliminate garnishes that typically don't get eaten.**



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Purchasing Tips

- Use reusable bottles** instead of single use condiment packets.
- Buy bruised or odd shaped/sized produce at a discount.**
- Ask for your suppliers' policies for food waste.** Simply inquiring will show suppliers it's a priority.
- Reach out to other businesses** to exchange ideas for source reduction techniques to reduce wasted food.
- Do regular inventory checks** or consider increasing the frequency to reduce spoilage.
- Buy local foods** to minimize environmental impacts through reduced storage time and transportation.

Serving Tips

- If you're a buffet restaurant, go trayless.** Removing trays can reduce wasted food by limiting customers to take only what can fit on their plate and to make a conscious decision to go back for more.
- If you're a buffet restaurant, consider a "pay-per-item" system instead of "all-you-can-eat" system.**
- Use smaller plates, bowls and serving scoops** to discourage over-plating and unnecessary waste.
- Offer different meal sizes and portions.** Don't limit small portions to just children.
- Don't automatically put bread or chips and salsa on the table when customers sit down.** Ask them if they would like these items.
- Ask if a customer wants a side item,** instead of automatically providing sides.

Engaging with Customers Tips

- Provide taste samples.** Allow customers to try foods before they buy them.
- Educate customers** on how to minimize food waste and why they should care.
- Offer to-go containers** and encourage customers to take their leftover food with them.

