

Food Loss Prevention Options for Grocery Stores

Below is a list of ideas and activities that grocery stores 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 waste bin with volunteers, buckets, a log sheet, a table, and a weight scale. Record the following:
 - What is being thrown out,
 - Weight or number of items,
 - The reason the food is being disposed (if known),
 - The expiration date of the product when applicable,
 - Whether the food was still wholesome/edible before being thrown out, and
 - Identify the most wasted to least wasted items.

Based on the results, consider changing procedures to minimize loss (e.g., reduce order quantities of low sold or otherwise tossed items).

- Clarify date labelling and date encoding to reduce confusion to customers.** Work with your supply chain to clearly label or define the difference between safety-based and quality-based dates. Some options might include:
 - Make "sell by" dates invisible to the consumer,
 - Use more "freeze by" dates where applicable so the customer knows they have that option,
 - Remove "best before" or other quality dates from shelf-stable, non-perishable foods for which safety is not a concern, or
 - Make sure all printed dates on products have descriptive language, not just a date.
- Call a meeting to discuss food waste prevention strategies with staff.** Get their thoughts and ideas.
- Share practices with others** outside your business to improve waste reduction industry-wide.

Purchasing Tips

- Take an accurate inventory first** and base orders on what you currently have.
- Buy surplus or odd shaped produce** from farms or wholesalers that would otherwise be wasted and sell them at a discount.
- Send order estimates more frequently** to suppliers to better align production planning with order timings.
- Start or increase regular communication with suppliers** to reduce food waste.
- Revise your supply contracts** to require the supplier to have a food waste reduction or food donation program.
- Change contracts** to include methods or techniques to prevent food loss (e.g., use innovative packaging such as vacuum sealed meat).



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- Make food waste reduction a key performance indicator** in operations, supply chain and employee performance.

Prep and Storage Tips

- 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.
- Marinate meats** to extend their shelf life for a few more days.
- 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.** Easily see what is available and keep an eye on freshness.
- Cook, freeze, juice, or otherwise process foods** that are approaching the end of their peak freshness to prolong their useful life.

Store Set Up and Display Tips

- Set up a discount shelf for ripe, near-to-expire, discontinued, or slightly damaged food.** Provide clear communication about this reduced price section.
- Redesign product displays with less excess.** For example, instead of a pile of produce, have a back support that makes it look like a pile to keep produce fresher.
- Allow prepared foods to run out near store closing.** Track these items and only make as much as you can sell.

Engaging with Customers Tips

- Provide taste samples.** Train staff to remind customers that they can try a sample to see if they like a product before they buy it.
- Have best storage practices information available** in appropriate departments for certain foods, including how long food should last when stored properly.
- Offer various options to your customers on produce** (e.g., whole, sliced, and mixed fruit). This will assist them in eliminating food loss in their own homes.

