



JULY 2023-JUNE 2024

FOOD MATTERS ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Food Matters Partners and Supporters,

We are pleased to present this annual report (July 2023–June 2024) on NRDC's Food Matters initiative, which partners with U.S. cities, counties, and nonprofit allies to develop and implement innovative urban food waste solutions. Every year, 89 million tons of food are wasted in the United States. More than two-thirds of that waste comes from residences and consumer-facing businesses like restaurants and grocery stores. Since approximately 80 percent of the U.S. population resides in urban areas, tackling urban food waste is crucial to achieving the national goal of reducing food loss and waste by 50 percent by 2030. Addressing urban food waste also provides cross-cutting benefits across climate, economic, health, and equity goals, fostering more sustainable and resilient urban environments.

We are celebrating the progress of our Food Matters partners and the expansion of our knowledge-sharing network, which promotes peer engagement and exchange of strategies and ideas. In the past year, NRDC provided technical support to 20 partners who are part of our broader network, and this has not only reduced food waste but also advanced the food waste movement, engaged businesses and consumers, and influenced government policy and programs at all levels. We are committed to sustaining this momentum by laying the foundation for municipal policy action, helping secure federal and state funding for our partners, and building a more robust network of partners working together to eliminate food waste.

We look forward to another fruitful year!

Sincerely,
NRDC's Food Waste Team

"The NRDC team has provided a wealth of knowledge on various aspects of reducing food waste and credibility, which has resulted in shared information within the city, to elected officials and the general public.

The credibility of NRDC as a respected resource has resulted in success and the ability to continue to offer resources in this area. The initial funding provided was critical to create the case for continuing this work using city funding. Thank you."

—CITY OF PHOENIX

NRDC'S FOOD WASTE TEAM



Madeline Keating
Senior Food Waste
Advocate



Darby Hoover
Senior Resource
Specialist



Anya Obrez
Advocacy Associate



Yvette Cabrera
Food Waste Director



Nina Sevilla
Food Waste Advocate



Andrea Collins
Senior Food Systems
Specialist

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

20 PARTNERS
REPORTED THE
FOLLOWING
ACHIEVEMENTS:

CLIMATE IMPACT:

Programs achieved savings of
61,855 metric tons
carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO₂e).¹



Equivalent to the
electricity-related carbon
emissions of
12,207 homes'
for one year.²



35,753

tons of food were diverted
from disposal (via food rescue,
composting, etc.) in programs
across seven cities.



2,300

participants attended
community events, round-
table discussions, and
stakeholder meetings.



580

food donors or food rescue
organizations were engaged.



27

food scrap drop-off
sites were established.

OUR KNOWLEDGE SHARING NETWORK

One component of the Food Matters initiative is our knowledge sharing network where cities can scale local and regional solutions across the U.S. by sharing best practices, learning from peers, and implementing lessons learned. The network includes learning groups, webinars, convenings, access to topic-based experts, and trainings.

- Meetings featured experts from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the Rocky Mountain Institute, and the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment.
- Topics covered included policy, food rescue, consumer education campaigns, restaurant challenges, climate action planning, composting, and data measurement.

54

CITIES AND
COUNTIES ACROSS
24 STATES ARE
REPRESENTED IN
THE NETWORK

POLICY

- **14 cities** included food waste prevention goals in their Priority Climate Action Plans as part of EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program.
- **9 cities** are exploring policies, including "Right to Compost," compost procurement, zoning for community composting, and volume-based pricing (pay-as-you-throw).
- **4 cities** declared proclamations and mayoral commitments to raise awareness of food waste during Food Waste Prevention Week.

FUNDING

- **\$283K** was leveraged through city and other external funding to expand Food Matters pilot programs in eight cities.
- **\$8.5 MILLION** in federal grants—like the USDA Composting and Food Waste Reduction cooperative agreements and the EPA Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling grant—was awarded to Food Matters partners.

"Thank you for your leadership in this space. Much of the wasted food prevention work that we've done was inspired by you opening the Food Matters city application in early 2023. We have learned so much since then and look forward to staying engaged in this important work."

—CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

"NRDC acts as an anchor to the overall movement around reducing food waste. By being in partnership, we know we have access to a thought partner who is an expert in the field and has a finger on the pulse of what is happening nationally. NRDC is a tremendous resource that helps make sure our projects are relevant and impactful."

—MAKE FOOD NOT WASTE
(DETROIT)

INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT: BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT COHORT

We offer guidance and best practice sharing through a cohort focused on food waste reduction in restaurants. Participants this past year included Phoenix, Denver, Lane County (Oregon), Minneapolis, earthday365 (St. Louis), Sustainable Business Network of Philadelphia, Urban Green Lab and Environmental Law Institute (Nashville), and Clean Memphis.

120

food service businesses were engaged.

8

restaurant food waste reduction challenges were held.

32

workshops or stakeholder meetings related to restaurant engagement were conducted.

244

hours of hands-on instruction were provided to restaurants.



City of Phoenix Waste Audit © Photo by Ariel LeBarron

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR CITY PARTNERS

- **Chicago** and **Boston** embarked on food rescue assessments with support from NRDC, forging strong partnerships with local organizations like Urban Canopy in Chicago.
- **Los Angeles** and **Joint Venture (Santa Clara County)** are educating food donors about rescue requirements under SB 1383. The city of Los Angeles reports that city food rescue organizations rescued and redirected more than 37 million pounds of surplus food in 2023.
- **Columbus** became the 10th city in the Food Matters network to sign the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, an international agreement on urban food policies signed by more than 200 cities globally.

"I am excited to see Columbus join the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, advancing our city's commitment to sustainability, waste reduction, and food security. This is a pivotal step toward achieving our Climate Action Plan's waste reduction goals while supporting the objectives outlined in the Columbus and Franklin County Local Food Action Plan. Together, we will build a healthier, equitable, and more resilient city where every resident has the ability to access fresh, nutritious foods." —COLUMBUS MAYOR ANDREW J. GINTHER

- Almost 6,000 households are participating in food scrap composting collection pilots in **Nashville, Chicago, and Madison**. Pilot programs like these are essential for reducing risk, validating concepts, and generating compelling data, ensuring that future programs are scalable and successful.
- **Albuquerque** is partnering with Three Sisters Kitchen on a food scraps collection pilot at two locations, a museum and a commercial-scale kitchen, while successfully integrating food waste prevention into its outreach.

- **Denver, Portland (Oregon), and Washington, D.C.**, engaged more than 11,000 households in behavior-change campaigns and conducted focus groups to inform educational materials on food waste reduction.
- **Cincinnati** and the surrounding **Hamilton County** each secured \$400K in USDA funding to increase food rescue and gleaning efforts, provide operational support, and build composting infrastructure across the city and the region.

FOOD MATTERS CITY PARTNERSHIPS





WHERE ARE WE HEADED NEXT?

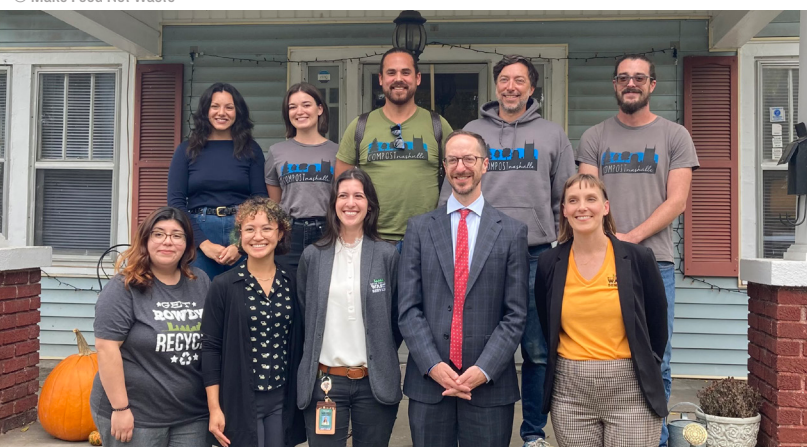
- Exploring partnerships with other national and regional organizations working with cities
- Advocating to pass municipal policies in cities, especially our model policies
- Updating our policy and program toolkit and other resources for cities
- Releasing a new model policy, adding to our list of five
- Growing our network of 50+ cities so that cities can continue to share and replicate local solutions

“The initial Food Waste Challenge has been leveraged for important grant opportunities leading to increased food waste reduction regionally. We have the potential to franchise the program in other cities, increasing impact. The challenge proved to other restaurants that they can save money through these strategies, showing the impact of restaurant-to-restaurant education.”

—EARTHDAY365 (ST. LOUIS)



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¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Waste Reduction Model (WARM),” last updated August 15, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/warm>.

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator,” updated January 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>.