

Reducing and Recovering Surplus Food*

Surplus food can be beneficially used in a variety of ways. The food recovery hierarchy prioritizes methods of reducing food waste.



*Graphic and text duplicated in part from EPA source found at www.epa.gov/osw/conserves/pubs/food-guide.pdf.

**** What is a food waste audit?** The first step to reducing and recovering surplus food is to identify the types and quantities of surplus food that is either already donated or goes to waste or in the trash. There are some food wastes, like produce trimmings that can't be avoided, but are not suitable for human consumption. Trimming can often be diverted to feed animals.

Why audit? What gets measured usually then gets managed and often reduced. Reducing surplus waste at the source generally saves industry money in material, labor and waste hauling.

Get started. Use the checklist on the next page (or reverse) to begin the food waste audit. There are two types of surplus food, pre-consumer and post-consumer, often called plate waste. This food waste audit checklist will focus on pre-consumer wastes and practices. Then, use the food waste log to record specific food waste details and quantities. Depending on the type of surplus food, this audit may be very specific or somewhat general.



Food Waste Audit—Surplus Food Checklist

Plan the audit

- Appoint a champion to drive the planning process and lead the audit, as well as the post-audit analysis.
- Obtain and review dumpster waste records to compile baseline data on tonnage and fees.
- Select a time period (one to seven days) for the audit that reflects normal operating conditions. Avoid holidays and adverse weather days as such influences may skew data.
- Decide how often to audit, how much data to collect, and what will be measured; then determine a data recording method. PPI can provide assistance for weighing and recording data.
- Determine and communicate the level of staff involvement needed, their assigned roles, and what you want to get out of the audit findings.
- Set up a waste audit location. Be sure you have planned out the measurement process so results can be consistently gathered and recorded.

Do the audit

- On the day of the audit, let staff know what you plan to do. This could involve posting signage announcing the audit.
- Remove garbage bins from less visible areas and label all bins: “No food waste - all waste must be recorded.”
- If possible, place your scale and cleaning towels at the planned audit location.
- Set up your tracking system (PPI can provide a spreadsheet for recording data OR you can set up an automated tracking system).
- For restaurants and cafeterias only, record the number of meals served as well as total sales during the audit time frame.
- Estimate the percentage of total waste captured—was it a complete effort? For example, did the audit capture 100% of the food waste or just 30%?

Evaluate the audit findings

- Add up audit totals (lbs), ideally by food type and also by reason for the loss. Be sure to deduct the total tare weight of the pan used if necessary.
- Estimate total loss in dollars using \$1.10/lb¹ as a blended price for food waste, unless you are able to track waste more accurately and can use your own cost/lb value.
- Calculate summary data to create a post-audit report.
- Identify trends and actionable strategies.

Act on the findings

- Communicate your audit findings to staff.
- Determine what practices need to change and prioritize source-reduction activities.
- Set deadlines, then plan meetings to evaluate progress on action items.
- Document successes and set goals for continuous improvement.