



Food Waste Prevention for Community Food Security

Background

Wasted food is a growing problem in Canada and around the world. There are many reasons that food is wasted at every step from land and sea to our tables.¹

Wasting food costs everyone. In Canada, an estimated \$31 billion of food is wasted every year,² and that does not include the additional costs to process, transport, store, and dispose of this food. In HRM, organic waste management costs approximately \$8 million dollars annually. In Nova Scotia, food waste is almost half of the organic waste from homes and commercial / institutional sources³. The food wasted in our public institutions, such as schools and recreation centres, is a drain on tax dollars and limited budgets.⁴

Wasting food impacts business bottom lines. Farmers and grocery store retailers operate within tight margins and wasted food represents a loss of revenue, resilience, and competitiveness.⁵ The cost of these losses may also be passed along to consumers at a time when food insecurity and affordability of healthy foods are a significant issue within HRM.

Wasting food is also bad for the environment, generating greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to climate change as well as consuming clean water and agricultural and natural resources.

Food waste and food insecurity

Initiatives aimed at reducing food waste often look to donate excess food to community organizations.⁶ Many local groups, such as charitable and community food programs, seek to increase the amount of healthy, fresh foods available to individuals experiencing food insecurity. However, donating excess food to reduce waste ultimately does not address the root causes of food insecurity.

REFERENCES

¹Gooch, M.V., Dent, B., Felfel, A.S., Vanclief, L., and Whitehead, P. 2016. "Food Waste: Aligning Government and Industry Within Value Chain Solutions." [Value Chain Management, International](#).

²Gooch, M.V., Felfel, A., and Glasbey, C. 2014. "\$27 Billion Revisited: The Cost of Canada's Annual Food Waste." [Value Chain Management, International](#).

³Divert NS. (2017). 2017 Waste Audit Report. <https://divertns.ca/assets/files/WasteAudit2017.pdf>

⁴Gooch, M.V., Felfel, A., and Glasbey, C. 2014. "\$27 Billion Revisited: The Cost of Canada's Annual Food Waste." [Value Chain Management, International](#).

⁵Gooch, M.V., Dent, B., Felfel, A.S., Vanclief, L., and Whitehead, P. 2016. "Food Waste: Aligning Government and Industry Within Value Chain Solutions." [Value Chain Management, International](#).

⁶Mansfield, B., Power, E., Riches, G., Soma, T., Tarasuk, V. (2015). Finding Effective Solution to Reduce Food Waste and Food Insecurity in Canada. Issue Brief. http://bcfsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FoodWasteReduction_FoodInsecurityCanada_Brief_Fall2015.pdf.

This approach has the potential to “download” the problem of food waste to those most vulnerable. Short shelf-life and low nutrition may also be of concern with donated food. In addition, these local groups become responsible for transporting, storing, ensuring food safety, and disposing of foods. The resources of these organizations are often stretched to the limit so it is crucial that they are involved in creating these programs.⁷

“From a public policy perspective addressing widespread food insecurity in Canada is essentially a matter for income security and income distribution not food distribution and increased aid.”⁶

It is also important that initiatives designed to minimize food waste ensure access to culturally appropriate and personally acceptable foods that support healthy lives, social justice, dignity, equity, and self-reliance. These initiatives should also work towards the longer-term goal of healthy, just and sustainable food for all.

How can HRM help to prevent and reduce food waste?

Municipal planning is beginning to consider the role of sustainable, local food systems in reducing negative environmental impacts and improving community well-being. For example, urban agriculture, supported in both the [Green Network Plan](#) and [Draft Centre Plan](#), provides access to local food and has the potential to reduce food loss by reducing the distance food travels. To effectively store and distribute food, these plans should emphasize the importance of infrastructure to preserve and enable access to food.

Many governments are exploring ways to address food waste that consider the ecological and social dimensions of food and are aligned with Indigenous teachings of balance and respect.⁸ This circular approach begins with exploring what we need first, preventing loss, and then considering next best uses.

Food waste that cannot be prevented or more effectively distributed, could be used for high-quality compost to improve soil quality and support the growing number of community gardens and urban farms. HRM should continue to support local producers and food businesses and develop partnerships across sectors to understand the issues locally.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Measure food waste within the Municipality and across sectors^{9,10}

- 1.1 Compile existing and collect new food waste data to establish a baseline measure of waste and identify opportunities to prevent/address food waste
 - Obtain food waste data by assessing materials collected by waste management companies, materials being disposed of through sewage systems, materials processed on site, and other waste routes.
- 1.2 Work with corporate and institutional sectors and other levels of government to facilitate ongoing data collection and monitoring.

⁷ Dachner, N., and Tarasuk, V. 23 October 2017. “Diverting food waste to charitable food programs will not address food insecurity in Canada.” Policy Options. <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2017/food-waste-and-food-insecurity-in-canada/>.

⁸ Soma, T., and Li, B. 2017. Discussion paper: Food Waste in Canada. Toronto: Food Systems Lab. <https://foodsystemslab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Discussion-Paper-FSL.pdf>

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme. (2014). Prevention and reduction of food and drink waste in businesses and households - Guidance for governments, local authorities, businesses and other organisations, Version 1.0. <http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Prevention%20and%20reduction%20of%20food%20and%20drink%20waste%20in%20business%20and%20households.pdf>.

¹⁰ Government of Ontario. (n.d.). Ontario’s Food and Organic Waste Framework: Action Plan. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-and-organic-waste-framework#section-2>

RECOMMENDATION #2: Develop and implement programs to prevent and reduce food waste in households, businesses, and institutions

- 2.1 Continue to develop and strengthen education programs and promotional tools for HRM residents to raise awareness and offer solutions
 - Increase education to residents to reduce contamination in organic waste.
 - Build on and expand the [Backyard Composting Basics Workshop](#) program.
 - Share resources with the Halifax Regional Centre for Education to promote understanding among youth and support edible school gardens.
- 2.2 Develop tools and resources for voluntary collective action to decrease food waste in businesses (e.g., conducting business food waste audits, links to best practices relevant to business type).
- 2.3 Incentivize businesses and work with other levels of government to reduce food waste through fiscal measures including: taxes, fees, economic incentives, and/or subsidies (e.g., organics waste collection fees).

RECOMMENDATION #3: Ensure municipal facilities and policies incorporate strategies to effectively address food waste using a holistic food systems approach

- 3.1 Ensure distribution, storage and disposal of food are considered in plans and strategies promoting urban agriculture.
 - For example, the Green Network Plan's objectives on promoting working landscapes for rural and urban agriculture and food security would be strengthened with a recommendation to prevent food waste.
- 3.2 Ensure design options for new organic waste facilities explore creative solutions to create small amounts of high quality compost available for community and residential use.
 - Explore the possibility of a small-batch, high quality compost pilot, using smaller particle screens, to improve the quality of the compost. Make this compost available for direct sale to residents to close the loop and support residents in growing their own food.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Support and champion innovative food programs that promote dignity and equity in accessing food

- 4.1 Prioritize making municipal infrastructure available to reduce food loss through improved processing and storage (e.g. warehouse / kitchen space) and ensure access to these resources is equitable. These programs should also support local producers.
- 4.2 Champion the involvement of community members and charitable food stakeholders in program development for redirecting healthy foods. Ensure solutions are inclusive and support reconciliation with Mi'kmaw communities. For example¹¹,
 - HRM currently supports the [Mobile Food Market](#), which connects several HRM communities with limited access to fresh, healthy foods and donates or sells extra food to local community groups or restaurants.
 - [FOUND Forgotten Food](#) repurposes local food by collecting extra produce from farms, farmers markets and gardens, and selling it to restaurants or businesses.

¹¹ There are additional creative examples within HRM of community-based projects and/or businesses that are seeking to prevent food waste in ways that also offer dignified access to healthy, local foods.