

# SMART BUSINESSES DON'T WASTE FOOD

A Quick-Reference Guide for **Reducing Food Waste** at Your Business



[des.sc.gov/smartbusiness](https://des.sc.gov/smartbusiness)



# Food waste is a problem.

## Smart businesses can help solve it.

The first step to reducing food waste is being aware of the issue. Each year **about 40 percent of the food supply in the United States is thrown away** at an estimated cost of **more than \$200 billion**. The price, however, is far steeper given the additional environmental and social impacts. Wasted food wastes resources. Any labor, energy, water or land used to produce, package and move food from the farm to our plates is lost. **All of this while 41 million South Carolinians are food insecure.**

Businesses from small to large can lessen food waste by implementing waste reduction strategies.

This guide provides general best management practices for smaller businesses and offices. It is not designed for restaurants, grocery stores, hospitals and other large businesses or organizations.

Additional information for these types of facilities is provided at [des.sc.gov/dwfsc](https://des.sc.gov/dwfsc).



The **S.C. Smart Business Recycling Program** is a free, confidential initiative that helps businesses reduce their environmental impact by:

- **Providing** technical assistance to begin or expand green practices such as waste reduction, recycling, buying recycled, energy and water conservation; and
- **Recognizing** them for their recycling and sustainability efforts with an annual awards program.

The program offers these services through consultations, site visits, workshops and other tools.

Please visit [des.sc.gov/smartbusiness](https://des.sc.gov/smartbusiness) for more details.



**Don't Waste Food SC (DWFSC)** is a collaborative outreach campaign that brings together stakeholders from the public and private sectors dedicated to sharing knowledge, coordinating resources and working together to reduce food waste in South Carolina. Its goals are to:

1. **Increase** the awareness of the economic, environmental and social impacts of wasted food;
2. **Inspire** individuals, communities, businesses, restaurants, schools and others to take action to reduce food waste through prevention, donation and composting; and
3. **Cut** food waste disposed of in half by 2030.

Visit [des.sc.gov/dwfsc](https://des.sc.gov/dwfsc) for additional information and resources as well as information about how you can participate.

# Simple Steps to Reduce Wasted Food

**1 Make it part of your business plan or company culture.**

**2 Find a leader and set up a team.** Identify individuals who are passionate about reducing food waste. A team will increase employee engagement, focus more minds on the issue and come up with solutions.

**3 Do the homework, develop a plan and set goals.** Learn about the issue and what steps can be taken to reduce food waste. How much unwanted food is being disposed of and what type? Determine where to start, what steps to implement and set a realistic timeline to achieve the goals.

**4 For businesses that have a cafeteria or canteen, do an audit.** Measure the amount of food consumed and disposed of over a specific period and compare. Equipped with this information, waste reduction begins by stocking, serving and/or producing the right amount of food for a scheduled period. For a simple audit form, visit [des.sc.gov/smartbusiness](https://des.sc.gov/smartbusiness).

**5 Get help.** DHEC's Don't Waste Food SC campaign provides comprehensive information including best practices as well as links to tools offered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

**6 Support employees who bring their lunch from home.** Provide an attractive and clean area to eat. Post tips about reducing food waste. Help employees:

- **Understand product dating.** See page 4;
- **Store smart.** See page 4 for steps to keep food fresh and safe;
- **Set up share tables.** Share tables are an easy way for employees to give away

safe, unwanted snacks (e.g., unopened and prepackaged food). Designate and clearly mark a table, shelf or even an area in the refrigerator for perishable items that others can have; and

- **Set up a composting program.**

As an added bonus, smart businesses can reduce other waste generated on site by supplying reusable cups, utensils and plates. For employees, additional benefits include saving money by not eating out so much and reducing wasted food at home by using leftovers.

**7 Compost.** Set up an on-site composting program or hire a commercial composter. If done on site, compostable items include vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds and fruit peels as well as flowers and plants. The nutrient-rich end product can be given to employees to take home. If done commercially, many more items may be accepted.

**8 Prevent food waste at catered events.** See page 5 for information.

**9 Donate.** Federal law protects organizations and individuals from any liability issues when donating "apparently wholesome food" in good faith to a non-profit. South Carolina has similar legislation. See page 4 for more information.

**10 Hold a Don't Waste Food Day.** Organize the event with activities such as food waste trivia or a leftovers recipe competition. Hold a food drive. Visit the food bank to help employees better understand food insecurity.



# Understanding Date Labels

Here's what you need to know.

- **Date labels are not expiration dates.**
- **Date labels – with one exception – are not required by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).** The lone exception is infant formula.
- **Labels have nothing to do with food safety – but rather quality.** The dates are manufacturer recommendations on the last day the product maintains peak quality and flavor. Visit [fdareader.com/blog/understanding-expiration-dates-and-date-labels](https://fdareader.com/blog/understanding-expiration-dates-and-date-labels) to learn more.
- **With the exception of infant formula, products are still safe to eat after these dates if they have been stored properly.**
- **If stored properly, a product should be safe, wholesome and of good quality beyond the date on the label.** If any odor or change in appearance, texture and color of the food is observed, do not risk it. Be smart. Be safe. Know your labels.



## Businesses can donate food.

The S.C. Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) **encourages businesses to donate as long as all food safety requirements are followed.** Federal legislation – the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act – protects donors from civil and criminal liability should the product donated in good faith later cause harm to the recipient. South Carolina also has similar legislation (S.C. Code of Laws §§ 15-74-10 et seq.)

Check with your local food banks, food rescue groups and other non-profits to find how and where both non-perishable and/or perishable food can be donated. Items accepted vary by organization.

Learn more at [feedingamerica.org](https://feedingamerica.org) and [usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm](https://usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm).

## Smart, Safe Storage

Storing food properly can help keep food fresh and save money. Understanding date labels is a perfect first step in smart storage. Below are additional tips.

- **Check the temperature.** The refrigerator should be set at 40° or lower.
- **Keep it covered.** Store food in covered containers or sealed storage bags to keep it fresh and avoid spills. Place a label on the container with your name and date.
- **Offer excess food to colleagues.** Set up a specific area or refrigerator shelf to offer items others can have. Remember to mark containers with the date. Place a list on the outside of the refrigerator highlighting what food items are available to others.

See additional storage tips at [des.sc.gov/dwfsc](https://des.sc.gov/dwfsc). The FDA provides a safe storage guide at [fda.gov/media/74435/download](https://fda.gov/media/74435/download).

# Hosting a catered event at your business?

A great way to reward staff or attract clients is through a catered event. When people gather for events that include food service, inevitably waste will be generated. Make food waste reduction and diversion a part of your plan from the beginning.

Here are some steps planners can take to lessen the impact.

**1 Use caterers who have food waste reduction practices.** Ask these questions.

- Does your company have food waste reduction practices in place?
- Do you use locally grown ingredients?
- Does your company have a process for leftovers (e.g., packaging them for later use).

**2 Plan wisely.** These simple alternatives can significantly reduce the amount of waste generated.

- Use reusable plates and flatware.
- If disposables are necessary, choose servingware and utensils that can be composted.
- Offer pitchers of water instead of single-use bottled water.

**3 Donate any untouched, unwanted food to a local food rescue organization.**

- Understand the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. See page 4 for details.

**4 Send any unwanted food to a commercial composter if it cannot be donated.**

- Add a compost receptacle next to the traditional trash and recycling containers.



## Reduce food waste by ordering smart.

Unwanted food often is a significant amount of business waste.

One way to reduce this is through a waste audit where food is sold or prepared. This includes break rooms with vending machines, cafeterias and canteens.

Send out surveys to employees to determine how often the vending machines are used and what they would like to see in them. This will ensure items stocked will be consumed and only an appropriate amount will be purchased.



# Resources & Contact Information

## SCDES RESOURCES

### Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

Telephone ..... **1-800-768-7348**

Website ..... [des.sc.gov/recycle](http://des.sc.gov/recycle)

### Don't Waste Food SC (DWFSC)

Website ..... [des.sc.gov/dontwastefoodsc](http://des.sc.gov/dontwastefoodsc)

### S.C. Smart Business Recycling Program

Email ..... [smartbiz@des.sc.gov](mailto:smartbiz@des.sc.gov)

Website ..... [des.sc.gov/smartbusiness](http://des.sc.gov/smartbusiness)

## OTHER SOUTH CAROLINA RESOURCES

### S.C. Department of Agriculture (SCDA)

Website ..... [agriculture.sc.gov](http://agriculture.sc.gov)

## FOOD DONATION LIABILITY LEGISLATION & REGULATIONS

### Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

Website ..... [feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html](http://feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html)

Website ..... [usda.gov/oc/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm](http://usda.gov/oc/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm)

### S.C. Code of Laws - Title 15 - Chapter 74 - Liability Exemption for Donors of Food

Website ..... [scstatehouse.gov/code/t15c074.php](http://scstatehouse.gov/code/t15c074.php)

## NATIONAL FOOD WASTE REDUCTION RESOURCES

### Feeding America

Website ..... [feedingamerica.org](http://feedingamerica.org)

"Find Your Local Food Bank" Online Locator ..... [feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank](http://feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank)

### The Food Industry Association

The Food Keeper App ..... [fmi.org/industry-topics/corporate-social-responsibility/food-keeper-food-storage-database](http://fmi.org/industry-topics/corporate-social-responsibility/food-keeper-food-storage-database)

### The Rockefeller Foundation

Food Waste Toolkit for the Office ..... [rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Food-Waste-Toolkit-for-the-Office.pdf](http://rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Food-Waste-Toolkit-for-the-Office.pdf)

### Save the Food

Website ..... [savethefood.com](http://savethefood.com)

### U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Website ..... [usda.gov](http://usda.gov)

### U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Sustainable Management of Food: What Businesses and Organizations Can Do ..... [epa.gov/sustainable-management-food](http://epa.gov/sustainable-management-food)

### U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Website ..... [fda.gov](http://fda.gov)



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