



# The ultimate guide

How to reduce food waste  
in the hospitality and food  
service sector

Save money. Tackle climate change.  
Show your customers that you care.



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European Regional Development Fund  
Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future



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### We can help you prevent food waste

If you're a food and drink business, we can help you prevent unnecessary food waste.  
Call 01786 433 930 or email [food.drink@zerowastescotland.org.uk](mailto:food.drink@zerowastescotland.org.uk) and ask about our free food and drink opportunity assessments.

[www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/FoodDrink](http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/FoodDrink)



# Introduction

If your business is throwing out food then it's costing you money, and it's having a big impact on society. But don't worry – this guide is here to help

If you're in the food business, you'll know all about food that goes to waste. You might think it's difficult to avoid food waste. After all, you can't force your customers to eat all the food on their plates, and surely peeling vegetables will always cause that food caddy to bulge a little?

At Zero Waste Scotland, we're actively supporting small and medium food businesses by conducting free audits to identify where they could reduce waste. We've seen that there are simple tips and tricks that can shave significant slices of food from your waste pile.

Many of these cost nothing to implement, or at least very little. For example, simply reassessing portion sizes can be surprisingly effective – one Indian restaurant is already saving £5,000 a year making adjustments in this way. Listening to your staff, and

asking for their ideas and input, can work wonders. Kitchen staff and servers will see where waste is coming from and will have suggestions as to how to reduce it. A practical way of preventing food ending up in the bin is for your serving staff to offer your customers a doggy bag for their leftovers. Then there are the bigger investments in modern technology you might not know about – for example, filtration fryers or vacuum pack machines – which can reduce waste and make your business more effective. You might need to fund your project but the payback will be worth it – especially when we can help you to access Government funding including the interest-free, unsecured [SME Loan](#).

So here is our ultimate guide to reducing food waste in the hospitality and food service sector. We've kept it short and in plain English.

**But if you need more help, or a more detailed assessment of opportunities for saving waste in your business, call us on 01786 433 930 or email [food.drink@zerowastescotland.org.uk](mailto:food.drink@zerowastescotland.org.uk) and ask about our free food and drink opportunity assessments.**





# The target

The Scottish Government has set a challenging food waste reduction target as part of Making Things Last: A Circular Economy Strategy for Scotland.

The target is to reduce food waste in Scotland by 33% by 2025.

Hospitality and catering companies in Scotland can make a significant contribution to this reduction while driving down business costs, maximising profits and showcasing the environmental credentials of the industry.

The cost of food waste from the UK hospitality and service sector was estimated at over £3.2 billion in 2018<sup>1</sup>. The equivalent of 106 million meals are discarded every year in Scotland. That's one out of every six meals served.



<sup>1</sup> WRAP (2020) UK progress against Courtauld 2025 targets and US Sustainable Development Goal 12.3. Available at: [https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Progress\\_against\\_Courtauld\\_2025\\_targets\\_and\\_UN\\_SDG\\_123.pdf](https://wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Progress_against_Courtauld_2025_targets_and_UN_SDG_123.pdf)





**33% by 2025**

**let's stop wasting food, together.**

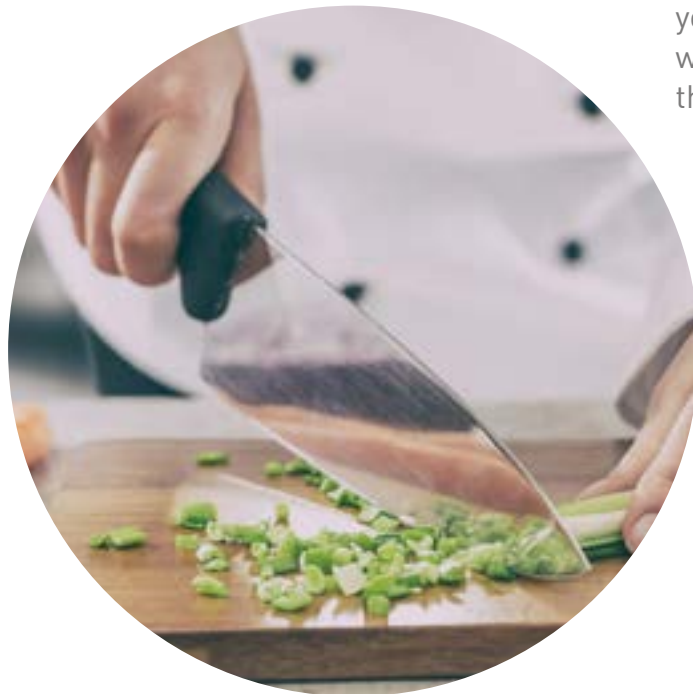
# Why reduce your food waste?



Reducing food waste makes good business sense in a world of finite resources and increasing financial pressures. Don't believe us? Read on...

Throwing away food is costing you money. It's estimated that a 240-litre wheelie bin filled with food waste costs around £151 for food purchase and waste disposal. If you're filling one wheelie bin with food waste every week, it's costing you more than £7,852 a year.

Then there's the cost of preparing and cooking the food, paying staff to work with the food, and dealing with the packaging.







# Saving

If saving money isn't enough, here are a few other reasons to reduce food waste

## Save time while staying legal

All food businesses producing more than 5kg of food waste a week must segregate their food waste for collection unless they are under the rural exemption.

## Save water, energy and carbon

Growing, producing and transporting food uses huge amounts of water, fossil fuel and energy – all things we can't afford to squander.

## Help Scotland meet its ambitious food waste target

Scotland is committed to reducing food waste, by 33 per cent by 2025 and by 50 per cent by 2030. We can do it if we all do our bit.

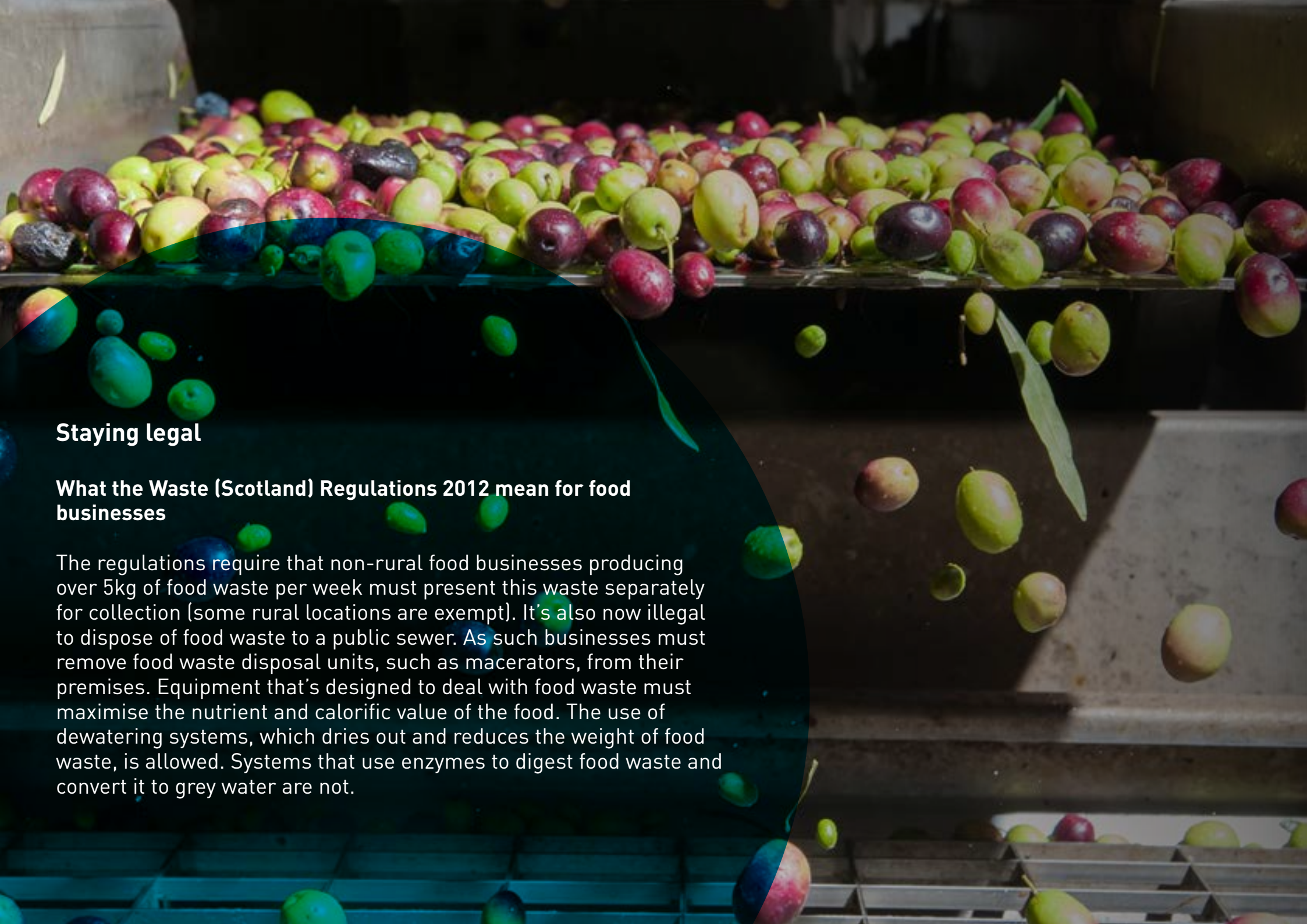
## Divert from landfill

Food waste in landfill breaks down into methane, one of the most damaging greenhouse gases.

## Your customers will love you

People are becoming more concerned about climate issues and more discerning in their choices. Reducing food waste shows that you care.





## Staying legal

### What the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 mean for food businesses

The regulations require that non-rural food businesses producing over 5kg of food waste per week must present this waste separately for collection (some rural locations are exempt). It's also now illegal to dispose of food waste to a public sewer. As such businesses must remove food waste disposal units, such as macerators, from their premises. Equipment that's designed to deal with food waste must maximise the nutrient and calorific value of the food. The use of dewatering systems, which dries out and reduces the weight of food waste, is allowed. Systems that use enzymes to digest food waste and convert it to grey water are not.





# Preventing food waste

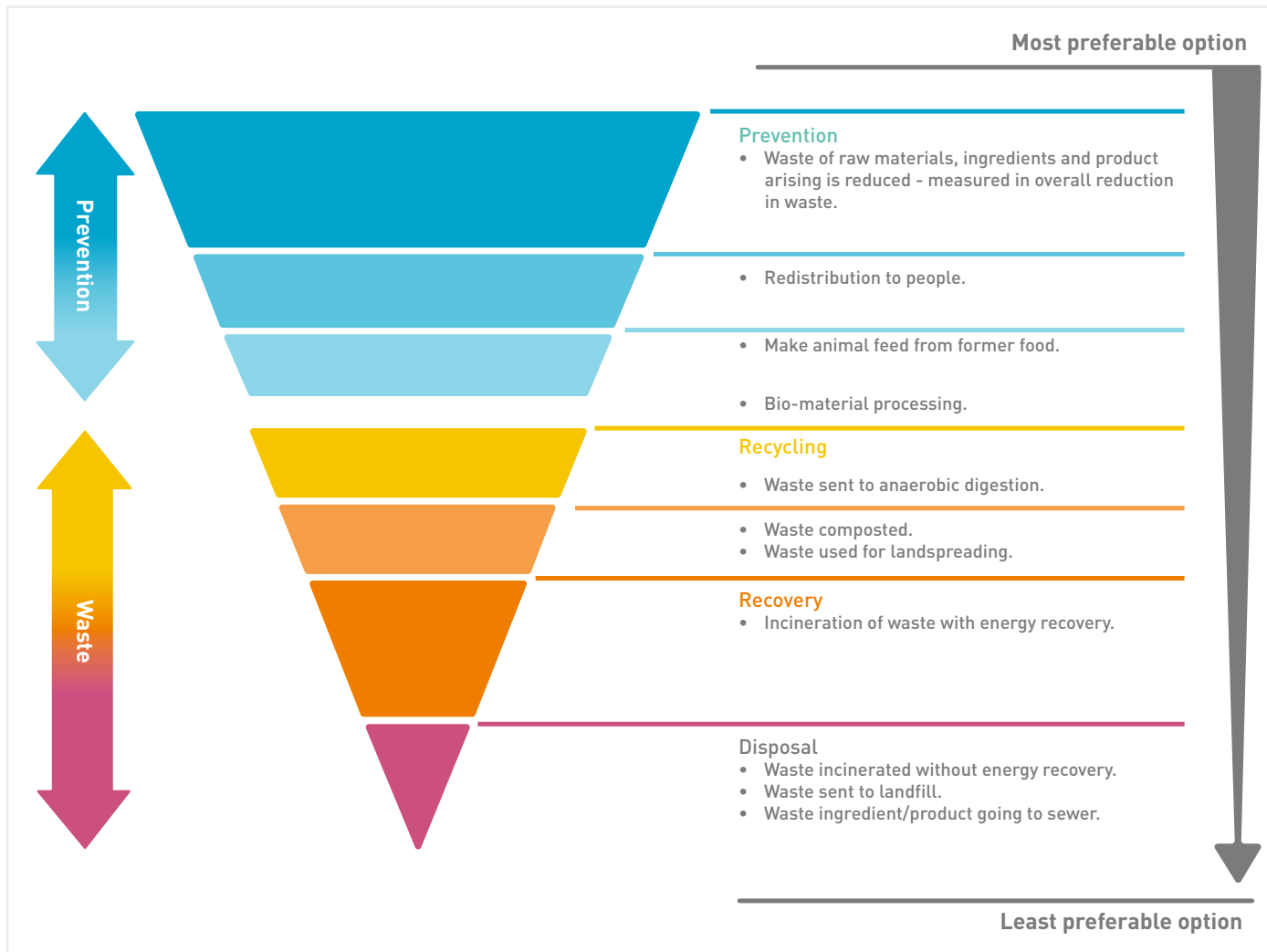
The best way to deal with food waste is to prevent it from happening in the first instance. We'd like to share some advice and our top tips for preventing food waste in your business.

Preventing food waste sits at the top of the food and drink waste hierarchy (see diagram on page 10). It's the holy grail of food waste management. The food you don't buy and don't cook will never be wasted. Preventing food waste therefore maximises financial and carbon savings by preventing raw materials being used in the first place.

The next option is to redistribute food to humans or animals. If that can't be done, food waste can be recycled using systems such as anaerobic digestion or composting. Disposing of food waste to landfill is the worst course of action you can take. Avoid it if you can.



# Preventing food waste







# Top actions for preventing food waste

More top tips for preventing food waste in your business.

## Monitoring food waste

Monitoring and measuring food waste is a great way to identify the sources of waste and track progress of your waste management techniques. The 'three-bin' approach works well and collects waste from three areas: preparation, spoiled food and customer plates. Once you've identified the hot spots for food waste, you can implement targeted reduction measures and monitor their success.

We'd like to share some advice and our top tips for preventing food waste in your business covering the following areas:

- Menu design, purchasing and ordering
- Storage and operational efficiency
- Cold storage
- Handling and preparation
- Portion control and plate waste
- Get your staff on board





# Menu design, purchasing and ordering

Careful menu design is one of the most effective ways to reduce food waste.

**Rationalise the number of ingredients across the menu**

For example, use one ingredient cooked in different ways across a number of dishes.

**Have a 'chefs special' each day**

To help use up leftover ingredients in a flexible and creative way.

**Work towards 'just-in-time' delivery**

Rather than pre-ordering large quantities of perishables. This ensures that you only order what you need and will help to minimise storage costs and spoilage.

**Keep the menu simple and consider regular menu updates**

For example, remove dishes that are proving less popular.







# Storage and operational efficiency

How you store, and knowing your best before dates, can make all the difference.

## **Storage of food**

Store fresh products and raw ingredients in the most appropriate environment to increase their usable life. For example, store cucumber and eggs at an ambient temperature instead of in the fridge.

## **Rotation**

Continually rotate produce by putting the newest product at the back of the shelf so that the oldest is automatically used first. Clearly label and organise products with their 'use by' dates.

## **Still good**

Remember that 'best before' dates may mean the product is still acceptable for use.

## **Organisation**

Place all items of the same type (for example, glass jars and cans) from the same supplier on one shelf or in one area. This way you can easily see what you need and improve stock control.

## **Measure everything**

Measure ingredients using cups, measuring jugs and scales to reduce errors in ingredient quantities.

## **Avoid cooking in bulk**

Cook to order rather than cooking in bulk by scheduling preparation and cooking times for when the food is needed.



# Cold storage

Chilling and freezing food is a great way to save it for another day.

## Natural cooling

Allow food to naturally cool before placing into the fridge or freezer. This helps reduce the energy used for storage.

## Labelling

Label food with the date it went into the freezer and keep track of what's in the freezer by keeping an up-to-date list. A chalkboard on the wall, or wipe-clean board with markers, can make this quick and easy.

## Storage containers

Use airtight containers for storing food and keep labels handy to mark dates. Store dairy products, cooked meat, raw meats, fish and fruit and vegetables separately. Always follow food hygiene standards for storage.







# Handling and preparation

Use, reuse, remove excess and make sure you always measure.

## Don't cut them out

Avoid excess trimming of fish, meat and vegetables. Order pre-cut and trimmed items if it's possible and appropriate for your business model.

## Be inventive

Or, get creative with trimmings and excess to make pâtés, soups and stocks. Freeze excess berries for coulis or smoothies. Make excess bread into bread crumbs for coatings or croutons to add to soups and small plates.

## Storage containers

Use airtight containers for storing food and keep labels handy to mark dates. Store dairy products, cooked meat, raw meats, fish and fruit and vegetables separately. Always follow food hygiene standards for storage.

## Avoid peeling

Offer 'skin-on' boiled, baked and roasted potatoes to reduce the amount of waste peelings and to retain nutrients.

## Be careful of over-prepping

Try to avoid pre-preparation of food that will spoil quickly. Store leftover food safely for use the next day where appropriate.

## Measure everything

Use standardised measuring equipment, such as measuring spoons, to reduce preparation waste and keep portion sizes consistent.

## Catch every bit of food waste

Fit strainers to all sinks used for cleaning equipment associated with food preparation, serving and plate waste. Ensure solids are tipped into the appropriate bin rather than going down the drain.

## Handle with care

Handle produce properly to ensure that product shelf life is maximized – bruised or damaged fresh products will result in extra waste. Check and inspect produce on delivery and return anything that is damaged straight away.



# Portion control and plate waste

Size matters if you want to stop your customers wasting food.

## Plates size

Take a look at the size of your plates. If they're too big, it may be encouraging customers to take more food, which may be creating unnecessary plate waste.

## Smaller sides

If customers are regularly leaving their side dishes uneaten, consider serving smaller portions but offer refills or a second helping if they want more.

## Consistency

For standard portion sizes, keep these consistent and use standard spoons and measures so that portion sizes don't creep up.

## Benefits of smaller servings

Smaller portions can be appealing and help the customer to decide to purchase a second or third course, which can help to boost sales.

## Light options

Offer smaller portion sizes for toddlers, children and lighter eaters.

## Good to Go

Give customers the option to take home their leftover food in doggy bags.





# Get your staff on board

Your people are the key to reducing unnecessary food waste.

## **Make staff aware**

Talk to your staff about the importance of managing waste with regards to company policy and legal requirements such as the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

## **Make sure staff understand**

Emphasise the importance of capturing food waste – for example, scrapings from pots. Ensure that people understand what each waste bin is for and how the waste should be segregated.

## **Communicate with customers**

Ask your staff to give a clear description of meal options to customers, for example, regarding portion size or side order requirements

## **Teamwork and training**

Appoint a Food Waste or Green Champion, or even a Green Team, to encourage ownership of waste reduction. [Free training modules and resources are available online.](#)

## **Reminders**

Put up posters and signage as reminders to staff.

## **Feedback**

Ask staff for feedback on waste prevention and waste practices. Get their ideas on how to improve things.



# Good to Go is good for all



Encouraging your customers to take home their leftovers stops uneaten food from going straight into the bin. Tell them it's good to go...

According to our research, four out of ten customers would like to be offered doggy bags but are too embarrassed to ask. But offer them doggy bags before they think to ask and they're usually happy to accept. Giving your customers the option

to take away their leftovers can reduce plate scrapings by around 40 per cent. This can reduce food waste significantly over time as people become comfortable with the idea.





# Good to Go benefits

Zero Waste Scotland's 'Good to Go' boxes have brought a number of benefits to restaurants including...

## **Decreased waste costs**

Minimisation of food waste and a decrease in associated waste management costs.

## **Happy customers**

Increased customer satisfaction with the dining experience.

## **Sustainable business**

Enhancement of business sustainability credentials.

## **Customer confidence**

Increased customer confidence through use of a labelled, endorsed

'Good to Go' box as opposed to regular takeaway containers.

## **Improved turnover**

Increased sales where customers feel more confident ordering a three-course meal despite uncertainty as to whether they can finish it.

## **Be Good to Go**

The message is clear – if they don't eat it, let them take it. After all, they've paid for it. Tell your customers that your food is good to go.

For more information on the Good to Go scheme, visit [www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/GoodToGo](http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/GoodToGo)



## See our food waste tips in action

Watch the below video to hear from other hospitality businesses in Scotland and see what they're doing to reduce their food waste.





**Zero Waste Scotland offers all businesses help not only to prevent food waste but to save money, tackle climate change and to show customers that you care.**

**We're here to help.**

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