

Food Loss Prevention Options for Universities

Below is a list of ideas and activities that university food services 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 be there at the dish return line with a few volunteers, buckets, log sheet and a weight scale. Record what is being thrown out, how much is being discarded and the reason the food is being disposed (ask students for detailed reasons why they didn't finish their 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 and/or interested student groups.** 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.
- Provide cook-to-order instead of bulk-cooking** either all day or toward the end of the day.
- Replace a buffet line with a cook-to-order line.** This allows you to prepare only what is ordered to minimize leftovers.
- Use smaller serving containers** toward the end of the day for the remaining portions of prepared foods.
- Use 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 near-to-spoil fresh fruits and veggies** instead of throwing them away.
- 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 on.
- 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.



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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.
- Buy local foods** to reduce environmental impacts and storage time.

Serving Tips

- Go trayless.** Removing trays can reduce wasted food by limiting students to take only what can fit on their plate and to make a conscious decision to get up and go back for more.
- Use a "pay-per-item" system instead of an "all-you-can-eat" system.**
- Use smaller plates, bowls and serving scoops** to discourage over-plating and food waste.
- Offer different meal sizes and portions.** Do not limit small portions to just children.
- Eliminate automatic sides.** Ask students if they want a side.
- Position the oldest products in the front of the refrigerator** so they are used up first and don't spoil. Have staff periodically check the refrigerator to ensure oldest items get put at the front of the line.

Engaging with Students Tips

- Advertise current university waste reduction already taking place behind the scenes.** Include the social, environmental and economic benefits of these efforts.
- Educate students on how to minimize food waste and why they should care.** Use wall graphics, table top displays, hanging signs, glass clings and/or videos to remind students to be conscious about food waste.
- Ask students to take a pledge to reduce food waste.** Engage students on campus and/or waiting in the food line.
- Display food waste in the cafeteria to encourage students to waste less.**
- When students move out, collect unwanted, non-perishable foods from student housing.**
- Invite students to weigh their food waste,** so they can see how much they waste and how much they improve over time.
- Provide taste samples.** Allow students to try the food before they make a serving selection.

