

FOOD WASTE REDUCTION GUIDE



Photo:
Blue Earth Compost

THE FOOD WASTE REDUCTION GUIDE

Forty percent of food grown in the U.S. is wasted, which contributes to climate change, hunger, and soil erosion. This guide addresses food waste reduction with a focus on schools, but it is also applicable to any organization seeking to lower the amount of food it wastes.

Importantly, this guide follows the EPA's Wasted Food Scale, prioritizing source reduction and food recovery above all other methods.

Many public schools lack resources to address food waste in cafeterias and classrooms, and this guide offers foundational strategies while also pointing the reader to additional resources in their community and all over the globe. It is made possible thanks to the ReFED Catalytic

Grant Fund, which supports organizations that drive systems-level change, helping to accelerate impactful solutions, gather data, and build capacity in the fight against food waste.



Wasted Food Scale

How to reduce the environmental impacts of wasted food





SOURCE REDUCTION is stopping waste at its source! Preventing food from being wasted in the first place is a simple concept and also the most impactful action you can take.

How Much Waste Can Be Prevented?

The first step towards source reduction is to identify how much food is getting thrown away and at what steps of the process. Are you producing too much food? When was the last time you reviewed your ordering practices? How come people are not eating what's on their plate?

Source Reduction Strategies:

- Find out what gets eaten most and focus menu creation and ingredients on this information.
- Evaluate and adjust ordering habits to ensure freshness.
- Be creative with kitchen excess to re-purpose meals.
- Reduce serving sizes as appropriate.
- Switch to reusable trays and silverware.

Educational Activities

- Perform a **cafeteria waste audit** to determine what is being thrown away. With this exercise you can see how much food, edible or not, is making its way to the trash.
- Check out the [*Food Matters Action Kit*](#) to get access to inspiring ideas for reducing food waste generation.

Organizations that Can Help

- [Chef Ann Foundation](#)
- [Phood](#)
- [LeanPath](#)

SOURCE REDUCTION





FOOD SHARING is taking steps to make excess food accessible within your organization. For example, food sharing can occur between students in a cafeteria or by colleagues in an office sharing leftovers from a catered lunch.

Sharing is caring! Sharing food is a good way to build friendships and community. The other result is that it lessens unnecessary food waste!

How Can Food Sharing Occur?

Setting up food sharing comes down to making it easy for excess food to flow from those who don't need it to those that want it. Here are some helpful tips to setting up formal food sharing in your organization.

Food Sharing Strategies:

- Sharing Tables are easy and simple ways to share packaged, shelf-stable items.
- A sharing refrigerator can be placed in a cafeteria or other accessible place to store items that are temperature-sensitive.
- Labels on items declare that they are good to be shared. The US Department of Agriculture supports food sharing in schools and businesses as long as it complies with local food safety regulations.

Educational Activities

- Host a **cultural food fair** by asking people to bring in dishes from home to share with classmates or colleagues.
- Check out [FoodCorps Lesson Plans](#) to gain insight on the cultural and social values tied to food sharing.

Organizations that Can Help

- [Center for Eco Technology](#)

FOOD SHARING





FOOD RECOVERY is gathering uneaten but still healthy food to donate to a local food bank or charity. Often this is achieved by partnering with an outside organization to collect and distribute the food on behalf of the institution.

Food recovery assists the vulnerable and needy in our communities. About 1 in 8 US homes are food insecure (USDA, 2022) and access to donated food is an important lifeline to staving off the ill effects of hunger.

How Can Food Be Donated?

Donating food is primarily a logistical consideration. Fortunately, there are many experienced food recovery organizations that will help you to build a successful program and partnership.

Food Recovery Strategies:

- Determine what food can be recovered by doing an audit of where edible food is being wasted.
- Identify a food recovery organization in your area and partner with them to come to you to pick-up your donatable food. If an organization doesn't exist in your area, consider finding a local food pantry that would accept the food and someone with your organization that would be willing to bring it to them.
- Find a location to store the food until collection can occur while keeping food safety protocols, such as temperature sensitivity, in mind.

The US Department of Agriculture supports food recovery. Food recovery is free from potential liability thanks to the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.

Educational Activities

- Check out [National Agriculture in the Classroom's Lesson Plan](#) on the connection between food waste, hunger, natural resources, and the environment.
- Set up a **volunteer day** with a food recovery organization.

Organizations that Can Help (write in your local orgs below)

FOOD RECOVERY





COMPOSTING is the controlled decomposition of organic materials (like food) to create soil. If food can't be eaten or donated, then composting is the next best use for food waste! Food scraps will be recycled back into the food system so that they can contribute to the next generation of plants.

How Does Composting Work?

Decomposition is a natural process and with a little human touch, you'll make a high quality soil that plants love.

Food Composting Strategies:

- Coordinate with stakeholders within your organization to identify a suitable location for a composting system.
- Figure out what kind of composting you'd like to do. Good options are a compost pile, worm composting bin or an in-vessel device.
- Work within your organization to identify who will be in charge of managing the compost system.
- Identify where you will get your "green" sources, like leaves or grass clippings to add to the food waste.
- Work with the kitchen to source the food items you'll be composting. Be advised to avoid bones, dairy, meat, and other highly putrescible foods.

A properly managed compost pile will not create odors or attract pests.

Educational Activities

- Explore the lesson plans in [Do the Rot Thing](#) to learn about setting up composting in a school.
- Have a conversation around what people do with food waste in their homes.

Organizations that Can Help

- [Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- [United States Composting Council](#)

FOOD COMPOSTING ON-SITE





COMPOST COLLECTION is how composting happens at industrial scale. Working with a local food scrap collection service allows you to compost even more food than you can do on site. They do the dirty work for you! About 24% of municipal waste is food (EPA, 2020). That's a lot to manage and a

local food scrap hauler is well-equipped to collect that material and turn it back into soil.

How Does Off-site Composting Work?

Local food scrap collection companies will customarily provide containers, training and signage to help you get a program going. They also likely deliver the finished compost back to you!

Food Composting Strategies:

- Identify a food scrap composting collection partner.
- Engage with school stakeholders (teachers, custodians, students, administrators, kitchen staff, etc) to plan the logistics of collecting food scraps.
- Craft an educational and promotional campaign for approaching sorting in the kitchen and the cafeterias.

Educational Activities

- Gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between food waste and the environment from a [Lesson Plan from the Purdue Extension](#).
- Plan a friendly competition in your school or organization where you challenge grades or departments to lower waste through composting and other food waste reduction methods.

Organizations that Can Help (write in your local orgs below)



FOOD COMPOSTING OFF-SITE





FOOD WASTE CHAMPIONS

make a real, tangible difference in their community. Your efforts not only make our world more sustainable, but they also inspire others to think about their relationship with food waste.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

- The Lorax

How Can I Become a Champion?

Champions are dedicated individuals that will work with others to coordinate and guide the success of the food waste reduction programs.

Some roles include:

- Recognize the issue to come up with potential solutions and advocate for change within your organization
- Coordinate with stakeholders and the organizations helping with food waste reduction efforts. An example of this would be convening meetings between school leadership and a food recovery organization or food scrap collection company
- Be a peer educator by doing things such as standing by bins to help educate on the proper food scrap sorting process or coming up with presentations

Educational Activities

- Champions know how to pass the baton and teach the leaders of the next generation. Learn more from the [World Wildlife Fund's Food Waste Warrior Toolkit](#).
- Invite an expert in food waste reduction strategies to come and present to your group to develop more knowledge and inspire action.

BEING A FOOD WASTE CHAMPION

