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Rescuing restaurant food waste one surprise bag at a time

Food waste is a big problem — but a smart fix is helping Aussie restaurants cut waste and recover lost revenue, with more venues getting on board.

By Maida Pineda | September 16 2025 | 4 min read



Photo credit: Too Good To Go

Australians waste about 7.6 million tonnes of food each year, 70% of which is perfectly edible. While it's unclear exactly how much Australian restaurants contribute to the nation's food waste problems, a 2016 report found that Australian cafes and restaurants produce more than 260,000 tonnes of food waste annually. They estimate about 120 grams of food binned for every plate served. Food waste in Australia accounts for \$36.6 billion each year.

Food waste means revenue loss for restaurants. Aside from the financial loss, there's also the environmental impact. Food waste contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. It requires substantial water and land resources to produce food that is wasted.

What happens to the food waste in Australian restaurants, then? OzHarvest estimates that only 0.2% of Australia's surplus food is donated; the majority still ends up in the landfill. With the goal to halve the country's food waste by 2030, Australia still has a long way to go.

One company committed to cutting down food waste and revenue loss for restaurants and cafes is Too Good To Go. The app connects customers, giving them the opportunity to rescue surplus food from restaurants and cafes. What began in Copenhagen in 2015 as an effort by a group of young entrepreneurs to find a solution to the massive amounts of food wasted in buffet restaurants in Denmark has expanded to many countries, including Australia in 2024.

Local businesses getting involved

According to Country Director for Australia, Joost Rietveld, Australians have welcomed *Too Good To Go* with open arms: "We just hit more than half a million registered users, and more than 1,500 businesses in Australia, with those numbers growing each day. This includes some iconic Australian businesses that everyone knows and loves, including Baker's Delight, Muffin Break, and Roll'd, to name a few.

"The impact of this constantly growing community has been huge, with the results speaking for themselves – we've just hit 500,000 meals saved (the equivalent of avoiding CO2e from 8,903 flights from Sydney to Melbourne)."



Photo credit: Too Good to Go

By browsing through the app, users can purchase surprise bags filled with fresh sushi, salads, sandwiches, arancini or pizza by the slice, pastries, cakes, wagyu birria beef, chipotle citrus chicken, pulled pork with chipotle, frozen yoghurt, gelato, chicken nasi lemak, or wonton dumplings– the options are endless. The surprise element makes it fun; only a few bags are available each day, and with a limited time window, these are highly coveted by users in the app. Surprise bags start at \$5.33 and range up to around \$9.99.

Users of the app become active participants in rescuing perfectly edible food from being binned. From a restaurant business perspective, Rietveld points out: "It's a powerful tool for our partners to simplify surplus food diversion and potentially recoup costs that would have otherwise been thrown in the bin. While we don't guarantee that businesses can recoup the entirety of their lost costs, our surprise bags strive to help close this gap for businesses significantly."

A win-win for everyone

Apart from recouping food costs, restaurants have reported other wins. Rietveld shares: "In speaking with our partners, many have expressed that, by using the app, they are seeing return customers coming back to try new products, or to even purchase another Surprise Bag! Too Good To Go helps enhance brand affinity and drive footfall, while also helping maximise profit potential and optimise costs." He adds: "In fact, 41% of customers purchase additional items when collecting a Surprise Bag. Businesses are also able to reach a whole new cohort of customers with 61% noting they only visited the store because of their Surprise Bag collection."

What makes this food rescue model different is the participation of consumers. Consumers love that they can go into their favourite local restaurant, cafe, bakery or supermarket and purchase a Surprise Bag consisting of items worth up to \$30 in value.

Rietveld points out: "From a business perspective, Too Good To Go is a win-win-win model: businesses make money from their surplus food, consumers get access to good food at great value for money, and together all stakeholders help tackle climate change by reducing food waste."

There are other apps like Olio and Karma connecting Australian consumers with surplus food at discounted prices. When asked about their competitors, Rietveld confidently says, "The biggest competitor for Too Good To Go in Australia, and globally, is the bin. We are on a mission to reduce the current 7.6 million tonnes of food that is wasted each year. We don't view other companies with similar concepts as competitors because we are all striving for the same goal."

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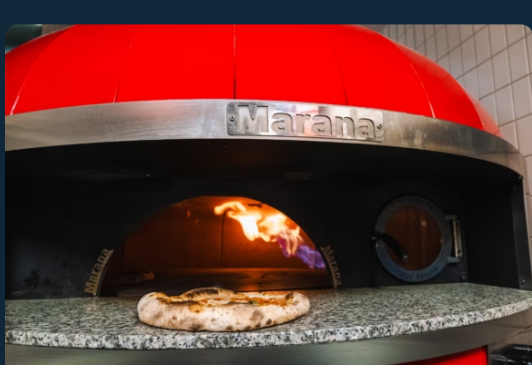
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