



Working together to reduce food waste in Australia

The cost of food waste to the Australian economy is estimated to be around \$20 billion each year. Australian consumers throw away around 3.1 million tonnes of food—that's close to 17,000 grounded 747 jumbo jets. Another 2.2 million tonnes is disposed of by the commercial and industrial sector.¹

The impact of food waste also includes the energy, fuel and water used to grow food that may not be used. When food waste is sent to landfill, it contributes to greenhouse gas emissions.

To help address this important issue, the Australian Government committed in 2016 to develop a National Food Waste Strategy and to deliver a National Food Waste Summit. The strategy establishes a framework to support actions that work towards halving Australia's food waste by 2030. This ambitious goal aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12 for sustainable consumption and production patterns.

National support for the strategy has been provided by Australia's environment ministers, and acknowledges the importance of addressing food waste and the impact it has on the environment, the economy and society.

Reducing food waste is a complex challenge due to the range of food types and their supply chains, and regulatory frameworks to support food safety and waste disposal. It also presents a number of opportunities to rethink how food waste can be prevented, or how wasted food can be used for other purposes.

Managing Australia's food waste

There are already a number of activities in Australia to reduce our food waste. These include consumer education, investment in waste treatment infrastructure, waste diversion from the retail and commercial sector, food collection for redistribution, and research into high value uses for food waste.

The effective management of food waste requires:

- support for agricultural efficiency and innovation
- assessment of food ordering, transport and storage practices
- effective and sustainable use of packaging
- partnerships between food and grocery retailers and charitable organisations
- household education, and community initiatives
- diversion of food waste from the commercial sector
- investment in alternative treatment technology and infrastructure
- incentives for alternatives to landfill disposal
- creating value from food waste
- standardisation of data for the measurement of food waste and tracking of waste reduction.

Halving Australia's food waste requires an integrated approach where governments, the private and not-for-profit sectors, and the community work together. The role of each is described below.

Australian Government

The Australian Government supports strategic dialogue on food waste reduction outcomes and has developed the National Food Waste Strategy that was launched at the National Food Waste Summit on 20 November 2017. Development of the strategy involved a number of industry sectors, all governments, the not-for-profit sector, and academia.

Under the Emissions Reduction Fund, the government is implementing the Source Separated Organic Waste method. This will allow funding for projects that divert food waste from landfill. The aim of the method is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane, to the atmosphere.

The fund is further supporting the reduction of emissions from waste through projects that reduce the amount of organic waste in landfill, through diversion to composting and resource recovery, capturing methane from landfills and producing electricity and treating wastewater at places such as sewerage plants or abattoirs. Compost can also be used to reduce the rate of soil carbon loss in agriculture.

The Government also plays a strategic role in fostering and encouraging state, territory and local governments to continue work on food waste programs and policies. Practical measures include identifying knowledge gaps and sharing information through national waste reporting.

National waste reporting consolidates key national waste and recycling information, including food waste data, from the states and territories. The availability of this data means that governments, the market, and the public are able to see changes in Australia's waste generation.

State and territory governments

State and territory governments are primarily responsible for waste legislation and management in Australia.

The states and territories are addressing consumer food waste by introducing food waste education and awareness initiatives, and grants programs.

Pilot programs in a number of states, including Queensland and South Australia, have shown that businesses that sell food can save money by diverting food waste at the source.

Local governments

Local governments operate within the legislative framework of states and territories, and organise waste collection for households and businesses in their local area. Many local governments have identified the significant amount of food in their waste streams and are taking steps to reduce food waste through a range of programs, such as:

- community information sessions and demonstrations on storing food and composting at home
- grants and rebates for households to purchase compost bins and worm farms
- pilot programs for restaurants and cafes to assess their food waste practices and reduce the amount of food they send to landfill
- supporting local businesses to source food waste, in order to turn it into valuable products like compost and fertiliser.

Private sector and not-for-profit organisations

In Australia, the retail and food processing sectors are working independently to address food loss and waste.

The food processing industry's peak body, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, has a target to reduce waste to landfill by 40 per cent by 2020. It recognises there are strong incentives for food processors and retailers to reduce their food waste. These include increased efficiency and profitability and opportunities for businesses to stand out from their competitors in a highly competitive industry.

A substantial amount of food is diverted from landfill through four major food recovery services—Fareshare, Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite. Major grocery retailers Coles and Woolworths, who hold around 70 per cent of the supermarket sector in Australia, have partnered with food recovery organisations. These partnerships mean that retailers can meet their food waste reduction goals while the charities are able to alleviate poverty and improve food security.

Industry is also exploring and experimenting with how different types of packaging can reduce food waste, waste to energy, and conversion of food waste into alternative types of animal feed.

Research

Research plays an important role in finding solutions to address food waste. A number of research organisations have been progressing work on better understanding where food is wasted from the farm to the consumer, and developing approaches that could be adopted to reduce or repurpose food waste.

Developing the National Food Waste Strategy

Consultation on the development of the strategy began in April 2017 through a Roundtable on Food Waste convened by the Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP.

Following the roundtable, the Department of the Environment and Energy established four advisory groups with representatives from industry, academia, local government and the not-for-profit sector. These groups provided advice to the Department on opportunities to reduce food waste, data sources that may assist in the formation of a National Food Waste Baseline, and possible governance arrangements for the delivery of the strategy once it is released.

Advice was also sought from state and territory governments on opportunities for sharing data, collaboration on state food waste reduction programs, and the appropriateness of food waste regulation.

The National Food Waste Strategy was launched by the Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon Josh Frydenberg, on 20 November 2017 at the National Food Waste Summit. The summit also provided an opportunity for participants to share ideas and improve their knowledge on how we can progress actions that will help reduce or repurpose food waste to work towards halving Australia's food waste by 2030.

Images from left to right: food on supermarket shelves © Arthur Mostead and the Department of the Environment and Energy, food re-use volunteers (iStock.com/Steve Debenport), mangoes © Kerry Trapnell, grazing sheep © Grant Hobson

¹ SARDI (2015) Primary Production Food Losses: Turning losses into profit. South Australian Research and Development Institute, Primary Industries and Regions South Australia; Blue Environment (2017) National Waste Report 2016, prepared for the Department of the Environment and Energy ([National Waste Report 2016](#)).

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