TIPS FOR REDUCING OFFICE FOOD WASTE

Once you have measured your office food waste, you will know how much and where the food waste is happening. Now you can prioritize where to act! The following is a list of some food waste reduction strategies to get you started.

ON-SITE CANTEENS AND CAFETERIAS
Where food is available for staff – typically for purchase.

- **Ask your food service provider** what steps they are taking to reduce the amount of food wasted in their preparatory kitchen and at your site. Just the act of asking them a question can trigger behavior change by your food provider.
- **Encourage the food service provider to sell leftover food at reduced prices** at the end of the day (or 20 minutes before the canteen closes) for staff to take home for dinner.
- **Go trayless.** Studies indicate that eliminating trays reduces the amount of food people take in cafeteria lines, thereby reducing the amount thrown away afterward.
- **Ask for smaller portions** if you don’t want to eat a lot.
- Ask for a food box or **doggy bag** so you can take any leftovers home or back to your office.
- Ask the cafeteria manager to **post signs** encouraging staff to only order what they need.

LUNCH BREAKOUT AREA
Where staff bring their own food, often having an on-site refrigerator for employee use.

- **Share your food** if you’ve found you brought too much for yourself.
- Designate a “**share shelf**” in the office refrigerator where one can place leftover food (e.g., uneaten slice of pizza) that colleagues can take.
- **Post tips** near the refrigerator on how staff can reduce their office food waste.
- Make sure the office refrigerator is set at the **optimal temperature** for ensuring food longevity: 32°F - 41°F (0°C - 5°C).
- Ensure that your “**refrigerator cleanouts**” don’t end up in the landfill. Send frequent emails and post signs on office refrigerators to remind staff to eat up leftovers or take them home prior to the periodic cleanout.
- Instruct the cleaning crew to **compost any leftover food** in the refrigerator on “clean out day” and save the Tupperware for staff to reclaim.
CATERED EVENTS

Where you order food from an external vendor and serve at an office-hosted event.

- Ask your events manager to automatically reduce the amount of food ordered by 25%. This reduces over-ordering, and no one will complain if there are no leftovers.
- Have “take-home” boxes or bags available at the end of the food table, and invite event participants to take home leftovers.
- Make leftovers freely available to your office staff afterwards. You’ll see a rush for the leftover food once that “all staff” email entitled “free leftovers in the lobby” goes out!
- If you nonetheless have a surplus of safe and wholesome food, see if there is a local charity that can deliver that food to people in need (e.g., in the United States consider using FoodRescue)
- If your office has on-site catering, encourage the chef to get creative and make more dishes from otherwise wasted foods. Examples include oatmeal compote made from fruit peels or potato chips made from potato skins not used in mashed potatoes.

CROSS CUTTING

Strategies applicable to all offices.

- Appoint an office “Food Waste Champion” who works to raise awareness among staff about office food waste and how to reduce it. This Champion also can engage vendors (e.g., food service providers for the office cafeteria or events) with the strategies outlined above.
- Hold a monthly “Food Waste Day” in the canteen or kitchen to raise awareness about food waste and tips for reducing it (e.g., via posters). You could even extend this to an awareness raising month with documentaries and movies shown during the lunch hour, or invited guest speakers on the issue.
- If you’re not sure how to get started, hiring a consultant to take a holistic look at your office can help you assess the best ways to mitigate waste.

Please share your tips with us so we can spread the word!

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