



## 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.<sup>i</sup> While household food waste contributes to the problem, most food is wasted within the food industry, with some estimates as high as 86%.<sup>ii 1</sup>

Wasting food costs everyone. In Canada, the estimated value of food wasted from production to consumption is \$49.46 billion annually.<sup>ii</sup> This figure does not include production costs, such as water, power, fertilizer, labour etc., as well disposal fees. In HRM, organic waste management costs approximately \$8 million dollars annually. In Nova Scotia, food waste represents almost half of the organic waste from homes and commercial / institutional sources.<sup>iii</sup> The food wasted in our public institutions, such as schools and recreation centres, is a drain on tax dollars and limited budgets.<sup>iv</sup>

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.<sup>v</sup> 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 56.6 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents<sup>2</sup> annually <sup>ii</sup> which is roughly equal to the greenhouse gas emissions from 12 passenger vehicles driven for one year. Food loss and waste also contributes to the climate emergency and consumes clean water, agricultural and natural resources.

### Food waste and food insecurity

Initiatives aimed at reducing food waste often look to donate excess food to community organizations.<sup>vi</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> There are several different reports by Gooch et al. on food loss and waste in Canada that use different methods. As a result, the reports provide estimates of food waste amounts and sources that are different and non-comparable. Differences arise from different data sources, the accuracy of the information, and whether or not calculations include both avoidable (e.g., a restaurant over-ordering supplies) and/or unavoidable (e.g., loss due to pests) food waste. This demonstrates the complexity of the issue and that there is more to learn.

<sup>2</sup> A CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) equivalent is a standard unit of measure for greenhouse gases.

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.<sup>vii</sup>

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.

*“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.”<sup>vii</sup>*

### **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.<sup>viii</sup> 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<sup>ix,x</sup>**

- 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.

### **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 raise awareness of when it is safe to consume products past their best before dates and 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’kmaq communities. For example<sup>3</sup>,
- 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.

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### **REFERENCES**

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- <sup>x</sup> 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>

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<sup>3</sup> 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.