

# How to track food waste in your kitchen



Knowing how much food you are wasting sets up opportunities for cost savings and waste prevention.

## WHY TRACK?

Establishing a food waste tracking system is the first step to understand what foods may be wasted and why. The information gathered from tracking helps you identify how waste prevention can make the biggest difference in your overall food costs and your business's commitment to sustainability. An ongoing tracking system sets a baseline and shows progress as you initiate food waste prevention steps.

## Get started

- Identify areas where pre-service food waste may be generated (prep stations, hot and cold line).
- Determine how many and what size of bins you need. Smaller bins or see-through Cambros may make it easier to identify items in the bin.
- Label bins to indicate how you want to separate food waste. We recommend starting with a bin labeled Pre-Service. You could also separate waste by food item (e.g. meat waste, vegetable trim), or separate waste by loss reason (e.g. overproduction, expired). How you choose to separate waste can give you different clues about your typical waste sources. You need to know what food items are wasted and why in order to create reduction strategies.
- Make copies of the tracking sheet provided and put one near each bin with a marker.



## Train staff

- Inform staff that you are going to begin measuring food waste and share this handout with them. Consider printing out page 4 of this handout to post in break rooms or next to the tracking sheet so employees are reminded how to track waste.
- Show them the bins, explain where they will be placed.
- Make it clear that all pre-service food waste will be separated and collected in designated bins.
- Ask staff in charge of scraping wasted food into the bins to fill out the tracker sheet each time. Emphasize that it's important to record how full the bin is, record what food was collected and the reason the food was wasted. Example loss reasons include: trim waste, overproduction, spoilage, expired/dated, burned/contaminated, dropped, equipment failure.
- Engage your staff in discussions about how best to describe food loss reasons for your kitchen.

## Track waste

- Place labeled containers and tracker sheets in each location where you will collect food waste, such as the prep station, dish pit, etc.
- Record information on the tracking sheet each time wasted food is scraped into the bin. Check in with staff and answer any questions during the first few weeks of tracking.

Food Waste Tracker					
DATE	TIME	INITIALS	ESTIMATED VOLUME OR WEIGHT	TYPE OF FOOD	FOOD WASTE REASON
<small>Example</small> 4/13	11:00am	DH	6lbs.	chicken breasts	spoiled in walk-in

**Pre-service waste**

**BIN LOCATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BIN TYPE AND SIZE:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(E.g. 5 gallon bucket, 2 gallon bus tub)

## POST-CONSUMER WASTE

Once your team is comfortable tracking pre-service waste, you might want to start tracking post-service waste, which is uneaten food that was served to customers. This type of waste is the largest contributor to the amount of wasted food in restaurants.

Set up collection bins in the dish pit and in other areas where customer plates are scraped. For example: customer plate waste with mostly fries and sauce.

Keep post-service food scraps separate from pre-service waste. Ask staff to track post-consumer food waste on paper log and note observations.

Better understanding post-consumer waste may help you identify opportunities for prevention such as



## Analyze and use the data

Use the data to start conversations and generate ideas with staff about how to prevent waste. Suggested approaches to analyze your data include:

- Tally the total weight or number of gallons of food waste during a week, and convert to weight of food wasted using the table below.

Example:  
Total weekly pre-service volume: 8 gal / qt / liter (circle) | X 3.8 lbs\* = | X 30.4 lbs

- Divide the total number of covers during a week by the total pounds of food waste collected to determine how much food is being wasted per cover.

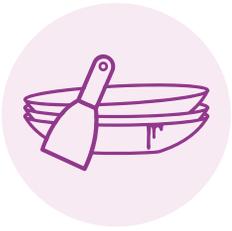
Example:  
Food waste weight (lbs): 100 | / 80 Number of covers = | 1.25 weight per cover (lbs)

- Calculate the cost per pound of wasted food. If you don't know the per pound cost of food items you can use \$1.17, which is the estimated median cost/lb across all food categories. For higher-priced items it can be valuable to use actual average cost/lb to get the most accurate view of how much money you can save through waste prevention.

Example:  
Food waste weight (lbs): 100 | X \$1.17 Cost per lb\* = | \$ 117 food waste cost

- Once you've determined the cost of wasted food, you can compare that to the cost of food purchases or sales. Ask your local waste reduction specialist for a [Food Waste Analysis Spreadsheet](#) that provides more detailed instructions and analysis formulas.

# For Employees



## Scrape

All pre-service food waste should be separated and collected in designated bins.

Place containers in each location where you will collect food waste, such as the dish pit, prep station, etc.



## Track

Staff in charge of scraping the wasted food into the bins should fill out the tracker sheet each time wasted food is put into the bin.

It's important to record the total weight or volume and note any observations about what kind of food was collected and why it might have been wasted.



## Dump and Rinse

Dump the food waste after logging it on the tracking sheet.

Ensure that bins are cleaned as per your procedure and return the bins to their useful location.



## Share

Share what you are learning with your team and your manager, this will help everyone understand what is wasted and how waste can be prevented.

## FOOD LOSS REASONS:

**Trim waste:** Food that was cut or trimmed off because it's inedible or not used in menu items. Example: Watermelon rind and strawberry stems that were removed and not served on the fruit buffet.

**Overproduction:** Food that was prepared but not served, and cannot be saved or reused. Example: Pan of eggs that was prepared for the buffet but not needed.

**Spoilage:** Food that goes bad or spoils before it is used. Example: Berries that got moldy before they were used.

**Expired/dated:** Food that was prepped or prepared but not used as planned. Example: Excess soup that was dated and saved in the walk-in, but not used before the expiration date.

**Burned/contaminated:** Food that is not usable because it was improperly cooked or contaminated. Example: Dessert that was overcooked and does not meet quality standards.

**Dropped:** Food that was dropped or mishandled before it reached the customer. Example: Potatoes that fell on the floor while plating the dish.

**Equipment failure:** Food that was wasted because equipment breaks or power is lost. Example: The cooler lost power overnight and staff didn't find out until the next morning.

