

Policy Brief – Addressing the Urgent Need to Reduce Food Waste in the Hospitality Industry



May 14, 2023 | Molly Findley

Executive Summary

This policy brief highlights the pressing need for immediate action to address the issue of food waste in the hospitality industry. Food waste not only contributes to economic losses but also has significant social, environmental, and ethical implications. By implementing targeted interventions, policymakers can reduce food waste in the hospitality sector, promote sustainability, and contribute to the development of a more responsible and efficient food system.

Recommendations

Promote Education and Awareness	Develop educational campaigns and training programs targeting hospitality businesses, employees, and consumers to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of food waste and encourage behavior change. This can include providing guidelines for portion control, proper food storage, and creative ways to repurpose leftovers.
Implement Food Waste Tracking and Reporting Systems	Establish standardized food waste tracking and reporting mechanisms for hospitality businesses, enabling them to monitor and measure their waste generation accurately. This data can help identify areas of improvement, set reduction targets, and incentivize businesses to actively participate in waste reduction initiatives.
Encourage Food Donation and Redistribution	Foster partnerships between hotels and local food banks, restaurants, shelters, or nonprofit organizations to facilitate the donation of excess food that is safe for consumption. Implement policies that protect businesses from liability concerns associated with food donations and incentivize their participation through tax benefits or recognition programs.
Support Technology and Innovation	Invest in research and development of technologies and innovations that can aid in reducing food waste in the hospitality industry. This includes implementing smart inventory management systems, utilizing predictive analytics to optimize purchasing and production, and exploring new preservation techniques to extend the shelf life of perishable food items.

The Problem

Food waste in the hospitality industry has reached alarming levels, demanding urgent attention. Annually, the United States discards 119 billion pounds of food, which corresponds to an astonishing 130 billion meals and an excess of \$408 billion worth of wasted food (Feeding America n.d.). Consumer-facing businesses, particularly hotels, are responsible for 40% of the total food waste in the United States (Coll 2017). The impact of food waste is significant, as it can contribute up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than a quarter of deforestation, and consume almost a quarter of the world's water resources. Reducing food waste not only provides a direct and efficient approach to mitigating the environmental impact of our global food system, but it also serves as an invaluable opportunity to combat food insecurity and meet the demands of a growing population without the necessity of extensive agricultural expansion (Coll 2017). By minimizing food waste, we can alleviate the strain on natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve forests, and optimize water usage. Additionally, redirecting surplus food toward those in need can help address the pressing issue of hunger and improve food accessibility for vulnerable communities.

Policy Recommendation

Implementing comprehensive food waste reduction policies and initiatives in the hospitality industry is vital for sustainable development and ensuring a resilient food system. Our policy recommendation is centered around a multi-faceted approach that combines education, measurement, collaboration, and technological advancements. By adopting these strategies, policymakers can effectively address the urgency of food waste reduction in the hospitality industry and reap its numerous benefits.

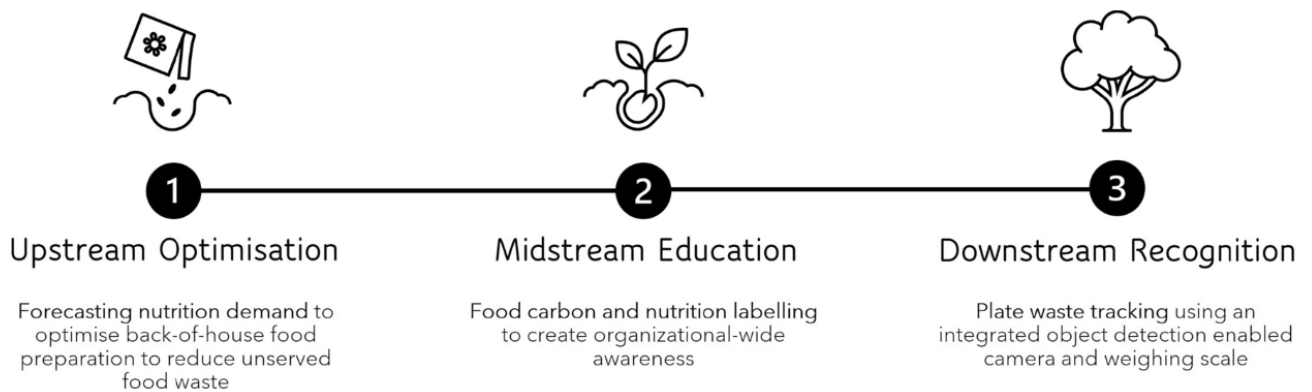


Figure 1. Three streams of decarbonisation for reducing life cycle GHG emissions from food waste: upstream optimisation, midstream education, downstream recognition. I Kit Cheng and Kin K. Leong. 2023. "Data-driven decarbonisation pathways for reducing life cycle GHG emissions from food waste in the hospitality and food service sectors." *Nature*. January 3, 2023. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-27053-6>.

Education and awareness campaigns will equip hospitality businesses, employees, and consumers with the knowledge and tools needed to make informed decisions and adopt waste-reduction practices. Training programs can provide guidance on portion control, proper food storage techniques, and creative ways to repurpose surplus food, empowering individuals to take responsibility for minimizing waste. According to a survey involving 32 participants from different hotel brands, including chefs, food and beverage directors, and general managers, it was evident that the participants highlighted a significant demand for specific training and education in food waste management, an area that is currently deficient within the hospitality industry (Hotel Kitchen 2017).

To track and measure progress, policymakers should establish food waste tracking and reporting systems in the hospitality industry. This standardized approach will enable businesses to accurately monitor and quantify their waste generation, identify areas of improvement, and set reduction targets (fig. 1). By collecting and analyzing data on food waste, policymakers can develop evidence-based strategies and interventions that effectively address the issue.

Encouraging food donation and redistribution is another critical aspect of reducing food waste (Cheng and Leong 2023). Policymakers should facilitate partnerships between hotels and local food banks,

shelters, or nonprofit organizations to ensure the safe and efficient redistribution of excess food. Clear guidelines and protections from liability concerns should be established to incentivize businesses to participate actively. Tax benefits or recognition programs can further encourage their engagement, promoting a culture of responsible food management.



Figure 2. Food waste occurs across the entire food supply chain. Andrea Willage. 2023. "5 ways tech can help reduce food waste." *World Economic Forum*. February 13, 2023.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/food-waste-technology-sustainable-food-systems/>.

Investing in technology and innovation is key to enhancing food waste reduction efforts in the hospitality industry (fig. 2). Policymakers should support research and development of technologies that streamline inventory management, optimize purchasing and production processes, and extend the shelf life of perishable food items. Smart inventory systems, predictive analytics, and novel preservation techniques can contribute to minimizing waste throughout the supply chain and maximizing resource utilization. Companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, have created a food freshness platform that employs connected sensors along the supply chain to track and evaluate the quality and freshness of food items (Willage 2023). By integrating real-time data into a digital model of the supply chain, the platform can simulate diverse environmental factors, including temperature, humidity, air quality, and light intensity, which influence the longevity of food. This capability allows the platform to predict the shelf-life of specific food products, such as potatoes for various uses and offers valuable insights for suppliers and retailers to enhance their handling and ripening procedures based on this information.

By implementing these evidence-based recommendations, policymakers can foster a significant shift toward reducing food waste in the hospitality industry. The urgency to act is evident from the environmental, economic, and social implications associated with food waste. Addressing this issue will lead to substantial greenhouse gas emission reductions, preserve natural resources, and improve food security by redirecting surplus food to those in need. Additionally, it offers an opportunity for the hospitality industry to enhance its reputation as a responsible and sustainable sector, attracting environmentally conscious consumers and fostering long-term economic growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reducing food waste in the hospitality industry is a critical imperative that demands immediate attention. The evidence supports the urgency of the issue, highlighting its environmental impact, economic costs, and potential for mitigating climate change. Implementing comprehensive policies and initiatives focused on education, measurement, collaboration, and technological advancements will yield tangible benefits, including a more sustainable food system, improved resource efficiency, and enhanced food security. Policymakers have a unique opportunity to drive transformative change by promoting and supporting food waste reduction strategies in the hospitality industry. By doing so, they will contribute to a more sustainable future for all.

References

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