



FACT SHEET

NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION! 10 STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING U.S. FOOD WASTE REDUCTION GOALS

In September 2015, the Obama administration announced the first-ever national target to reduce food waste across the United States, calling for a 50 percent reduction by 2030. Executive and legislative federal action will be essential to meeting this goal, as will concerted efforts by food-related businesses, consumers, and other stakeholders. The following 10 strategies provide direction to government, businesses, and the philanthropic sector for pursuing this ambitious goal.

STRATEGY 1: ENGAGE THE PUBLIC

Consumers are responsible for the largest share of food that is wasted today. Raising consumer awareness and changing their behaviors are therefore critical to tackling this problem. Increasing consumer awareness of food waste can also help encourage and incentivize companies to change business practices that contribute to waste. Beyond this, engaged consumers can influence the world around them through their professional spheres of influence and social networks, catalyzing additional change and innovation.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Implementing a unified consumer education campaign, including participation by food companies, government entities, health care institutions, colleges, and waste haulers, among others.
- Working with K-12 schools to develop and deliver classroom curricula, cafeteria-based education, home economics lessons, farm-to-school initiatives, and school garden programs to engage the next generation in reducing food waste.
- Initiating food literacy programs for university students, with an emphasis on minimizing food waste and creative repurposing of surplus foods.

STRATEGY 2: CATALYZE ACTION BY FOOD INDUSTRY MEMBERS

Given that a significant portion of waste occurs within the food supply chain from farm to fork, food companies must also be active players in the solution. There should be efforts within individual companies to reduce, reuse, and recycle food waste as well as greater collaboration among businesses. Companies stand to benefit through reduced food purchases and lower disposal costs, enhanced customer loyalty, and progress toward social and environmental sustainability goals. Businesses in the food processing, distribution, retail, food service, and restaurant sectors all have a part to play.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Establishing a common practice of consistent and transparent measurement of food waste so that companies can benchmark themselves against their peers and leaders can be recognized.
- Developing tools to support this practice and aggregate results.
- Collaborating across businesses to establish shared goals and benchmarks for assessing efforts to reduce food waste, expand food rescue, and recycle remaining food scraps.

- Creating a library of case studies, model corporate policies, business case arguments, and resources on specific technologies and practices to reduce food waste within businesses' own operations and throughout their supply chains.

STRATEGY 3: SOLICIT AND DISSEMINATE BETTER DATA

Good data are crucial for prioritizing strategies to reduce waste, establishing baselines, and assessing progress.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Developing robust baseline data and benchmarks to measure progress toward the national goal to reduce food waste by 50 percent by 2030.
- Establishing a methodology for counties and municipalities to consistently measure their waste, along with a mechanism to aggregate and disseminate that information.
- Adopting food waste tracking systems in business operations, following the Food Loss and Waste Protocol¹ where possible.
- Requiring federal food service vendors to report food waste generation as well as prevention, donation, and recycling efforts.
- Including data on food waste prevention, donation, and recycling as part of sustainability reporting by federal government agencies.

STRATEGY 4: MEASURE AND REDUCE FARM LOSSES

More than half of all fruits and vegetables go uneaten in the United States. Vast quantities of produce never leave the farm because of volatile market conditions and business practices that drive waste of these fresh, wholesome foods and the natural resources used to grow them.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Quantifying on-farm losses through federal investment in comprehensive national research.
- Supporting innovative marketing for fruits and vegetables that fall short of the industry's prevailing cosmetic standards.
- Supporting value-added processing of produce that otherwise lacks a market.
- Evaluating industry practices and federal grading standards to identify any undue barriers to the sale of fruits and vegetables.

¹ <http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/food-loss-waste-protocol>.

STRATEGY 5: STANDARDIZE FOOD EXPIRATION DATES

Between 54 and 87 percent of consumers at least occasionally discard food prematurely because they misunderstand the meaning of date labels. This confusion extends to businesses, which also wind up discarding perfectly edible food. Refining and standardizing date labels represents one of the most straightforward steps for reducing the amount of edible food wasted both in households and in businesses.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Establishing a national standard for date label language (e.g., "Best if used by" to indicate quality and "Expires on" to indicate an increased safety risk).
- Educating consumers on the new, standardized system and its meaning through a coordinated campaign.

STRATEGY 6: EXPAND FOOD RECOVERY CAPACITY

Significant efforts are under way to distribute surplus food to people in need. Despite this, enormous volumes of surplus food remain untapped, and 42 million Americans remain food insecure. Additional investments and policy innovations are critical.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Expanding value-added processing, transportation, refrigeration, and logistical capacity for food rescue organizations, including pantries and direct service organizations.
- Adopting state and federal policies and funding mechanisms to enable farms to donate more fruits and vegetables.
- Adopting state and federal policies and funding mechanisms to foster innovation in food rescue, processing, distribution, and the financing of food rescue efforts.
- Educating businesses about liability protections, tax benefits, and effective logistics for food donation.
- Developing innovative food rescue models, replicating the most successful initiatives, and taking them to scale.

STRATEGY 7: EXPAND RECYCLING OF FOOD SCRAPS

Composting, anaerobic digestion, processing food waste into animal feed, and other approaches for recycling food scraps offer many environmental benefits, including reduced methane emissions from landfills. Recycling food scraps can also generate useful soil amendments, recycle nutrients, and produce energy.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Discouraging disposal of organic material in landfills and incinerators through restrictions, bans, or increased tipping fees.
- Expanding infrastructure for organics recycling such as composting, anaerobic digestion, or conversion of food waste to animal feed, and municipal curbside collection of food waste.
- Developing markets for compost products, with an emphasis on building soil health and recycling nutrients into agricultural production.
- Equipping waste-hauling trucks with scales or other automated methods to measure organizational, municipal, and state food waste.

STRATEGY 8: FOSTER ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

Entrepreneurial creativity can catalyze new solutions that turn the tide on food waste.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Providing incubation support for new businesses.
- Providing entrepreneurs with technical assistance and access to financing.
- Conducting food waste innovation challenges, such as new designs for refrigerators and food packaging.

STRATEGY 9: MOBILIZE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FINANCING

Various types of financing are needed to fund investment in food waste reduction, donation, and recycling.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Directing current government grant programs to set aside funds for research and implementation of food waste reduction efforts, and establishing new grant programs as needed.
- Financing public infrastructure for food donation and food waste recycling.
- Mobilizing private investors around high-priority food waste reduction strategies that require significant capitalization.

STRATEGY 10: ESTABLISH COORDINATION

In the United Kingdom, the Waste and Resources Action Program (WRAP) has championed food waste reduction efforts through research, a consumer awareness campaign, and catalyzing leading businesses to commit to joint action. The organization is a central hub with a bird's-eye view of efforts across the country to reduce food waste. Similar coordination is needed to ensure that the work happening across the United States is as efficient and effective as possible.

Key aspects of this strategy could include:

- Launching and promoting a website that identifies the growing cadre of organizations and initiatives working to reduce food waste, materials for consumer engagement campaigns, and available research.
- Hiring a federal coordinator to oversee national, state, and other efforts to reduce food waste.
- Creating a national task force to advance progress toward the 50 percent food waste reduction goal. This task force should represent diverse stakeholders and be charged with making the goal more visible, monitoring progress, recommending improvements in implementation, and identifying strategies for supportive government action.