



# How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit

### Food Waste Auditing 101

#### What is a Food Waste Audit?

A food waste audit is the process of identifying types and quantities of items in the waste stream in order to plan appropriate waste management systems. The audit typically includes an on-site project to collect, measure and record food waste data.

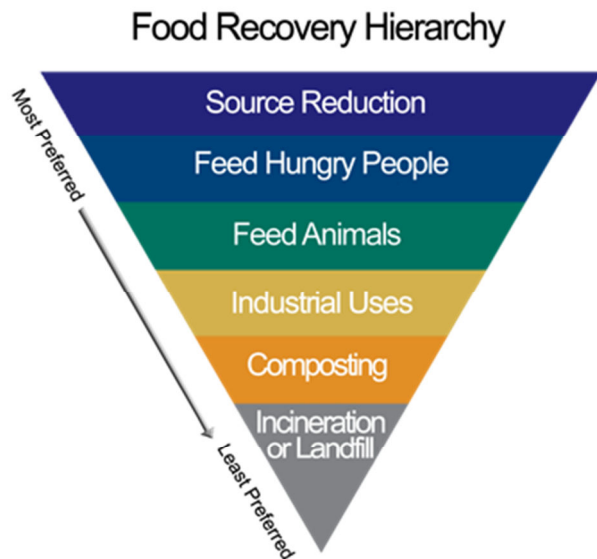
#### Pre-Consumer vs Post-Consumer Food Waste

There are two distinct types of food waste that need to be audited separately: pre-consumer and post-consumer. Pre-consumer food waste is discarded by staff and within the control of the foodservice operator. This includes overproduction, trim waste, expiration, spoilage, overcooked items, etc. Post-consumer food waste is discarded by customers/guests after the food has been sold or served. This waste is sometimes referred to as "plate waste" or "table scraps."

*Note: This guide focuses primarily on the pre-consumer food waste audit, as that offers greater opportunity for waste prevention at the source, however post-consumer auditing tips are also offered.*

#### Why Conduct a Food Waste Audit?

Auditing leads to food waste prevention. Prevention is the most powerful way to manage waste. By designing systems and policies to prevent, minimize or avoid waste in the first place, we have an opportunity to save food and labor dollars while making the largest positive impact on the environment.



*According to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) food waste hierarchy, source reduction (ie, prevention) is the number one way to reduce food waste.*



How does auditing lead to prevention? Simply put, we manage what we measure. When you conduct an audit, you establish baselines and collect information that can help identify areas to improve.

### Pre-Consumer Food Waste Audit | Step 1: Plan

#### Timing

**Select the dates for your audit.** Choose dates which reflect your normal operating conditions. Avoid holidays, weekends and adverse weather events. To get the most accurate and useful data, conduct the audit without any advance notice to front-line staff. This should prevent changes in behavior prior to the audit which could skew your data.

**Decide how often to audit.** The ideal method is to measure food waste every day. This allows you to spot more improvement opportunities, monitor improvement as well as backsliding, and raise employee waste awareness at every meal.

**Decide how much data to collect.** For pre-consumer, collect a minimum of one week of data—continuous data collection is optimal. For post-consumer, it is possible to track as little as one meal and derive benefits from your audit.

#### Participants

**Appoint a champion.** This person will drive the planning process and lead the audit, as well as the post-audit analysis. Often a chef is selected as the champion.

**Determine who will be involved.** For the audit to be most successful, the more people you involve, the better. Select a project team consisting of chef(s), manager(s) and front-line staff. Determine if you need outside assistance from consultants or your local solid waste authority.

**Assign roles.** You will need people to perform several roles: Receiver/Weigher, Recorder and Scrapper/Utility.

#### Goals

**Establish your goals.** Determine what you want to get out of your audit. Example goals include establishing a baseline and identifying opportunities to reduce waste.

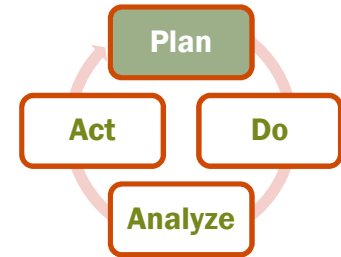
#### Tracking

**Select a data recording method.** Options include manual tracking sheets or fully automated food waste tracking systems (Tip: learn more about automated tracking systems at [www.leanpath.com](http://www.leanpath.com).)

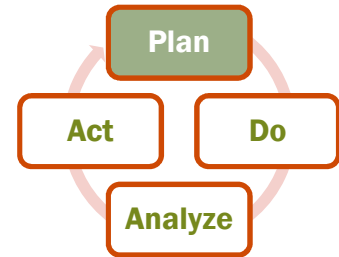
**Decide what you will measure.** For the data to be useful, you need to track at a sufficient level of detail to change behavior. At a minimum, track type of food, reason for loss, date of loss and amount. Use weight as your unit of measure—it is the easiest and most accurate way to record waste.

#### Set-Up

**Set an audit location.** Assess work flow to determine the most efficient location. Determine if you will record waste items as they occur or batch waste items to record them after a meal. Select one specific pan to use for weighing all food waste items and record its tare weight; this will be deducted later.



### Planning Notes



#### Timing

• **Dates:**

• **Duration:**

• **Repeat on:**

#### Participants

• **Champion:**

• **Audit Team/Roles:**

#### Tracking

• **Recording Method** (Paper or automated):

• **Data Set:**

[ ] Food Type (ex. Starch, Meat-Protein, Dairy)

• [ ] Loss Reason (ex. Overproduction, Expired, Trim Waste)

• [ ] Employee Name

#### Set-Up

• **Audit Location:**

• **Pan Used to Weigh:**

• **Tare Weight of Pan:**

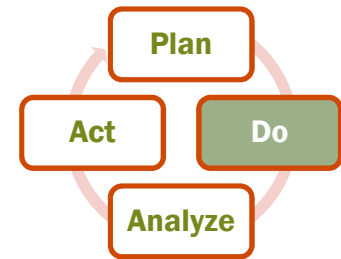
### Pre-Consumer Food Waste Audit | Step 2: Do

#### Before the Audit

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**Make sure you are prepared.** Use this pre-audit checklist:

- (DAY OF AUDIT ONLY) Announce the audit to staff at a meeting
- (DAY OF AUDIT ONLY) Post signage announcing the audit
- Remove garbage bins from less visible areas
- Minimize the number of bins overall
- Label all bins: “No Food Waste – All Waste Must Be Recorded”
- Place your scale in the planned audit location
- Provide cleaning towels at the audit location
- Post a master staff list on a clipboard (to track participation)
- Print out paper tracking sheets and number each sheet, or set-up your automated tracking system



#### During the Audit

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**Be Complete.** All pre-consumer food waste should be recorded (e.g. overproduction, spoilage, trim waste).

**Know the exclusions.** Items that should not be recorded include by-products (e.g. egg shells, coffee grounds) and non-food items (e.g. compostable disposables).

#### Tips for Recording:

- Check off employee names on a master staff list as people participate
- Record the gross weight of the item based on the scale reading (tare weight will be deducted *later*)
- Record additional data items as specified in planning stage (Food Type, Loss Reason, Employee Name)
- Discard items after weighing
- Collect data sheets regularly to avoid loss

#### After the Audit

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**Capture critical operating data immediately.** Use this post-audit checklist:

- Record the number of meals served during the audit timeframe
- Record the total sales during the audit timeframe
- Estimate the % of total waste captured – was it a very complete effort?

### Pre-Consumer Food Waste Audit | Step 3: Analyze

#### Organize

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**Add up audit totals (lbs).** Add all the weights (ideally by Food Type and also by Loss Reason) and deduct the total tare weight of the pan used. For example, if you weighed 100 items, multiply the pan weight (e.g. 2.5 lbs) by 100 and deduct that from the total.

**Estimate total loss in dollars.** Use \$1.25 per lb as a blended price for food waste.

#### Summarize

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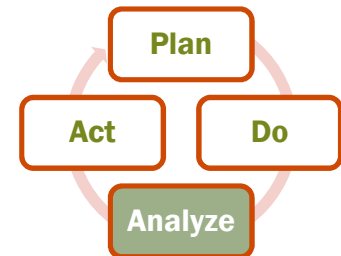
**Calculate summary metrics to create a post-audit report.** Useful metrics include:

- Annualized totals (Projected Weight and Dollars lost per year)
- Waste \$ as % of Food Purchase \$
- Waste \$ as % of Sales \$
- Weight of Pre-Consumer Waste per Meal
- Estimated Value of Pre-Consumer Waste Per Meal

#### Review

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**Hold a team meeting.** Look for trends and actionable strategies.

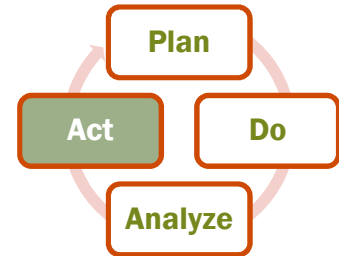


### Pre-Consumer Food Waste Audit | Step 4: Act

#### Communicate

**Communication is critical to success.** Communicate your audit learnings to key staff using this checklist:

- Post summary data on a wall
- Discuss at pre-shift meetings: share learnings, trends and opportunities
- Thank staff for participating



#### Set Goals

**Determine what changes to make.** Be specific, set deadlines and discuss regularly with your audit team.

#### Repeat

**Pre-consumer food waste should be tracked on an ongoing basis.** This creates a continuous opportunity to assess production, purchasing, menus and behavior, leading to food waste reduction and prevention.





## How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit

### Post-Audit Report Notes

**Organization**

**Audit Date(s)/Time(s)**

#### Data Summary

**Audit Weight (lbs) Collected:**

**Annualized Total Weight:**

**Audit Value (\$) Collected:**

**Annualized Total Value:**

**Food Waste Weight/Meal Served:**

**Food Waste Details:**

**Most Wasted Items (Top 10):**

**Most Common Reasons for Loss (Top 3):**

#### Waste Reduction Takeaways

**Idea 1:**

**Idea 2:**

**Idea 3:**





## How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit

### Post-Consumer Food Waste Audit | Tips for Success

#### **Pick an Approach**

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##### **Hidden Audit**

- Dining staff scrapes plates/trays
- Food waste is collected behind the scenes
- Waste bags are weighed periodically

##### **Public Audit**

- Dining staff or guest volunteers scrape food waste into clear bins in front of dish return
- Waste in bin is weighed periodically

#### **Set-Up**

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- Post prominent signage on day of the audit
- If the audit will occur outside the dish room, put out a drop cloth or tarp to avoid a mess
- Select a clear plastic container (e.g. Lexan/Cambro) in which to consolidate post-consumer food waste during the audit; record a tare weight for the container
- Locate a scale to weigh post-consumer food waste

#### **Recording**

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- Scrape plates into the plastic container
- Weigh the plastic container when full and record the data on the audit sheet
- Empty the plastic container
- Close and dispose of any garbage bags before they become too heavy

#### **Organize Data**

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- Add up the daily totals in weight (lbs)
- Write down observations about frequently wasted menu items

#### **Create Guest Awareness**

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- Post results prominently
- Consider creating a public goal/challenge



## How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit

### Food Waste Tracking Systems

Businesses manage what they measure, and food waste is no different. The key to reducing food waste begins with tracking and analysis. Tracking creates a feedback loop that focuses employee behavior and creates a culture of production excellence. The data collected helps chefs and managers pinpoint opportunities and make changes that reduce waste.



#### **LeanPath Tracker: Scale and Touch-Screen Terminal**

The LeanPath Tracker includes an integrated scale and touch-screen terminal that allow you to quickly weigh all pre-consumer food waste. Employees record the type of food discarded and the reason for disposal while software automatically captures the date and time and calculates the estimated value of the waste.

#### **LeanPath Advantage: Integrated Reporting Software**

Once you capture that waste data, your LeanPath Advantage reporting dashboard provides a high-level snapshot of how you're trending and the biggest opportunities for improvement. You can also drill-down for additional details. Quantitative data collected over time helps you make critical decisions and changes related to purchasing, menus and production to drive down food costs and prevent waste.



- **Save Food Cost by 2-4% or More**  
LeanPath helps you pinpoint where you're wasting food, so you can target specific areas to modify food purchases.
- **Reduce More Waste**  
LeanPath's reporting dashboard provides the detail you need to pinpoint the exact food, why it happened, when, who was involved, and which station it came from.
- **Raise Staff Awareness**  
LeanPath technologies empower your front-line team to become waste reduction experts by providing instant cost feedback every time they weigh in. And there's virtually no impact on labor—it takes less than a minute per day per employee.



How to Conduct a Food Waste Audit

## Food Waste Auditing & Tracking | The Payoff

*These are just 3 of the organizations that have utilized LeanPath automated food waste tracking systems to reduce pre-consumer waste.*

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“Through implementation of a waste tracking system, we have decreased our annual food waste by greater than 23 tons and **saved \$41,000 on food purchases.**”

*Mary Porter, FNS Manager, Northwest Hospital and Medical Center/UW Medicine, Seattle, Washington*

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“During this period of daily waste tracking, the sites collectively reduced pre-consumer food waste by 47% by weight and **reduced food costs per meal by 13.2%.**”

*From the Food Waste Prevention Case Study: Intel Corporation’s Cafes*

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“By simply tracking and monitoring food waste on eight college campuses allowed Sodexo employees to **trim the amount of food sent to landfill or compost by about 30 percent** in the kitchen alone.”

*Published on GreenBiz.com*

**Need audit support? LeanPath can help.**  
Email [info@leanpath.com](mailto:info@leanpath.com) or call us at (877) 620-6512.

***The path to food waste prevention starts here.***

LeanPath provides automated food waste tracking systems to help foodservice directors reduce pre-consumer food waste, positively impacting the environment and your bottom line. To learn more, visit [www.leanpath.com](http://www.leanpath.com).