

# CAFÉ FOOD WASTE ACTION PLAN

Summary 2024







This Sector Action Plan provides valuable insights into food waste reduction for cafés.

End Food Waste Australia creates Sector Action Plans as a key tool to reduce food waste through collaboration across the supply chain, acknowledging the unique challenges for different sectors and the mix of systemic change and individual action that will help Australia reach the goal of halving food waste by 2030.

This Sector Action Plan is part of a wider suite of Foodservice Sector Action Plans and is supported by research conducted through the End Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre.

Learn more:  
[endfoodwaste.com.au/sector-action-plans](https://endfoodwaste.com.au/sector-action-plans)



# WHY END FOOD WASTE?

When we reduce food waste, we are saving money, saving food to feed people and helping the environment.

Australia produces high-quality food that the world wants, yet one third of food is wasted globally.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, an average café's food waste fills more than 60% of the bin.<sup>2</sup>

Café culture might be one of the great pleasures of everyday life in Australia, but we need to work together to make it sustainable which includes finding solutions to stop wasting food.

## FOR THE PLANET



If food waste was a country, it would be the **third largest** emitter of GHG emissions after the USA and China.<sup>6</sup>

### FOOD WASTE FEEDS CLIMATE CHANGE.

**Up to 10% of global GHG emissions are caused by food waste<sup>7</sup> - more than the emissions from aviation, plastic production and oil extraction combined.**

**A landmass the size of Victoria is used to grow food that ultimately goes to waste in Australia.<sup>3</sup>**

## FOR PEOPLE

**3.7 million** 

Australian households (36%) experienced **food insecurity in last 12 months**. That's more than the number of households in Sydney and Melbourne combined.<sup>4</sup>

**Fighting food waste is fighting hunger.**

## FOR INDUSTRY PROFITABILITY

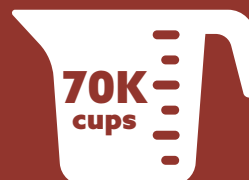
EVERY YEAR, AUSTRALIA WASTES:

**7.6 million** **TONNES OF FOOD,** **\$36 billion** **COSTING**  
70% of this is edible<sup>3</sup>



The Australian hospitality industry creates over **1.2 million tonnes** of food waste every year<sup>3</sup> or **16%** of Australia's food waste.<sup>3</sup>

Each year a typical café generates a volume of food waste equivalent to **70,000 cups** of coffee per employee.<sup>2</sup>



For every dollar spent by industry to reduce food waste, hospitality will receive **\$9.50 in direct benefits.**<sup>3</sup>

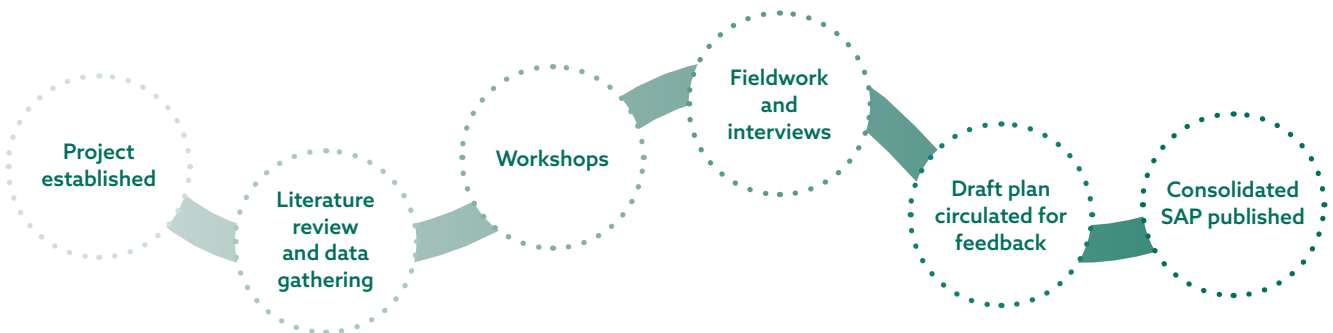


# HOW WAS THIS PLAN DEVELOPED?

End Food Waste Australia is leading the development of Sector Action Plans as a key tool to reduce food waste through collaboration across the supply chain.

This Sector Action Plan was co-funded by the New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority, Queensland Government's Recycling and Jobs Fund and End Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre as CRC project 1.1.8. The research was conducted by RMIT University, with the team receiving additional support from the university's Enabling Impact Platforms.

Project partners included the City of Yarra, the Australian Food Service Advocacy Body and William Angliss Institute, Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology, and stakeholders across the café sector from producers, distributors, local council representatives and food relief agencies.



## FIELDWORK IN CAFÉS AND BEYOND

The research project engaged with venues across Australia already implementing low-waste systems to learn from industry what practical, real-world solutions might be feasible for the café sector. The research examined the structural barriers for cafés to enact low waste solutions, such as limited training opportunities, tight spatial constraints and complex health and safety regulations, to understand what policy and regulation transformations might enable food waste reduction to become a routine part of modern café culture.

The research team conducted fieldwork in hospitality venues and along the food supply chain, spending time with industry stakeholders in café venues and along the supply chain in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Still and video images of food handling practices, customer service environments and waste systems were captured. Finally, workshops were held to identify food waste hotspots and work out potential solutions.





# THE **AUSTRALIAN** CAFÉ SECTOR.

The café sector is a key part of Australia's food culture and urban environment and is a significant economic actor, intrinsically connected to other key industry sectors including agriculture, food manufacturing, markets and retailing, distribution and waste management, as well as tourism.

This sector employs more than 140,000 people and represents the world's largest café industry per capita outside of Europe.<sup>5</sup> There are around 54,000 cafés and restaurants in Australia, making up over half of all foodservice businesses nationally.<sup>8</sup> These are mostly small businesses employing less than 19 staff, hence the focus on small-to medium-sized venues in this research.

With the cost of ingredients rising, and margins for cafés becoming increasingly slim, now is the time to reshape our hospitality sector more efficiently. The current model, where waste is a normal part of doing business, needs rethinking with the focus on preventing waste by creating:

- Robust systems around how food is prepped and stored.
- Menus designed to make it easy for customers to order just enough for their needs.
- Distribution systems to ensure food reaches people in prime condition.

If food waste cannot be prevented, or ingredients repurposed, then systems need to be in place to compost this food waste and avoid it entering landfill.





# UNDERSTANDING FOOD WASTE IN CAFÉS.

Cafés can influence food waste both directly and indirectly. An indirect influence on food waste is the creation of an expectation that a dish served in a café must always look the same, leading to pressure on suppliers and primary producers to only deliver produce that can create such uniformity, while the remainder is wasted.

Within the café environment itself, food waste emerges from three major areas or 'hotspots':

**SPOILAGE**

Food wasted in the café prior to kitchen preparation due to overordering, exceeding use-by-date, or damage.

**PREPARATION**

Food wasted during the preparation stage, including excess trim, unused portions of perishable ingredients and over production.

**PLATE**

Food wasted after reaching customers i.e., food served but not eaten.

Each of these types of waste requires a different approach to their management. The research found the following root causes for these hotspots:




**HOTSPOTS**

**ROOT CAUSES**

**1**


**SUPPLIER**



- Cultural expectation of 'perfect', unblemished produce.
- Shortage of time to develop relationships between suppliers / farmers and café operators.
- Long food delivery chain leading to reduced shelf life.
- An untapped capacity for cafés to process seasonal excess and food gluts.

**2**


**SPOILAGE**



- Extensive menus requiring a large array of ingredients.
- Shortage of time for stock control and rotation.
- Limited knowledge of how to store produce.
- Lack of effective storage containers, due to budgetary constraints.
- Unforeseen circumstances like changes in weather or cancellations.

**3**


**PREPARATION**



- Overproduction of food with a limited shelf life (such as sandwiches, pies or salads in a display cabinet).
- Lack of skills/capacity/time to use all parts of produce from 'root to tip' or 'nose to tail'.
- Small spaces that constrain long term storage, such as freezing or pickling.

**3**

**PLATE**



- Portion sizes.
- Cultural norm of leaving leftovers rather than taking them home.
- Sides, garnishes and sauces offered without asking customer.
- Food is not what the customer expected or they over ordered.





Eccles  
\$5.50

Hazelnut  
Financier  
\$4.50

Tosca B  
\$5.00



# HOW CAN WE EFFECTIVELY REDUCE FOOD WASTE IN CAFÉS?

Our research has shown that café workers and operators face considerable structural challenges when it comes to fighting food waste.

The following recommendations include solutions that cafes can enact on the ground without any expensive equipment or change to infrastructure. These are paired with recommendations for larger bodies such local, state and federal governments and training institutions, that will enable these solutions to happen, and help this culturally vital sector thrive.



Café Solutions		Larger Structural Enablers
Understand where the waste is coming from	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Separate food waste from general waste. Make sure that all staff from front of house to chefs to management know about the amount and make up of food waste.</li><li>• Learn from kitchenhands and front-of-house staff about what is being wasted. Use this knowledge to reshape your menu.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support from State/local Government to facilitate monitoring of food waste, such as subsidised Food Organics, Garden Organics (FOGO) removal, in-kitchen bins and caddies for food waste. (see <a href="#">NSW EPA Business Grants</a> or <a href="#">Queensland's ecoBIZ</a>) - <a href="#">epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/grants/business-recycling</a> - <a href="#">ecobiz.au</a></li></ul>
Low waste menu design & planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fewer menu offerings to make stock control easier.</li><li>• Ask before serving commonly wasted items (i.e., bread, salad, relish, fries) or offer as a side or extra.</li><li>• Use all parts of an ingredient ('root-to-tip' and 'nose-to-tail').</li><li>• Allow ingredient substitution for meal components such as 'seasonal pesto'.</li><li>• When there is a seasonal glut of produce, cook in batches and freeze.</li><li>• Reduce or offer choice of portion size for commonly wasted items</li><li>• Don't change your core menu too often – it takes time to create a low waste menu. Create a specials board for experiments and making use of surplus ingredients.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Government backed training and public education campaigns around how to cook and plan menus to reduce waste. (see <a href="#">NSW EPA grants</a>) - <a href="#">epa.nsw.gov.au/business-food-waste-grants</a></li><li>• Expand government subsidised programs for the provision of energy and space efficient freezers.</li><li>• Work with industry to create a website and training campaign around how to keep produce fresher, longer.</li></ul>



	Café Solutions	Larger Structural Enablers
<b>Café as an education environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate training on food waste into staff induction and ongoing development.</li> <li>• Raise customer awareness about food waste.</li> <li>• Normalise 'doggy bags': ask customers if they would like their leftovers boxed up.</li> <li>• Encourage both staff and customers to get to know producers, to increase their perceived value of food.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure inclusion of low waste and sustainability skills/knowledge in vocational training.</li> <li>• Change customer culture and expectations through campaigns and school food literacy programmes.</li> </ul>
<b>Food safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance staff food safety knowledge and expand to include processes such as pickling, freezing, and drying.</li> <li>• Make sure that staff know the why of food safety risk management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise, update and standardize food safety regulations nationwide to enable low waste practices and upcycling.</li> <li>• Review and enhance current food safety handling and food safety supervisor qualifications to include techniques to reduce food waste safely.</li> </ul>







<p><b>SOURODOUGH OR FRUIT TOAST (V, PBO)</b> house made seasonal jam, with vegemite, local honey or peanut butter</p> <p><b>MAPLE + TAHINI GRANOLA (PBO)</b> house yoghurt or coconut yoghurt, seasonal poached fruit</p> <p><b>EGGS YOUR WAY (GFO, DFO)</b> two fried, poached, or scrambled eggs, buttered sourdough toast</p> <p><b>HOUSE BAKED BEANS &amp; FLATBREAD (GFO, PBO)</b> tomato sugo, plant-based fetta, house whey flatbread, microgreens</p> <p><b>CHILLI SCRAMBLE (DF, GFO)</b> scrambled eggs, salami tapenade, seasonal microgreens, sourdough toast</p> <p><b>LEVANTINE MEZZE (V, GFO)</b> house shanklish yoghurt balls, two fried eggs, aromatic chilli oil, seasonal pickled + fresh veg, house whey flatbread</p> <p><b>POTATO RÖSTI (V, GF, DF)</b> house made, thrice-cooked potato rösti, charred capsicum + tomato caponata, fresh zucchini + radish, two poached eggs</p>	<p><b>CROISSANTS</b> victorian ham + cheddar kimchi mushroom + cheddar</p> <p><b>BREAKFAST MUFFINS</b> bacon, onion jam, cheddar, scrambled egg, plant based mayo</p> <p>halloumi, onion jam, scrambled egg, plant based mayo</p> <p><b>SIDES &amp; SAUCES</b></p> <p><b>HOUSE MADE CONDIMENTS</b> onion jam aromatic chilli oil beetroot ketchup plant-based mayo fermented hot sauce seasonal jam</p> <p><b>PASTURE RAISED EGGS</b> poached or fried</p> <p><b>HOUSE MADE</b> kimchi mushrooms whey flatbread</p> <p><b>PLANT BASED</b> avocado fetta sauteed greens fries</p> <p><b>PROTEINS</b> bacon halloumi</p> <p>Scoop of ice cream</p>	<p><b>KIMCHI MUSHROOMS FRIED RICE &amp; TOFU</b> (PB, GF, NF) crispy fried tofu, kimchi mushrooms, brown rice, charred seasonal greens, crunchy chilli oil, spring onion, fragrant herbs</p> <p><b>REUBEN (DFO)</b> peppered beef pastrami, kraut, reuben sauce, cheddar, dark rye, pickle</p> <p><b>LOADED HUMMUS (V, PBO, GFO)</b> slow roasted carrots, chimichuri, toasted seeds, crispy chickpeas, house whey flatbread</p> <p><b>JALAPENO CORNBREAD + CHORIZO (GF)</b> north carlton quality meats chorizo sausage, chipotle yoghurt, pico de gallo, grated manchego cheese</p> <p><b>MACAULAY BURGER</b> victorian beef patty, pickles, cheese, lottucco, sesame milk bun, house made burger sauce, fries</p> <p><b>SANDWICHES + SALADS (weekdays only)</b> see our display fridge for a variety of ciabattas and salads made fresh daily</p>	<p>22</p> <p>24</p> <p>24</p> <p>21</p> <p>24</p> <p>23</p> <p>5</p> <p>6</p> <p>3</p>
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Please note that a 10% surcharge applies on weekends

Owned and operated by Melbourne housing developer Assemble, Cassette is run by a passionate team that is always learning new ways to preserve, ferment and transform the produce that they work with in their café. A key part of this is that all the chefs take turns at doing the dishes. This helps them keep track of what customers are leaving on their plates – an important component in fighting food waste.

A person in a white uniform is holding a stack of five white plates. The plates contain various food items: spaghetti with sauce, fried items, vegetables, and other dishes. The person is holding the plates with both hands, and the background is slightly blurred, showing a kitchen or dining area.











# TAKE ACTION NOW.



**Start the conversation** about food waste in your venue by creating a separate food waste bin. This will allow everyone to see exactly what and how much is being wasted.

**Establish relationships** with local charities and organisations for food donation.

Bigger venues might want to measure their food waste by **weighing it and categorising it**. But for many smaller venues, just looking your food waste in the eye is enough to spark change.

## **The freezer is your friend.**

Portioned batch cooked meals, pestos, high fat cheeses, preserved meats – all kinds of things can be successfully kept in the freezer then taken out in small quantities.

Use food wastage information to **reshape your menu or your preparation techniques**. Some changes might not even need a menu rewrite. For example, if a garnish is never eaten, just don't garnish. If food is always left over, scale down the size of the meal a little.

**Preserving fruit and veg doesn't need to be complex.** Pickles are easy, delicious and fun. Food dehydrators are now much more affordable. Making jam can be made simple with the use of commercial pectin.

**Normalise** customers taking their leftovers home.

**Create shorter menus.** This will give you less stock to keep an eye on and so will reduce waste.

**Consider discounting or giving away perishable food** at the end of the day – it's an easy way to create customer goodwill, and so much better than the food going into landfill.

Some modes of food presentation – pie warmers and bain maries in particular – create food waste because they are always begging to be topped up. Is there some way you could pivot your menu away from using these? Or could you **normalise running out of food**? After all, it does show that you're popular!

Make sure everyone knows how to **store fresh produce**.

**Batch cook when produce is plentiful and cheap.** This reduces food waste at a farm level as well as doing great things for your bottom line.

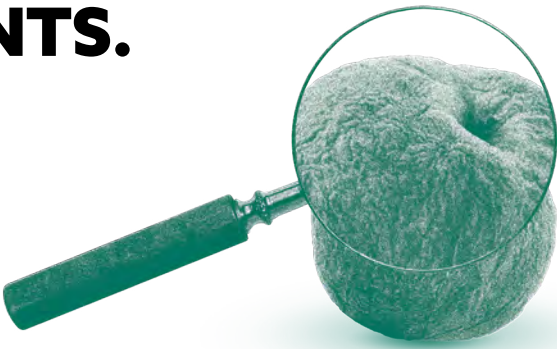


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The Cafe’s Sector Action Plan was co-funded by the New South Wales Environmental Protection Authority and Queensland Government’s Recycling and Jobs Fund. The research was conducted by RMIT University, with the team receiving additional support from the university’s Enabling Impact Platforms. Project partners included City of Yarra, the Australian Food Service Advocacy Body, William Angliss Institute and Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology Project team. We thank all industry stakeholders who participated in this project:

- Cornersmith
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  - Cassette/Assemble
  - Furrmien
  - Florian
  - OzHarvest
  - Just Food Collective
  - Open Table
  - SecondBite
- The Fermentary
  - Merivale
  - Bird Cow Fish
  - Billy Blue
  - Mucho Aloha
  - Butter
  - Famelia
  - Heathe
  - Sydney Seafood School
- Food Lab
  - Ozharvest Refettorio
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  - NE Waste
  - Impact Enviro
  - Food Connect Shed
  - Two Good
- Babs
  - Nonie’s Food
  - Bloodwood
  - Burnt Honey Bakery
  - Alphabet
  - Loop Growers
  - Neighborhood Farm
  - Lucky Duck
  - All My Friends

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