

Grocery Store Surplus Food Management FAQs & Strategies: Food Waste Prevention

The Illinois Grocery Store Surplus Food Management Project is designed to support grocery stores to better manage surplus food through food waste prevention, surplus food donation and food scrap composting. Bright Beat and Seven Generations Ahead provided professional support to a local grocery store/chain by analyzing current food waste generation and recommending best practices to reduce waste, implement donation, increase diversion and gain recognition.

- 1. WHY: Why should we manage surplus food through prevention strategies instead of sending it to the landfill?**
Production, transportation, and sale of food is expensive and energy intensive. Reducing food waste saves businesses and customers money, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and conserves natural resources.
- 2. WHAT: What surplus food can and cannot be reduced? In general...**
Food waste can be reduced in almost all grocery departments. Some waste can be reduced up front through better inventory management, some surplus food can be rescued and donated to feed people, and the remaining food scraps can be recycled to return nutrients to the soil. To determine which of these is the appropriate way to reduce waste, see Food Waste Reduction: Diversion and Donation Guidelines in the Illinois Grocery Store Surplus Food Management Best Practices Guide.
- 3. HOW: How must we change operations to better manage surplus food?**
Food waste reduction can be accomplished through small changes in management techniques and standard procedures. **Improving storage techniques** can extend the shelf life of many different foods. **Upgrading inventory technology systems** can prevent the excess buildup of supplies. **Changing the cosmetic standards** to accept a wider range of appearances and blemishes will reduce the amount of produce that is wasted due to perceived "imperfections." **Educating customers** about the food waste and the best practices to prevent it will reinforce waste reduction efforts.
- 4. WHO: Who is/should be responsible for food waste prevention strategies and practices?**
Employee participation and observation are critical to successful food waste reduction practices. Management can play a key role in championing the program early on and identifying areas for improvement. Staff should be adequately trained in order to handle the day to day work of properly handling perishable food items to maintain their quality and shelf life.
- 5. COST: How much will it cost to implement food waste prevention strategies?**
There are opportunities to save money by reducing the amount of food wasted. These opportunities can be identified by carefully tracking and monitoring perishable food inventories and costs.
- 6. ISSUES: How do we balance food waste prevention efforts with customer expectations?**
Food waste is built into the business model of many grocery stores where the customer expectation is to always find fully stocked shelves. To reduce food waste means limiting what is stocked without the customer experience suffering. This requires customer education about efforts and the impact these changes will have. Having concise, educational signage about food waste prevention efforts helps increase awareness and understanding of these efforts.

For more how-to tips and case studies, visit wastedfoodaction.org -> Food Retail Toolkit

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Food:Land:Opportunity
Localizing the Chicago Foodshed

