

# How to conduct a food waste audit





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Experts have [found](#) that 1.6b tonnes of food globally is wasted every year. The hospitality industry accounts for 451,100 tonnes of food waste in the UK alone, with the majority ending up in landfills.

Reducing food waste has a positive impact on the [environment](#) and positively impacts your business's bottom line. Effectively managing food waste in your organisation can help reduce food waste by on average 65%, helping to cut costs by up to [8% a year](#).

To reap these benefits, you'll need to perform regular food waste audits to give you real scope on where food is wasted and how you can prevent this.

**While it's often difficult to get started with conducting food waste audits, this simple guide will explain:**

- [What a food waste audit is](#)
- [Why you should conduct a food waste audit](#)
- [5 steps to performing a food waste audit](#)
- [How to create a sustainable future with food waste management](#)

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**What is a food waste  
audit?**

# What is a food waste audit?

A food waste audit is [defined](#) as the process of identifying different types and quantities of food that are wasted. Data collected from this audit can help you to implement or improve food waste management systems and strategies in your organisation.

This audit isn't a one-time operation but an **ongoing on-site project** that helps you collect, measure, and record waste data.

[Oakdene Hollins](#) found that [66%](#) of all food waste produced in hospitality is pre-consumer waste, with 34% of that attributed to plate waste, it's important to measure all kinds of food waste that happens on-site.

Conducting a food waste audit can help you decide how menus could be changed or implement in-house strategies to increase your profits and improve overall efficacy.

Food waste audits are conducted by measuring two types of waste:



## 1. Pre-consumer

This is the food waste that is usually thrown away in your kitchens by members of staff. This can include, but is not limited to, trimmings, spoiled produce, or overproduction of certain types of dishes.



## 2. Post-consumer

Typically known as 'plate waste', post-consumer waste is food wasted after it has reached the consumer. This does not include any food that has been taken away by the consumer off-site, but is limited to food that is thrown away by staff or the consumer at your establishment.

# Why should you conduct a food waste audit?



## Increases profits

Reducing the amount of food your business buys or produces will dictate how much profit you make. An accurate representation of what's eaten and what is thrown away will help you to make smarter decisions when it comes to buying produce or items on the menu.



## Improves efficiency

Not only will this impact the efficiency of your kitchen, but the overall supply chain. Conducting an audit will help you realise which items you need to cut back on, what you need more of, and how you can repurpose food.



## Positive public image

Communicating the steps you're taking to reduce your businesses' food waste shows customers you're taking sustainability seriously. Depending on the strategy you choose to minimise food waste, you could give back to members of your community or help those in need, showing customers you're concerned about the well-being of residents in your local area.

**To unlock these benefits for your business, it's important to see where you are wasting food and figure out ways to minimise this waste. This is achieved using the food recovery hierarchy.**

# Reducing food waste

The food recovery hierarchy is a visual representation of how businesses can reduce their food waste, with the best ways to prevent excess waste at the top of the pyramid, going down to the least environmentally friendly or cost-effective methods.

**The six ways businesses can reduce food waste are:**

## Source reduction

Whether this is by minimising the amount of food your business is buying or reducing the number of items on a menu, this is the most beneficial way to increase your ROI.

## Feed hungry people

Help your community by donating food to the people who need it most, whether this is through food banks, soup kitchens, or shelters for those less fortunate.

## Feed animals

Help sustain the local farming industries by working with members of your community to help turn scraps from your establishment into animal food.

## Industrial uses

Work with local councils to repurpose kitchen items. Wasted oils can be rendered and turned into a sustainable fuel source, while food scraps can be anaerobically digested and help create energy.

## Composting

Generate fertile soil by working with local crop producers in your community, and repurpose food waste as compost.

## Incineration or landfill

Traditional methods of waste. This is not sustainable or environmentally friendly. Measures should be taken to avoid this action for all food waste.

**To determine what food can be repurposed, you'll need to conduct a food waste audit.**

**This will help determine where food is being wasted in your establishment and how you can take proactive measures to minimise this overall cost.**

# 5 steps to perform a food waste audit

To improve efficiency across the supply chain while making more sustainable decisions, you need to understand where food is being wasted in your kitchen. Food waste audits can be difficult to manage and maintain, but there are steps you can take to simplify the process.

# 1. Set goals

Before you start digging through your bins, it's important to decide what you'd like to get out of this, audit. This could be something as simple as halving the amount of food wasted to minimising food thrown away by your customers.

It's critical early on in this process to establish a baseline of what you'd like to achieve and identify opportunities along the way on how you can minimise waste.

For example, if you're told by your compost hauler, that you have 3,000 pounds (1.36 t) a month of organic food waste, an audit can help you understand that 500 pounds (0.23 tons) come from rotten tomatoes, 500 is from stale bread, and maybe 2,000 pounds (0.91 ton) is from half-eaten food from customers.

**From here, you'd be able to make more informed decisions throughout your process, such as reducing:**

- The number of tomatoes and bread purchased.
- Portion sizes of your guests.
- Items that are readily available and are not 'available on request'.
- Food consumed on-site, offering takeaway boxes to patrons.





## 2. Set dates

To achieve these goals, you need to set dates to conduct your audit to get an idea of how much food you're wasting in your establishment.

It is [recommended](#) to conduct an audit over approximately 3-5 days.

During the audit, it's important to look at dates that reflect your usual operating conditions, so you should avoid big holidays or weekends where business may be busier than usual.

**TOP TIP:** To get the most accurate data, avoid telling your staff about the food waste audit. This prevents any behaviour changes which could skew results.



# 3. Choose a food waste champion

## **Appoint one person to plan and drive the audit.**

While the person running this food waste audit is typically a chef, as they have more involvement with the food in their role, this can be anyone in your kitchen. The key to a food waste champion isn't what they do, but that they have ownership of the audit.

Alternatively, depending on the amount of food wasted, you may need assistance from an outside source. This could be a food reduction consultant or your local food waste authority.

Depending on the amount of food wasted, your food waste champion can then assign other roles as needed, such as:



### **Receiver/weigher**

A person who will take the wasted food and weigh it, analysing where it comes from.



### **Recorder**

Someone to log the weighed food down, recording the measurements.

## 4. Find a location

For this food waste audit to run smoothly, it's vital to assess the workflow and waste of your team and create a dedicated waste audit section. This could be a bin from either your kitchen or front of house.

It's important to choose a specific section that will cause the least disruption to your team.

**TOP TIP:** Record the weight of the empty bin before you begin the experiment. This will help you deduct the weight of the bin from your findings, giving you an accurate result.



# 5. Track your food waste

For your food waste champion to conduct the audit, you need to track your business' food waste. To do this, you and your champion need to figure out:

## **What food waste you're measuring.**

Whether it's plate waste, trimmings, or spoiled food, it's essential to know what you're going to measure in your appointed bin. This will also help you decide which bin you should focus on.

*For example, if you run a fast-food restaurant and want to measure plate waste, you wouldn't choose to measure a bin in the kitchen.*

## **When you'll measure it.**

Your team will have other duties to get on with throughout the day, and may not be able to measure waste as it's thrown into your appointed bin.

You could measure it at key service points throughout the day, such as after breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

## **How you'll record it.**

There are two main ways your food waste champion can record data. Either through:

**1. Spreadsheets.** This manual process takes time, but it's a free way for your team to track food waste. While it may be sustainable for a few days, it gets trickier over busier periods and is open to human error.

**2. Automated waste tracking systems.** Using a tracking system, helps your food waste champion easily analyse food waste and see where you and your team can make changes. Because it's automated, there's no room for human error, and you have an accurate insight into the food most commonly wasted in your kitchen.

**Want to see how AI technology works in your kitchen?**

[REQUEST A FREE DEMO](#)

# Creating a sustainable future with food waste management

By completing a food waste audit, not only will you have a clear understanding of where food is being wasted in your business, but how you can reduce these overhead costs.

Going forward, using the food waste audit as an indicator of what food is being wasted where throughout your establishment will help you make informed decisions on how you can make improvements to the sustainability of your business.

While conducting food waste audits are a good way to measure food waste in the short term, to maintain this process long term, it's important to have a more sustainable plan in place.

Experts recommend using technology, such as Winnow's [food waste management software](#), to help support your business. Depending on the size of your business to the level of insight you'd like in your kitchen, AI technology can help sustain your food waste measurement process with minimal input from your team. This means your team can focus on their role while your technology gives you accurate insights into where food is being wasted and allow you to make data-driven decisions and changes throughout the process.

## Make data-driven decisions

Try Winnow's food waste management software for yourself for free and discover the benefits it can bring to your business.

**Click the button and request a free demo from one of our experts.**

[REQUEST A FREE DEMO](#)

# Can Winnow help you?

1. Interested in reducing food waste & cost?
2. Want to gain better understanding of food waste in your kitchens?
3. Are you spending ~100K\$/year on food in each of your kitchens?
4. Do you prepare some or most of your food in advance?
5. Does your organisation have more than 10 sites with kitchens?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, speak to one of our food waste experts to find out what reducing food waste could mean for your business.

[GET A FREE CONSULTATION](#)

# About Winnow

**Winnow was founded with a simple belief that food is too valuable to waste. Yet measuring food waste is a challenge for all commercial kitchens with up to 20% of all food purchased going to waste (typically 5%-15%).**

Our mission is to connect the commercial kitchen, create a movement of chefs, and inspire others to see that food is too valuable to waste.

Winnow develops Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to help chefs run more profitable and sustainable kitchens by cutting food waste in half.

From city centre hotels to casinos and cruise ships, Winnow offers a solution for every kitchen. Our analytics platform and reporting suite helps teams pinpoint waste quickly, allowing enterprises to drive significant waste reductions at scale.

Our hardware options range from simple digital measurement tools to our AI enabled Winnow Vision which 'learns to see' food being thrown in the bin.

We understand that achieving and improving profitability in a professional kitchen can be a challenge. We will work with you every step of the way.

Get in touch to continue the conversation  
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