

Early childhood sector

# Food Waste Action Guide



# Early Childhood Sector Action Guide

This is a practical guide for everyone involved in early childhood education, identifying ways to reduce and separate food waste. It has been developed using learning from four KU childcare centres.

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## Why do we need to reduce and separate food waste?

When we waste food, we're also wasting all the natural resources, like water and energy, that went into growing, packaging, transporting, selling and preparing it.

When food breaks down in landfill it generates methane – a greenhouse gas that's 25 times more powerful than carbon dioxide and a major cause of climate change.

Reducing and recycling food waste supports the NSW Government's goals to achieve net zero emissions from landfill and halve organics waste sent to landfill by 2030.

Having a separate food waste collection can help businesses:

- identify how much food waste they generate and motivate them to reduce it
- save costs on food bills and sending waste to landfill
- reduce their carbon footprint
- improve their sustainability by turning food waste into compost.

## About this guide

This guide is designed to help the early childhood sector reduce and separate food waste. It provides:

- information on common causes of food waste in the sector
- a step-by-step guide to avoid unnecessary food waste
- tips to prevent food waste, reduce operational costs and environmental impact
- a template for recording food waste data (see example at the end of this guide).

## Where does food waste come from in child care centres?

Food waste occurs throughout the purchasing, storage, preparation and serving phases of an early childhood centre's food production cycle.

Some common causes of food wastage are:

- kitchen staff not being informed of children's absences in time
- new foods being introduced
- repeat orders without checking the stock or buying in bulk
- incorrect storage or food is not arranged according to its expiry or best-before dates
- leftover food on plates because portions are too big
- lack of skills.

Centres that include goals to review and minimise food waste in their Quality Improvement Plan, create opportunities to engage with their communities and embed better practices in everyday routines.

# The five-step food waste reduction journey

# 1

**Engage with staff**

Follow these five steps to work out how much food waste you're generating and develop an action plan to reduce it.

# 2

**Establish baseline**

## 1. Engage with staff

Train and engage staff before introducing any changes. It's a good idea to consider appointing a 'champion' to lead on food waste action to ensure all practices are compliant with workplace and food safety guidelines.

# 3

**Create action plan**

## 2. Undertake a review of food waste

Follow the instructions in the 'How to do a food waste review' section and use the data to establish a baseline of waste volumes.

Involve staff in setting up the food waste collection, seek their input and acknowledge their good work.

# 4

**Collection and disposal**

## 3. Create an action plan to reduce food waste

Prioritise actions to reduce the most waste as you work towards best practice food waste management.

Discuss findings with staff and listen to their ideas. Implement simple, easily achievable actions to motivate staff.

# 5

**Celebrate success**

## 4. Set up food waste collection bins and disposal pathways

Avoiding food waste is the best option to save your operational costs and minimise environmental impact. However, no matter how hard you try, there will still be some unavoidable food waste like banana skins, pips and eggshells.

Establishing practices to keep food waste out of the general waste bin will ensure you are ready to meet any organics waste separation requirements in the future. You may also be able to reduce costs by not sending this waste to landfill. See 'Setting up food waste collection and disposal' below for more information.

## 5. Celebrate your success by conducting a post audit

Repeat a waste review at the same menu cycle after a month to see how much you've saved in food waste and operational costs.

Small changes over time will lead to success! Share wins on your social channels and newsletters to inspire staff and others to reduce food waste!



# How to do a food waste review

Set up a 5-15 litre bin/bucket for each of the three main types of food waste:

- spoilage
- preparation waste
- plate waste

Make sure to place these in convenient locations where food waste is generated, e.g. next to the kitchen bench or dishwasher.

Wastage through preparation and spoilage is likely to occur in the kitchen areas, whereas plate waste will be in classrooms or staff areas where the children and staff eat.

Record food waste from each bucket, identifying whether it is from spoilage, kitchen preparation, or leftovers from children's plates and unserved food. Remember to include the staff room!

Track the waste for at least a week to monitor changes over different days, different menus and potentially different children.

Once you have identified where the most food is wasted, you can act to minimise it. See the food waste avoidance section below.

Centres that cater to 200 children can reduce annual food waste from 1,700kg to 997kg by implementing avoidance actions.



# Top tips to reduce food waste

Now you know where food waste is generated in your centre, you can develop an action plan to reduce it. Here are our tips for reducing spoilage, preparation and plate waste.

## Spoilage

If spoilage is a big contributor to food waste in your centre, changing the way you order and store food can make a big difference.

### Know what you have already

- Arrange the fridge and pantry by food types (with date labels) to make finding items easy.
- Check what you have in the fridge/freezer before placing orders and order as needed.
- Store new supplies at the back to ensure older items are used first.
- Keep a variety of tinned food and frozen vegetables on hand, rather than ordering too much fresh food 'just in case'.

### Store items correctly

- Follow instructions on packaging to store food correctly.
- Store berries, pre-cut veggies and leafy greens in airtight containers lined with paper towels to absorb excess moisture.
- Keep herbs fresh by storing them in a jar of water on the benchtop.
- Keep bread in a paper bag or original packaging on the counter. Freeze extra supplies to keep them fresh.

### Use up leftovers

- Store portioned leftovers in the freezer if they won't be eaten in 2-3 days.
- Use up leftover rice, pasta and quinoa in bakes, salads and soups.
- Use a dehydrator to turn excess fruit and vegetables into healthy, preservative-free snacks.
- Make custard with milk that's about to go out of date.
- Make salads and stir fries using leftover grains (rice and quinoa).
- Revive leftover celery, carrots and lettuce by plunging them in icy water.

## Preparation waste

Some waste during food preparation is unavoidable, like eggshells and watermelon rinds. But with a little creativity, you can find ways to use up leftover ingredients and offcuts, rather than throwing them in the bin.

- Explore ways of using the same ingredients for different dishes.
- Roast washed potato peelings to make veggie crisps.
- Add sliced broccoli and cauliflower stalks to stir-fries, soups and stews.
- Make pesto with parsley stalks, carrot, or celery leaves.
- Store veggie scraps in an airtight container in the fridge for making stock.

## Plate waste

Taking notice of what comes back to the kitchen will help you reduce waste.

- Enable cooks to check attendances each day so they can adjust portions and save ingredients for later.
- Introduce new foods in small quantities, in combination with favourite meals. It can take 5-10 times of tasting new foods for children to find them acceptable!
- Get feedback from classroom staff after new foods are introduced.
- Encourage children to take small servings to begin with – they can come back for seconds if they finish!
- Review portion sizes to avoid waste.
- Involve children in meal planning, e.g. voting for favourites or creating opportunities for them to cook
- Attractive presentation can reduce waste – small, individual items like mini pies and quiches are more appealing.
- Consider using a small milk jug that children can learn to pour from and top up as needed.



# Setting up food waste collection and disposal

Separating food waste from general waste is beneficial for businesses from both an environmental and economic perspective. It helps reduce operational costs including landfill fees, reduces your carbon footprint and diverts food waste for recycling.

Businesses are encouraged to first reduce food waste by better practices or donating to people in need. What's left can be managed on site or collected for recycling at a commercial composting facility.

## Separating food waste at your centre

To make collection of food waste easy, set up small food waste bins near kitchen benches or dishwashers where food waste is generated.

## On-site food waste disposal

Low volumes of food waste can be managed on site, but always follow best practice and be aware of the limitations of what can and can't be disposed of.

## Worm Farms

If you have limited space, a worm farm is great for turning your kitchen scraps into rich fertiliser for your centre's garden or veggie patch. Worm farms can be made, or purchased, and come in a variety of styles to suit different environments. [www.milkwood.net](http://www.milkwood.net)

## Compost bins

Compost bins can take garden and fruit and vegetable scraps and are a great option for centres with space for a compost set-up. Visit the Sustainable Gardening Australia website for advice on what type of bin will work in your environment. [www.sgaonline.org.au](http://www.sgaonline.org.au)

## Chickens

Early Learning Australia has advice on how to set up and look after chickens. [www.cela.org.au](http://www.cela.org.au)

## Off-site food waste disposal

Unlike home composting, commercial food waste collections take all food scraps including meat, bones, fish, bakery and dairy products. Only food scraps and certified compostable bin liners can go in food waste bins. No packaging, paper towels, cutlery or other materials are allowed. Contact your council or waste contractor to find out more about setting up a food waste collection service.

# Resources

The Love Food Hate Waste NSW program supports households and businesses to reduce food waste. By making simple changes we can reduce the amount of edible food we throw away. For all the latest tips and tricks visit [lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au](http://lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au) and follow us on **Instagram** and **Facebook** @lovefoodhatewastensw

Check out these resources for recipes, meal-planning and dietary information.

- Our Love Food Hate Waste UK partner has compiled a library of easy, **food-saving recipes** that can be filtered by dietary requirements, ingredients and 'cooking with kids'.
- Access more than 200 healthy recipes and snack suggestions using Feed Australia's online, menu-planning tool [feedaustralia.org.au](http://feedaustralia.org.au). For Australian dietary guidelines visit the Australian Government's Eat for Health website [eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines](http://eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines)
- Summary of dietary guidelines for early childhood education [healthykids.nsw.gov.au](http://healthykids.nsw.gov.au).
- Australian Government – Reducing Australia's food waste [dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/food-waste](http://dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/food-waste).
- Caring for Children – Birth to 5 years (Food, Nutrition and Learning Experiences [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)).
- Munch and Move – summary of Australian Dietary Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care Services. [healthykids.nsw.gov.au.pdf](http://healthykids.nsw.gov.au.pdf)



# Food waste review template

Centre name:	<input type="text"/>	Week beginning date:	<input type="text"/>	/	<input type="text"/>	/	<input type="text"/>
Room name:	<input type="text"/>	Age group:	<input type="text"/>				
Menu cycle week:	Please tick <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4	Bucket size:	<input type="text"/>				

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Weekly total
	Enrolled	Eating	Enrolled	Eating	Enrolled	Eating	Enrolled	Eating	Enrolled	Eating	
<b>Number of children</b>											
<b>Morning tea</b> Key food waste items											
Food waste volume	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full
<b>Lunch</b> Key food waste items											
Food waste volume	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full
<b>Afternoon tea</b> Key food waste items											
Food waste volume	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full	<input type="checkbox"/> 1/4 <input type="checkbox"/> 1/2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3/4 <input type="checkbox"/> Full

**Food for thought:** additional comments or record un-served food return to kitchen.





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ISBN 978 1 922963 89 5|

EPA 2024P4532

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