

EPA Food Service Pathway to less food waste & better margins

There is compelling evidence of how much hospitality and food service businesses can improve their bottom line by minimising food waste. Some savings come through lower waste management costs, but the largest savings come through reducing the raw materials that end up as food waste.

Reducing this food waste is not just financially rewarding, it has the added benefit of reducing carbon emissions and contributes towards addressing climate change.

Before you decide on any course of action, you need to know what food waste is coming out of your business, where it is coming from and what causes it to happen.



THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME
The Driving Force for Ireland's Move to a Circular Economy



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



About the Pathway

Many businesses say that they “don’t waste any food, so measuring would be a waste of time”, but are then surprised once they start measuring – it soon mounts up!

The four step Pathway aims to use information you already have to first estimate your food waste in a consistent manner. This will allow you track your performance over time, to compare your business with others in your sector and identify how you can reduce food waste and improve your bottom line.

STEP 1:

Make a start, gather basic food waste data

Get started by collecting some basic information about waste being collected from your business. Ideally, every food business would have at least 3 types of bins:

- Food waste collection bin (brown bins: where you would expect to find most of the food waste)
- Mixed general waste (it is quite common for food waste to end up in the general waste in food service businesses)
- Recycling bins (unfortunately some food waste can find its way into the recyclable stream, particularly food residues within discarded food packaging)

Having a dedicated food waste service is required by law and, when used properly, provides you with accurate food waste information and allows this food waste to be used in a circular economy.

Collect your waste bills for the last year. Check these to see if you are billed by lift or by weight. Food waste is usually measured in tonnes so weight-based data is ideal. All waste contractors now have on-board weighing systems, so if you are paying by lift ask for your weight data for each type of waste bin. You are entitled to this information and it is far more accurate to use weight data than to estimate your food waste from the number of bin lifts.

NOTE: in situations where there are shared or centralised waste management services (e.g. contract caterer on a business site, restaurant in a shared commercial building) gathering these data may not be initially possible. Ideally a separate collection, with dedicated waste reporting for the food service activities, should be organised. Otherwise, it will be necessary to do some form of measurement of the waste generated in order to track and monitor food waste volumes.

STEP 2

Review and improve your data

Once you have your annual waste bills it is time to collate them for the whole year. Arrange them by date, for each bin type, in a basic spreadsheet and then check for any gaps in the bills you have. This might be due to missing records, a switch-over between contractors or even missed collections so you may need to get in touch with your waste contractor to deal with any queries.

Often waste contractors can run an annual waste report off their system for you (or have online billing facilities). These can be an easy way to gather your annual waste data.

Once you have these, add up the totals for each bin type over the year and enter the results in our **Touchstone Report**.

If you can only obtain records for the number of bin uplifts, you will need to estimate the typical weight of waste per uplift for each bin type. We have provided rough estimates for the typical weights of different bin types below. Please note that these are average weights and you should always try and get weight based information from your waste collector.

	Food Waste	General Waste	Recyclables
140 L	80 kgs		
240 L	135 kgs	34 kgs	14 kgs
660 L	-	95 kgs	40 kgs
1100 L	-	154 kgs	66 kgs

These weights are averages and assume that bins are at least 80% full. If you are paying by lift, ensure that your bins are full when being collected – otherwise you will be paying more than you need to.



STEP 3 Establishing your food waste estimate

Using the information gathered in Step 2, it is now time to estimate the total annual food waste quantities for each bin type.

For food waste bins it is straightforward - we assume that all contents are food waste.

However, for mixed waste and recycling bins, even where businesses have food waste bins, significant volumes of food waste still end up in the wrong bins.



It has been found that food waste can account for up to 50% of the mixed waste and 25% of the recyclable wastes so these need to be accounted for in the food waste estimate.

In order to do this you can:

- Do your own assessment: though it takes a bit of time, businesses who examine their wastes through an internal waste assessment establish a full understanding of their food waste and how their waste management systems are working
- Though not as accurate, an easier option is to do this through visually checking your bins over a few weeks. When doing this make sure to look at the internal bins (to check for proper segregation at source) and also the waste management area bins (to ensure that wastes end up in the correct bins). Having done this, apply your best estimate for the proportion of food waste found in general waste and recycling bins.
- As a last resort, you can use the default factors that have been established from national studies of food service mixed waste bins – these are included in the **Touchstone Report**.

Once you have done this, record the total food waste for each bin type, and the method used, in the **Touchstone Report**. Also include any other destinations for your food waste such as:

- donations of food surplus to food charities
- food waste given to animals
- any on-site management (e.g. composting)

STEP 4 Refine, update and continue

Much of this initial work involves gathering the information that you already have and reporting it in an organised and consistent way. However, this should be the start of a process that continues, refines and begins to involve the whole team.

If you find food waste in your general waste and recycling bins, then you can reduce costs quickly through better segregation. This will also improve your food waste estimates as more of the food waste is correctly placed in the brown bin. This will also reduce your general waste disposal costs and also benefit the environment.

Keep adding data to your internal waste records - if you can improve your data during the year, then update your food waste estimates as improved information becomes available.

Review the quantities of food waste over time and compare how these change in relation to business activities and any actions that you take to reduce food waste. Using these will help you monitor for waste reduction and progress towards targets.

For more please visit Foodwastecharter.ie and fill out the **Food service Touchstone Report** to get a compilation of estimates on your waste in our easy to use spreadsheet. No calculators needed!



Next steps:

Food waste has significant environmental implications but, for your business, it can have a serious impact on your margins. It has been found that over 60% of food coming out of food service businesses is potentially avoidable and the cost of this to your business is ~€3 per kg (this is purchasing costs only).

You can now use your initial food waste figure to estimate the true cost of food waste for your business. Multiply your annual tonnage by €3,000 and this will provide an indicative cost of purchasing the avoidable fraction of your food waste.

For more information on food waste from different sectors see the following resources on foodwastecharter.ie

Hotels-Daily Factsheet



Full-Service-Restaurants



**ACROSS THE IRISH FOOD SERVICE SECTOR
APPROXIMATELY TWO-THIRDS OF FOOD
WASTE IS POTENTIALLY AVOIDABLE.
TOTAL FOOD WASTE EQUATES TO AN
ANNUAL COST WELL IN EXCESS OF
€300 MILLION FOR THE FOOD
SERVICE SECTOR AS A WHOLE.**

Hotels-Function



Less Food Waste More Profit



Irish-Case-Studies

