

# Preventing Food Waste at the Buffet

A Guide for Chefs and Managers



# Table of Contents

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**Intro.....3**

**Get Your Team – and Yourself – Engaged.....4**

- The Role of a Food Waste Prevention Champion..... 5
- Recruit a Co-Champion..... 6
- Introduce Food Waste Tracking and Prevention to Your Staff..... 7
- Separate and Measure Food Waste..... 8
- Separate and Measure Food Waste, continued..... 9
- Set Food Waste Prevention Goals..... 10

**Rethinking Buffet Service ..... 11**

- Communicate With Customers..... 12
  - Shrink As Demand Shrinks..... 13
  - Manage Portion Sizes..... 14
  - Be Smart About Prepping & Staging..... 15
  - Incorporate Cook-to-Order and Ala Minute Service..... 16
  - Avoid Over-Merchandising..... 17
  - Manage Unexpected Demand..... 18
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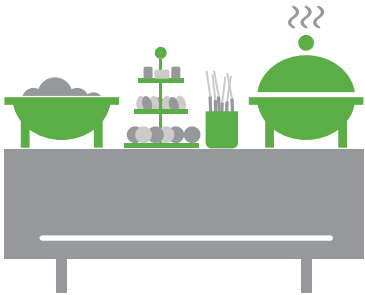
# Intro

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There are three big reasons the buffet is a key source of food waste.



First, it's challenging to match supply and demand in an all-you-care-to-eat format. The default is overproduction: better to have too much on display than disappoint a customer with too little.



Second, a buffet has to be aggressively merchandised. Half-empty pans and blank spots on the line kill the look of a bountiful buffet.



And third, when faced with that bounty, customers have a hard time gauging their own appetite and will often simply take more than they can eat, leading to excessive plate waste.

**The good news is** that you don't have to sacrifice customer satisfaction or the visual appeal of a buffet to dramatically cut food waste. Pulling best practices gleaned from Leanpath's decade-plus experience in food waste prevention, as well as intelligence from **The World Wildlife Fund** and **The Rockefeller Foundation**, we offer this guide.

**01**

# **Get Your Team – and Yourself – Engaged**

# The Role of a Food Waste Prevention Champion

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If you are the Chef or General Manager, you are best positioned to drive your food waste prevention effort across your site.

Building food waste prevention into a kitchen's culture requires leadership. There has to be someone who owns the effort and drives it every day. If you work with Leanpath, that person would be called a Champion and would be the leader of the kitchen's food waste prevention effort. To be a successful Champion, you first have to embrace the fact that every kitchen has food waste – yes, even yours – and that preventing that waste is critical to running an efficient kitchen that values food, manages costs effectively, and has a positive impact on the environment.

**4-10%**

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of food purchased at typical sites is thrown out before it reaches the plate, based on over a decade of Leanpath research.

That means if you have a **\$1M food purchasing budget**, up to **\$100,000** of that is thrown out.



# Recruit a Co-Champion

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To effectively prevent food waste, prevention has to become part of your kitchen culture.

It's not something you do once and forget about it. It has to become second nature and a part of prep, service, purchasing, and inventory. It will be challenging, it will take time, and the results are worth it. And you shouldn't try driving this program on your own. Recruit a co-champion. Choose someone you're confident will embrace the importance of food waste prevention as much as you do, who can provide continuity in the program if you're not around, and someone who can simply reinforce the message that food waste prevention is a priority in your kitchen.



## Build a Team Outside the Kitchen

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**Executives:** If they aren't already onboard, company leaders will be key in helping create a company-wide culture of sustainability and food waste prevention.

**HR:** Particularly with the high turnover experienced in foodservice, it's a great idea to have food waste prevention built into your new-employee onboarding.

**Event Planning:** Your internal event planning and scheduling team can help provide critical data to estimate demand at the buffet. Work with them to ensure accurate head count. The added benefit: a great opportunity to let guests know they are working with a foodservice provider that takes food waste prevention seriously.

# Introduce Food Waste Tracking and Prevention to Your Staff

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## Get your team onboard.

You've recruited a co-champion. You know that measurement is the path to food waste prevention. Now it's time to introduce this new way of thinking to your kitchen staff.

- 01 Tell them why food waste prevention is so important.
- 02 Let them know they are not going to get in trouble by tracking their food waste, a common concern when kitchens are introduced to food waste measurement. Let them know it's just the opposite, they will get a big pat on the back (prizes are good too!) for helping your kitchen become more efficient.
- 03 Share food waste goals at daily stand ups and encourage them to help brainstorm new ideas to help reach those goals. Share progress reports and celebrate reaching goals.



If food waste was a country it would be the **third largest greenhouse gas emitter.**

# Separate and Measure Food Waste

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Before you can fix a problem, you have to understand the problem.

To understand the problem of food waste in your kitchen you must separate and measure it. These are the critical steps to preventing food waste. It also lets your kitchen know that food is valued: too valuable to just throw away without a second thought..

**Separate:** Food waste needs to be diverted from the rest of your waste stream. Dedicate specific areas and containers to food waste. This kind of separation makes it possible to measure the food waste. And ultimately allows for intentional decisions about what happens to the food: repurposing, flash freezing, donating, composting, etc.

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*“Separating and measuring your food waste is the single most important thing you can do to start preventing future waste. Separation and measurement provides transparency and insights into the largest drivers of food waste so you can start planning for reduction.”*

**– World Wildlife Fund, Hotel Kitchen Toolkit**





# Separate and Measure Food Waste, continued.

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**Measure:** If you are not tracking your food waste and instead relying on your own perception of your kitchen's food waste problem, it's safe to say you are underestimating the amount of waste you generate. Even if you're conducting manual, paper-and-pencil tracking, odds are you're underestimating. Leanpath research shows that you can prevent three times more waste using automated waste tracking over manual tracking.

Automated tracking technology, like Leanpath provides, allows you to understand your full food waste stream, what's in it, where it came from, and why it's being wasted. You are then able to adjust operations going forward to prevent that waste.

Further, measurement allows you to understand going forward whether you are maintaining your food waste prevention standards.

**3X**

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**Prevent three times more waste**  
using automated waste tracking  
over manual tracking.

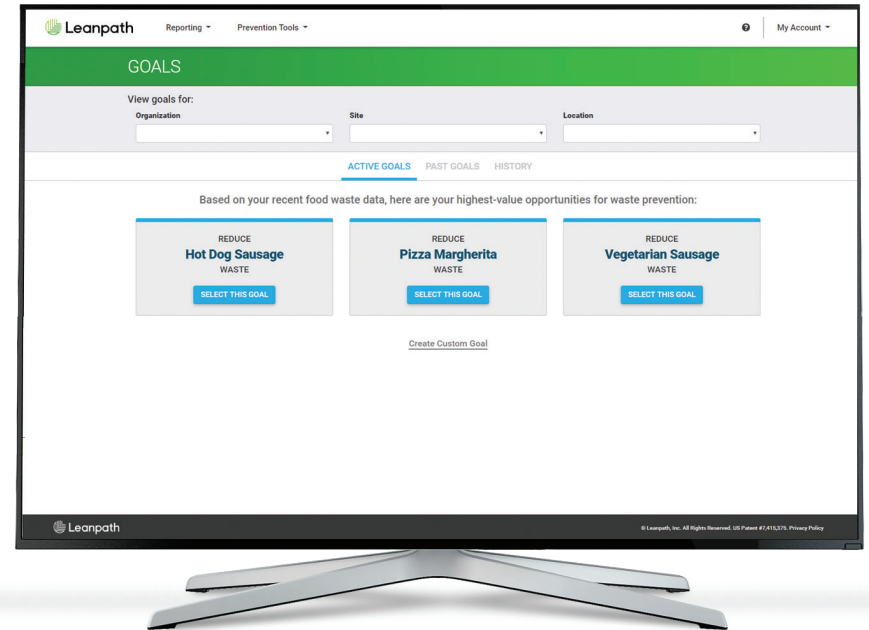


# Set Food Waste Prevention Goals

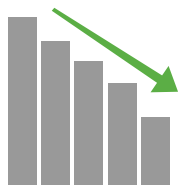
A critical part of tracking food waste is setting food waste reduction goals.

Deciding to prevent food waste is a great step, but if you want to see results, you need SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. If you want to focus your team's efforts and break down a large goal (like reducing your total food waste by 50%) into manageable chunks, set SMART goals. That might look like this: Reduce vegetable overproduction waste by 50% in two weeks. A goal like that is something a team can get its arms around and easily track progress on.

Leanpath's automated Goals Module automatically identifies food waste items to focus on for the biggest financial impact. A recent study of Leanpath clients found those who actively used the Goals Module saved an additional 3% in COGS as a percent of revenue compared with those who did not use goals.



*Leanpath's Goals Module automatically identifies top food waste items and identifies SMART goals to reduce them.*



**02**

## **Rethinking Buffet Service**

# Communicate With Customers

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You're doing a good thing for the planet by preventing food waste.

Sustainability in general, and food waste prevention in particular, resonates with customers. Share your love of food and your efforts to prevent food waste with buffet signage and other communication tools.

One family-friendly, resort-style property shared the following message with guests: "At The Hotel we are proud to collaborate with our guests to ensure the best possible buffet experience. Preparing foods of the best quality and variety, in amounts that are abundant without being excessive, helps ensure our food is eaten and not wasted."

At a 4.5-star hotel in Australia, the kitchen created house-made marmalade from orange peel waste. They incorporated the marmalade in drop biscuits served in bags as guest amenities. A sticker on the bag told the story of food waste the biscuits and marmalade represented.



# Shrink As Demand Shrinks

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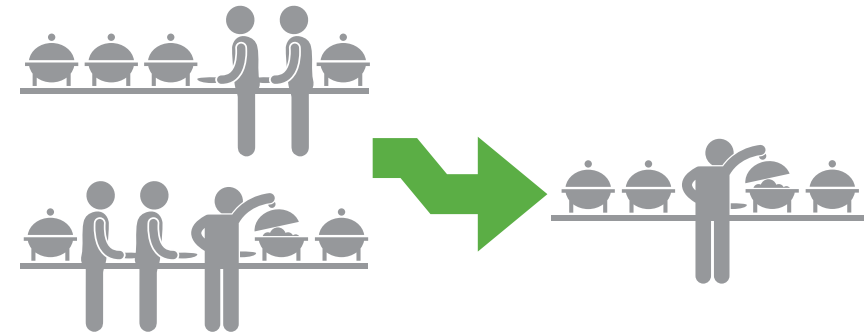
You know when it's busiest at your buffet, and you know when demand wanes.

The buffet should shrink accordingly, so at the end of service there is, by design, less potential for waste.

**Shrink pan size:** As demand declines, put out smaller pans of food. Use creative placement and merchandising to fill empty space.



**Reduce buffet lines from two to one:** Instead of the potential for two pans of food waste, the potential shrinks to one pan.

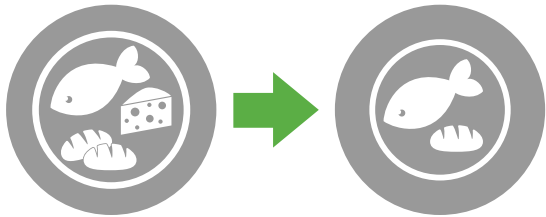


# Manage Portion Sizes

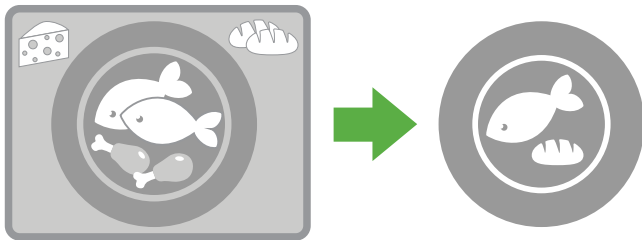
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Post-consumer food waste – the food customers take but don't eat – is a big source of waste.

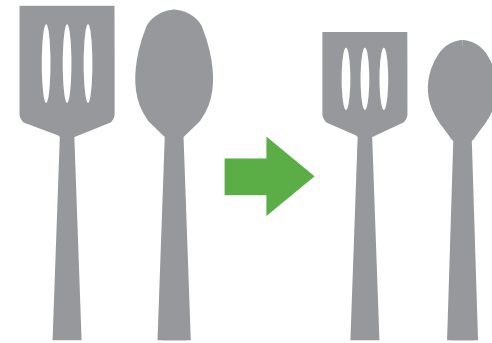
Leanpath data shows post-consumer waste can make up as much as 60% of a location's total food waste stream. This is a particular problem at all-you-care-to-eat buffets. Here are some tips to reduce it:



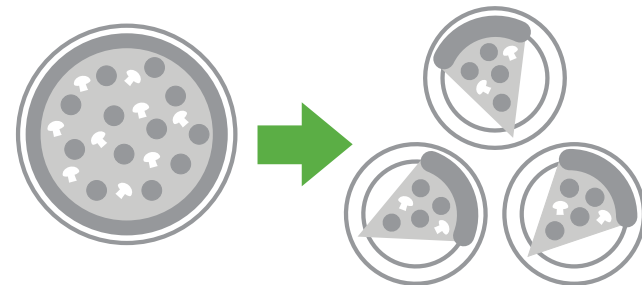
Subtly encourage customers to take less by using full-size plates with smaller usable surface area.



Go trayless. Trays are less and less the norm simply because they allow customers to take too much at once. Get rid of trays and see your post-consumer waste drop.



Use smaller serving utensils so a single serving doesn't mean a customer automatically takes more than they can eat.



Pre-portion items individually. This reduces plate waste and allows for creative merchandising.

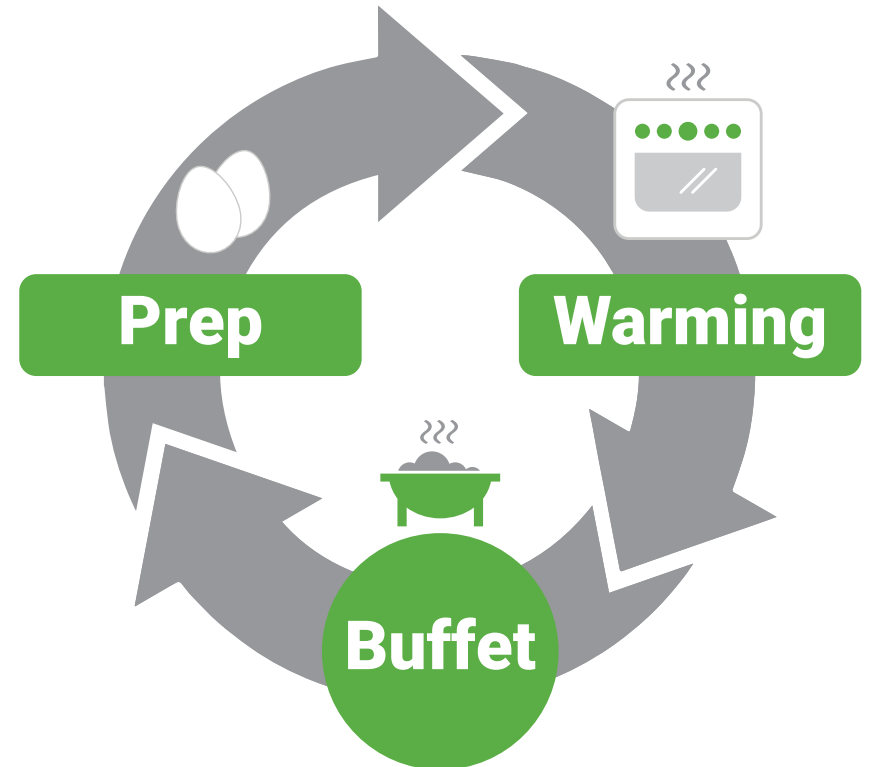
# Be Smart About Prepping & Staging

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This is about matching production to demand.

Based on predicted demand, your kitchen expects to go through six pans of scrambled eggs at the breakfast buffet today. Instead of prepping six pans and putting them in the warmer, consider the “kanban” method. Kanban is a just-in-time manufacturing process developed for Toyota where new car parts were ordered only when they were getting ready to run out, keeping less inventory on site.

In our example, the kanban system would look like this: instead of prepping six pans (and running the risk of overproducing) have one pan prepped in the warmer. When the pan on the buffet needs to be replaced, take the pan from the warmer, and only then prep another pan of eggs or half pan as demand requires.



# Incorporate Cook-to-Order and A la Minute Service

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Break up your buffet with a cook-to-order station and a la minute service.

Both strategies allow you to better control production. With a la minute, consider merchandising a plated serving of highly perishable or expensive items, like a cheese course, for instance. Instead of customers helping themselves to cheese from a platter, they order a pre-plated serving, which is kept in the cooler.

Likewise, consider a cook-to-order station to better manage overproduction or to better control portion sizes, particularly of high-cost items.

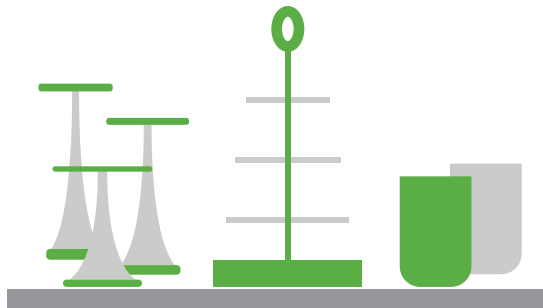




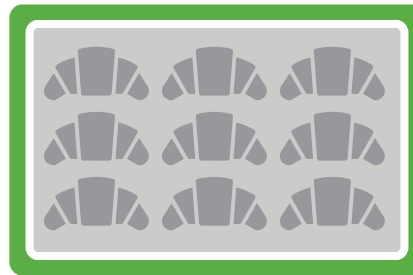
# Avoid Over-Merchandising

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A buffet has to be visually appealing, which can drive food waste if merchandising isn't managed properly. Some tips:



Use vertical serving containers. This allows you to add visual contrast on your buffet and also allows you to use less sheer volume of an item to fill space.



Display pastries in single, horizontal rows rather than in piles or bowls. You fill the same space with less product.



Separate mixed items when possible to allow for better repurposing. It also gives guests more choice while maintaining freshness. For instance, instead of serving a fruit salad, merchandise fruits in individual bowls for visual appeal and less plate waste. Repurpose individual fruits not displayed in house-made pastries or jams.

# Manage Unexpected Demand

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There are two types of unexpected demand: the first is when you run out of an item sooner than expected; the other is when a bus load of tourists happens to show up.

If sales exceed projections and you're in danger of running short, be prepared with a plan to cover. Instead of discarding back-up pans, if they are properly cooled, you can reheat and use. Pull dishes prepped for tomorrow, a soup for instance. Another idea for near end of service is to switch to cook to order/serve the guest till end of service.

Unexpected mass demand is just as exciting as it is demanding. Approach it strategically vs. panic cooking (which usually leads to waste). What do you have that are quick to prepare items that could fill in gaps? One example is various pasta noodles with choice of sauces. If you can move to a staff service model, people will naturally take a more reasonable portion when served.





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