



# Smarter food management to reduce waste and save

Food waste creates added business costs

## Acknowledgement of Country

Circular economy inspires regeneration of land and rethinking the current waste and resource intensive systems we are a part of. It asks us to rethink how we can apply better practices in our businesses that prioritise community, land, and welfare of people and planet. This toolkit acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation who practice this care and have for tens of thousands of years, providing a lesson for us all to value the materials and food products in our business and supply chain, now and into the future.

## How to use the toolkits

These toolkits are designed for managers, owners and chefs who want practical, workable sustainability improvements. Each toolkit focuses on simple actions you can introduce into day-to-day operations without disrupting service. The examples show how circular economy principles can be applied in real kitchens and venues, improving efficiency, reducing waste and uncovering measurable cost savings.

Each guide covers one core area of your business: waste management, food and organics, packaging, and procurement. Use them individually or as a series. Start with the area that creates the most waste or cost pressure in your venue.

You'll find clear steps to reduce environmental impact, strengthen operational discipline, cut unnecessary spend and build a story your staff and customers can stand behind.

## Definitions

### **EMISSIONS**

Emissions refer to the production of greenhouse gases which can enter our atmosphere during the development of a product or when food enters landfill. Greenhouse gas emissions trap heat and impact our climate.

### **ORGANICS**

Food scraps and coffee grinds that go into a Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) bin to be composted instead of sent to landfill.

# Are we losing money on our food waste?



When food is wasted, venues lose ingredients, labour, time and profit. When food goes to landfill, it also creates emissions.

The good news is that there are practical steps hospitality businesses can take now to reduce waste, improve efficiency and prepare for future regulation with FOGO mandates.

# What works in practice



Reduce prep and plate wastage and spoilage



Use every part of your food products and get creative with leftovers



Upsell food before it spoils



Recycle unavoidable food waste

## Why food waste matters – The bigger picture

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ORGANICS?**  
Organics are the food scraps, coffee grinds and leftovers generated through daily operations. When recycled, organics can be turned into nutrient-rich soil for gardens, sports parks and agriculture.

Organic waste in restaurants occurs across three stages: Spoilage, preparation and plate waste.

**Spoilage**  
poor stock rotation, limited storage or unsold food.

**Preparation**  
offcuts, trimmings and unused ingredients.

**Plate**  
large portion sizes, garnishes or sides.

Here's what the numbers tell us:

**\$36.6B**  
Food waste costs the Australian economy \$36.6 billion.<sup>1</sup>

**70%**  
Australia wastes 7.6 million tonnes<sup>2</sup> of food each year - over 70% which is edible.

**\$1**  
The average cost of food waste per sale is 5.6%. That means for every \$20 meal, approximately \$1<sup>3</sup> is thrown out.

Lost food is lost time, money and opportunity.

1. <https://www.foodbank.org.au/food-waste-facts-in-australia/>  
2. <https://endfoodwaste.com.au/about-food-waste/>  
3. <https://www.foodanddrinkbusiness.com.au/news/big-audacious-food-waste-targets-driving-policy-behaviour-change>

## Why food matters

To understand what good looks like, we need to think about why food matters:

- It supports people and our communities
- It represents financial value
- Every item sent to landfill is money and effort lost
- It protects jobs and food safety when managed correctly

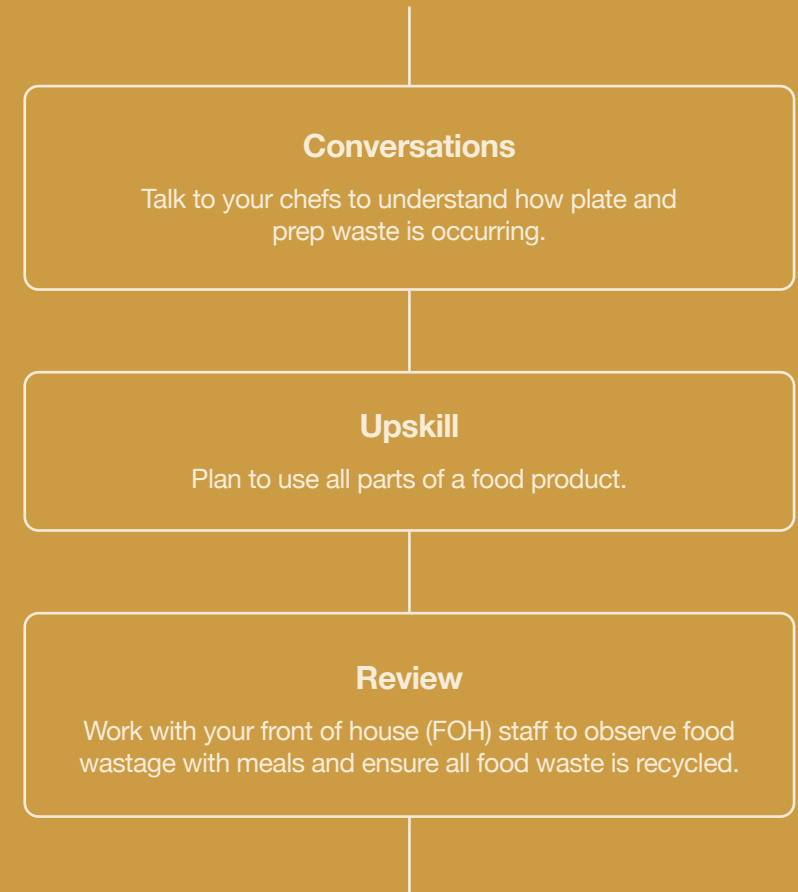


When we spoke with First Nations Response, a food security charity, they shared an important lesson about how businesses can think about wasted food. 'Food creates community. It nourishes, heals and connects. It is not something to waste'.

That perspective is a useful reminder that food should be valued, used well and, where waste is unavoidable, returned to the soil through organics recycling.

For chefs, this is a chance to think creatively, make fuller use of ingredients and build better systems around unavoidable waste.

## Start with three simple steps



In catering, around 20% of food served is discarded. That is lost value for both the business and the customer<sup>4</sup>.

4. <https://endfoodwaste.com.au/end-food-waste-australia-unveils-action-plans-to-help-slash-food-waste-and-costs-for-cafes-and-caterers/>

# Setting your team up for success

## 1. Design menus to be flexible

### GOOD

Create time for kitchen conversations about how ingredients can be used across multiple dishes.

### BETTER

Gain more value from purchased ingredients by managing portion sizes that minimise any likely plate wastage from customers.

### BEST

Track which meals generate the most waste and adjust portion sizes or menu options accordingly.

## 2. Minimise spoilage and unsold food

### GOOD

Date mark food on delivery and rotate stock so items nearing expiry are used first.

### BETTER

Prioritise near-expiry food for staff meals or for staff to take home.

### BEST

Offer unsold end-of-day items at a reduced price to customers or partner with a recognised food donation organisation to redistribute. An example is 'Too Good To Go', an app providing discounted food products from cafes/restaurants to local community members, ensuring businesses still retain monetary value from their product.

## 3. Manage your organic waste

### GOOD

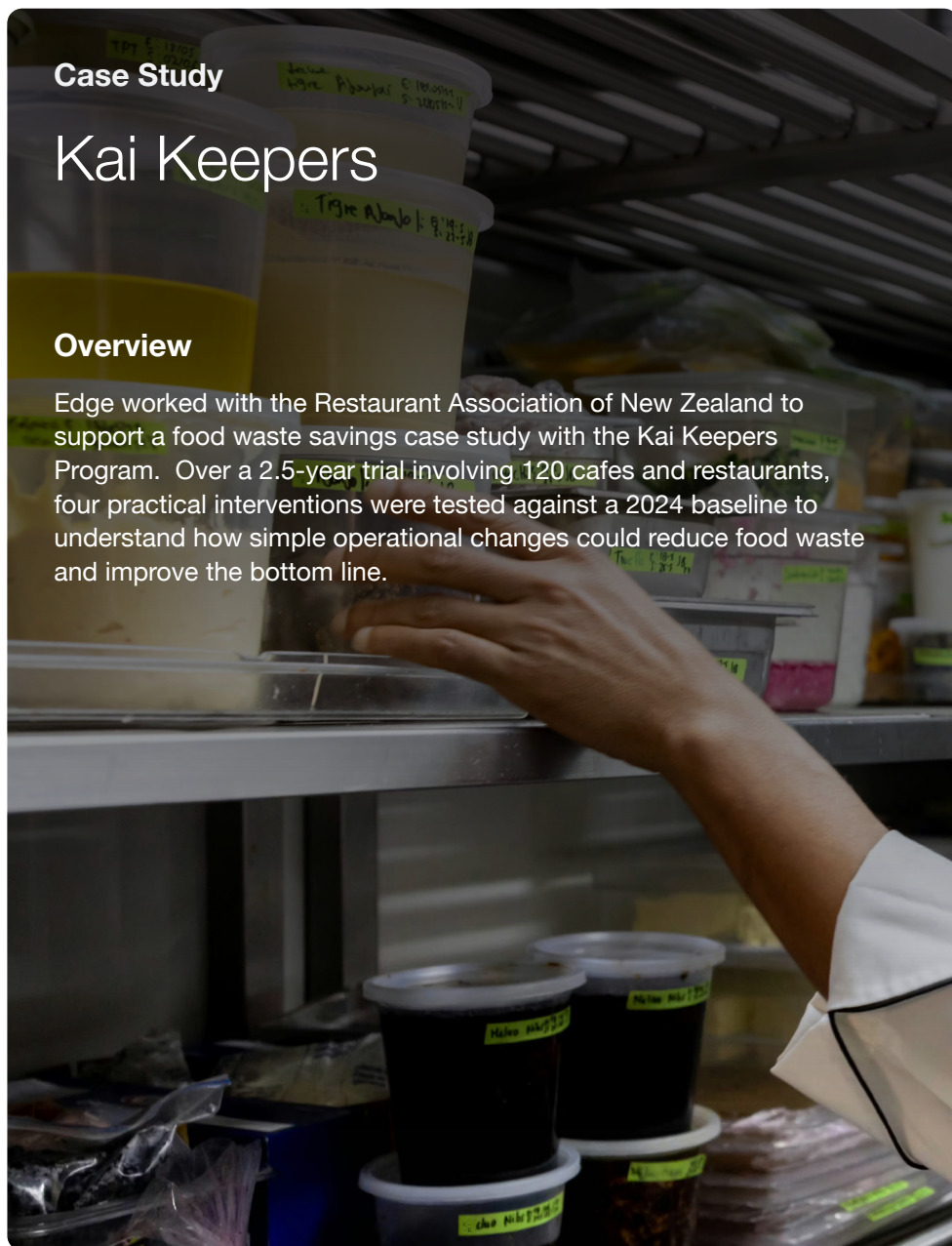
Set up a regular organics collection service with your waste provider and review whether general waste capacity can be reduced over time.

### BETTER

Place organics bins in key work areas, use liners where needed and support correct use with clear signage.

### BEST

Build expectations into onboarding and team meetings and use waste data to track progress and motivate staff.



## Case Study

# Kai Keepers

## Overview

Edge worked with the Restaurant Association of New Zealand to support a food waste savings case study with the Kai Keepers Program. Over a 2.5-year trial involving 120 cafes and restaurants, four practical interventions were tested against a 2024 baseline to understand how simple operational changes could reduce food waste and improve the bottom line.

## The Approach

The interventions included:

- Smaller portion and menu sizes to reduce plate waste and spoilage
- Reusing prep waste in new dishes to reduce prep waste through menu innovation
- Upsell at-risk stock to prevent spoilage
- Redirecting unsold food to staff to create staff perks

## The Results

Modest changes in kitchen operations can deliver meaningful savings.

### INTERVENTION 1

18.6% reduction in total food waste cover, especially from unsold food and spoilage waste. This equates to \$0.27 per cover or approximately \$8,000 to \$9,000 in savings per year.

### INTERVENTION 2

17.5% reduction in total food waste, especially in food prep waste. This equates to \$0.12 per cover or approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 in savings per year.

### INTERVENTION 3

20% reduction in total food waste cover, especially from spoilage. This equates to \$0.15 per cover or approximately \$7,000 to \$8,000 in savings per year.

### INTERVENTION 4

17% reduction in total food waste cover. This equates to \$0.14 per cover or approximately \$5,000 to \$6,000 in savings per year.

Not every intervention will suit every kitchen, but even one change can make a measurable difference. Customers valued efforts to reduce food waste and were interested in hearing about them.

## Acknowledgement of organisations supporting the Circular Economy and Sustainability Toolkits developed by Edge Impact, supported by the City of Sydney.

Edge Impact acknowledges the organisations who contributed their expertise and practical insight to the development of these toolkits. Through consultation and detailed feedback, they identified key barriers and enablers to circularity in hospitality and shared best-practice examples from their own operations.

Their input has strengthened the relevance and impact of this work.



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