

How to Reduce & Recycle Food Waste at Skilled Nursing & Senior Living Facilities



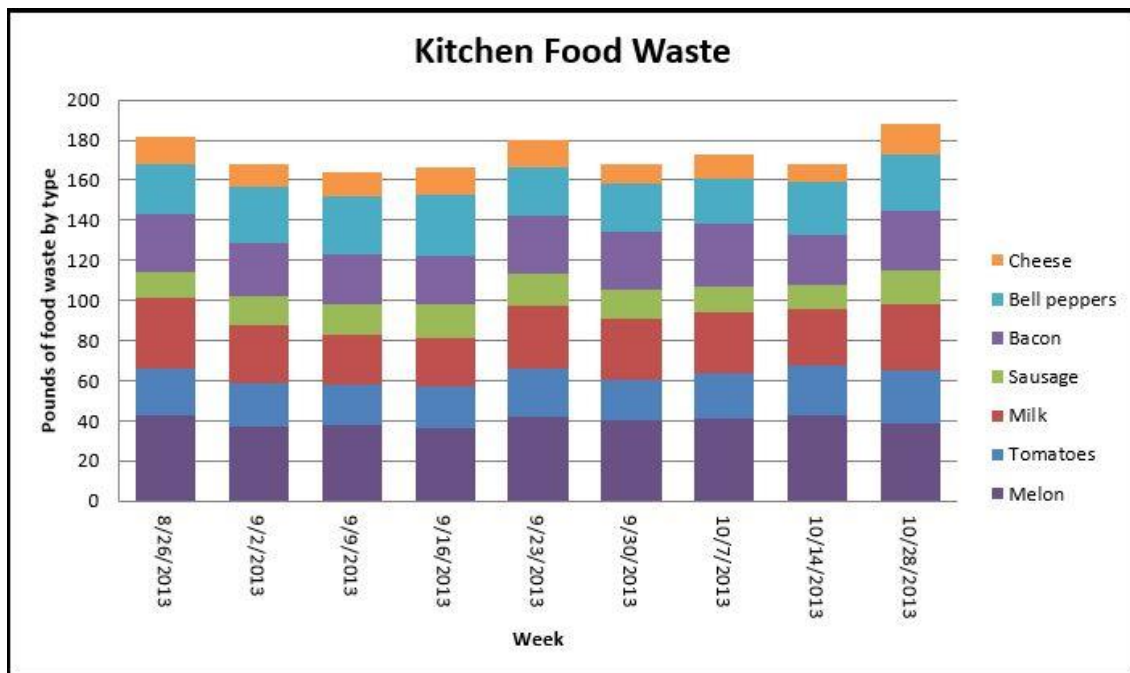
Sustainability Checklist



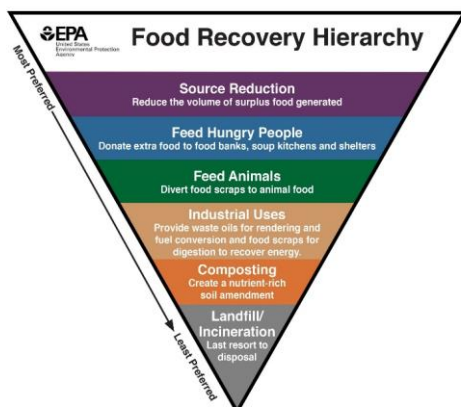
Nursing homes and assisted living facilities prepare and serve food 7 days a week, 365 days a year to residents and staff. In Connecticut, it is estimated that 25% of the waste stream is made up of food scraps.

Statistics show 4 to 10 percent of food purchased is thrown out before it ever reaches the table. Add to that the amount of food tossed in the trash after meal service and you can see how food waste can be expensive and contributes to the state's waste disposal issues.

Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to cut down on the amount of food waste generated in the kitchen and dining areas that end up in the dumpster. By taking action, your facility can save money and reduce environmental impact. This checklist provides basic information to get you started on preventing food waste, reusing and recycle food scraps in CT, and resources to help with tracking progress.



Example of facility data that can be analyzed using [EPA's Toolkit for Reducing Wasted Food & Packaging spreadsheet](#)



Food Scraps aren't trash!
They are a resource that can be turned into useful compost or energy!

1. Take Action - Know How Much is Being Wasted

Already Done

In Progress

Completed

Understand Where and How Much Food is Wasted at Your Facility

Food can be wasted in a number of ways including: over ordering/purchasing, kitchen preparation and storage, and uneaten plate scraps.

Start by touring your facility to identify the different locations and activities that generate food waste.

Carry Out a Food Waste Assessment

Find out how much food waste is being generated weekly, where it is being wasted and how much it costs your facility to purchase and dispose of. You'll need to determine a sorting method (i.e., visual, weighed) and a time-frame to gather information.

A helpful resource is EPA's [Guide to Conducting and Analyzing a Food Waste Assessment](#), a free guidebook that covers all aspects of identifying food waste and disposal options.

Set Reduction Goals

Once an assessment has been done, it's useful to calculate the amount of food waste and cost per resident, and set reduction goals. Keep track using a log, such as [EPA's log sheet](#).

There are companies that you can hire to assist with this as well, including those with software packages that track food waste and record the data such as [Lean Path](#) and [Phood Solutions](#).

2. Take Steps to Reduce Wasted Food!

Ordering, Inventory and Menus:

Menu planning and keeping track of your inventory are key. Order only what will be used and plan meals that repurpose left-overs into soups, stews, croutons, etc. (for example, serve corn as a side vegetable one day and corn chowder the next). Take the time to date perishable items when they come in and use them before they spoil.

Make Food Prep Changes in the Kitchen

Cut off and peel less from fruits, vegetables, fish and poultry and find ways to utilize scraps to prepare stocks, and sauces (onion skins, shrimp peels).

Staff Awareness and Training

Let staff know there is a goal to reduce food waste. Dining directors, chefs and cooking staff play a role, and so do dishwashers and servers. They know which foods aren't being eaten and end up getting scraped off the plate.

Some senior living food vendors provide training and can help with measuring food waste.

Consider Preferences

Focus on serving the foods that residents prefer or give them a choice of menu items. Foods that are boring or disliked become plate waste. Consider switching to a resident/restaurant style with pre-ordered customized choices. [A facility in Bellingham, WA](#) switched and reduced per-patient daily food costs as well as food waste and increased resident satisfaction.

3. Find Ways to Re-use / Repurpose Excess Food

Look Beyond the Residents

Excess prepared foods or perishables that are about to expire can be used in several creative ways. Consider giving it away or selling it to staff for a nominal price.

Offer Up

[Donate food](#) to the needy by connecting with an organization nearby that distributes food to shelters and soup kitchens. Some examples of food rescue organizations in CT include [Food Rescue US](#) and [Rock and Wrap it Up!](#) In 2012, [Connecticut passed a law](#) to protect people that donate food from potential legal liability as well as the federal Good Samaritan Act. Your facility may also be eligible for [federal tax credits from food donations](#).

4. Recycle The Rest!

Give Food Scraps a Second Life

Food scraps don't have to go into the trash. They can be composted or used to generate energy and it may be cost effective to do so. The disposal cost per ton of trash is likely significantly higher than to recycle food waste. First, determine how much food waste is left after reducing and re-purposing.

Next, see if you are located close enough to a food scrap processing facility. There are 4 approved sites in Connecticut: 1) [Quantum Biopower](#), Southington, 2) [New England Compost](#), Danbury, 3) [New Milford Farms](#), New Milford, 4) [WeCare Denali](#), Ellington.

Collecting and Transporting Food Waste

If it's feasible to send waste to one of the processing facilities, ask the hauler that transports your trash if they also haul food scraps. You can also contact Curbside Compost located in Wilton CT and/or Blue Earth Compost, located in Hartford regarding possible on-site pick-up.

Set up a Food Scrap Separation Program

Work with the hauler and/or processing facility to determine what bins and liners to use and where to place them, pick up frequency, employee training, and appropriate. Contact [CT DEEP's recycling program](#) ((860) 424-3366) or Caren.Harder@ct.gov for more information or assistance.



5. And, Finally ...

Review, Re-evaluate, Re-adjust

Don't forget this important step – once you have reduced food waste at the source, repurposed it through donations and recycled the rest, re-evaluate your trash hauling needs. You can save money by using a smaller dumpster and/or needing less frequent trash pick-ups.

Continue to measure waste reduced and set new goals periodically.

And consider joining [EPA's Food Recovery Challenge](#).



Resources

- RecyclingWorks MA is a great resource with information on [Source Reduction of Food Waste](#) including resources, videos, and their [Food Waste Estimation Guide](#) geared toward specific industry sectors, including Assisted Living Facilities, Hospitals (healthcare), Lodging, Restaurants and more.
- CT DEEP food waste & recovery webpage: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Reduce-Reuse-Recycle/Waste-Reduction/Food-Waste---Reduction-and-Recovery>
- Use EPA's Guide to Conducting and Analyzing a Food Waste Assessment https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/r5_fd_wste_guidebk_020615.pdf
- EPA's Toolkit for Reducing Wasted Food & Packaging: A Guide for Food Services and Restaurants - https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/reducing_wasted_food_pkg_tool.pdf
- And https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-08/documents/food_loss_prevention_options_universities_august_2016.pdf
- Check out what similar facilities have done, including colleges, restaurants and hotels since they are serve meals to residents daily. Utilize articles and case studies found online, including these examples:
 - Senior Housing News article – <https://seniorhousingnews.com/2019/03/12/senior-living-providers-control-dining-costs-with-better-budgeting-management/>
 - Argentum Magazine – <https://www.argentum.org/magazine-articles/managing-food-labor-energy-costs-senior-living-communities/>
 - Food Waste at Long Term Care – <https://ugsrp.com/2019/07/11/food-waste-at-long-term-care-facilities-a-moral-dilemma/>
 - Best Practices: How Hospitals Can Waste Less Food - <https://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20150704/MAGAZINE/307049996/best-practices-how-hospitals-can-waste-less-food>
 - Bizrecycling case study – <https://bizrecycling.com/local-story/boutwells-landing-senior-housing/>
 - Podcast, Managing Dining Waste - <https://resources.boelter.com/senior-living-waste-podcast>

Always check state & federal regulations that may apply to your facility before making changes. This document, created 8/2020, has been reviewed by CT DPH Food Protection Program and Healthcare Quality & Safety Branch. Funding was provided by a Pollution Prevention grant from US EPA.