

# 6 Food Waste Prevention Myths

And how to debunk them in your organization



# Introduction

---

There is a lot outside a foodservice organization's control: food costs, labor costs, evolving customer expectations. One thing organizations can control is food waste.

By controlling food waste, you can mitigate pressure on food and labor costs and meet ongoing customer expectations for more sustainable practices.

The commercial and competitive environment demands today's kitchens take control of food waste. The impact food waste has on climate change and food insecurity adds to this urgency.

Food waste prevention—the only way to address food waste that delivers triple-bottom-line benefits—requires new kitchen tools and workflows. For busy kitchens with thin margins, this rightly brings up questions.

This e-book has been created to address the most common myths surrounding food waste prevention. We are debunking them here so that foodservice organizations can move as quickly as possible to address food waste, and achieve the financial, environmental and social benefits that go along with it.



This e-book is a companion piece to Leanpath CEO Andrew Shakman's keynote address, "To Overcome Our Food Waste Goals, We Must Overcome Limiting Beliefs," delivered at the ReFED 2022 Food Waste Solutions Summit. [Watch the keynote or read the transcript here.](#)

## Myth #1

# My team doesn't have time to track and prevent food waste

### Why this myth exists:

To prevent food waste, a kitchen must first track the waste it is currently producing. Equipped with data on what is being wasted and why, kitchens can make smart adjustments to purchasing and prep to stop wasting that food going forward. Kitchens are busy places and often struggle to stay fully staffed. Every minute of labor is precious. So when a kitchen hears food waste prevention requires adding a new workflow, they don't always stick around to hear that that labor investment is paid back by making staff more efficient (and by cutting the amount of food needed to purchase and prep).

### THE DEBUNK

## The time invested in tracking is paid back in a more efficient team and lower costs

By far the largest source of food waste in foodservice kitchens is overproduction; Leanpath data shows it typically makes up 50 percent or more of a kitchen's food waste stream. When you stop producing food that just goes to waste, you stop investing in the time spent purchasing, inventorying, prepping, cooking, and ultimately discarding that food. (Ask yourself: my kitchen staff has time to prepare food that only goes to waste, but not time to track and prevent it?) Based on Leanpath analysis, the labor saved by cutting food waste from overproduction in half could increase a kitchen's profitability by 4 percent to 8 percent.





**For every hour invested in tracking food waste, an average Leanpath site saves \$811 USD.**

**In addition to the financial savings from food waste tracking, the daily practice of measurement also transforms kitchen culture, raising awareness and increasing efficiency.**

*Source: Leanpath*

## Myth #2

# Food waste prevention technology is too expensive

### Why this myth exists:

At the moment this e-book is being released (August 2022), inflation and disruptions to global trading have driven food prices to record levels. But even outside this difficult period, the foodservice industry has notoriously thin margins. Any cost has to be justified. It is understandable under those circumstances that some kitchens only hear the cost associated with preventing food waste without understanding the well-documented return on that investment.

### THE DEBUNK

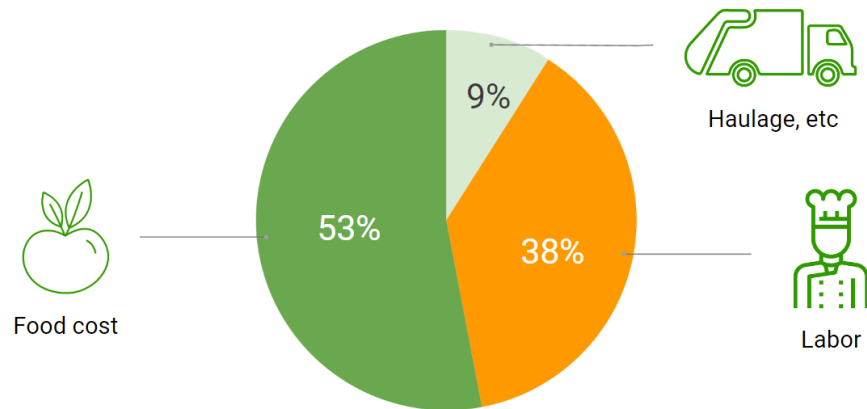
## The ROI on food waste prevention tools is well established

Leanpath typically shows a 2-7X ROI on its food waste prevention platform within the first six months of usage. This aligns with research from the UN-affiliated group Champion's 12.3 (named after the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 12.3, to halve global food waste by 2030). In a review of hundreds of restaurants, catering operations and hotels around the globe, Champions found that for every dollar spent on food waste prevention, a foodservice kitchen saw a \$6 to \$7 return.



### The true cost of food waste

The true cost of food waste is more than just the cost of wasted food. WRAP, the UK-based nonprofit focusing on food waste, crunched the numbers. When all assets are factored in, the cost of the wasted food is only about half of the full investment. The labor used to purchase, inventory, prep, serve and dispose of that food adds an additional 38 percent to the overall cost.



### Myth #3

## Food waste is a result of poor performance

---

#### Why this myth exists:

While food waste can sometimes occur because of negligence (an overcooked pan of lasagna can't be served) or poor training (melon trimming has too much fruit left on the rind), food waste exists in every kitchen, even those with top notch staff. But food waste is insidious: it occurs throughout the kitchen, throughout the day, and it is nearly impossible to be aware of all the waste if you are not tracking it.

#### THE DEBUNK

### Food waste often exists as a way to manage operational risks

In many kitchens, food waste is not a byproduct of poor performance, but a tool used to manage risk. Overproduction—the primary source of waste in most kitchens—is often used to manage the risk of running out of food and disappointing a customer. Large batch cooking—a primary source of overproduction—is often used to manage the risk of running short on labor (e.g., make a big batch now while the kitchen is fully staffed). Perceived safety risks are managed with the “when in doubt throw it out” mantra. When a kitchen tracks food waste, they no longer have to blindly manage risk this way. They can see what they're wasting because of overproduction, for instance, reduce that production going forward with the confidence, backed up by tracking data, that they will produce enough (but not too much).



## Myth #4

# My kitchen controls its food waste: we donate and compost

### Why this myth exists:

Composting and donation programs have their place in managing food waste. And particularly with food donation programs, there is a tangible benefit: you see the excess food sent to an organization that helps feed the hungry. But composting and food donation programs do not allow kitchens to achieve triple-bottom-line benefits and could inadvertently lead to additional waste.

### THE DEBUNK

## You can only achieve triple-bottom-line benefits through prevention

Donation and composting only happen once a kitchen has paid for that excess or wasted food and invested labor in preparing it. Preventing food waste in the first place is the only solution that delivers environmental, social and financial benefits—a full triple bottom line.

In addition, according to food donation organizations themselves, the preference is for monetary donations over food donations. It allows them more flexibility in ensuring they have the food they need, and it lowers the overhead in preserving perishable food. If donating to food pantries is a part of an organization's community support efforts, prevent food waste and use the financial savings to make monetary donations.



### Composting can lead to higher waste

University of Ohio researchers examined a group of 266 diners and found if diners know their food waste is being composted they are more likely to throw away more food.



#### UNEDUCATED

One group of diners was told nothing about the food waste crisis. Their plate waste was measured.



#### EDUCATED

The second group was educated on the food waste crisis. **Their plate waste dropped 77 percent from the control group.**



#### EDUCATED+COMPOST

A third group was educated and told their waste would be composted. **They wasted just as much as the control group.**

## Myth #5

# You fix food waste once and you're done

### Why this myth exists:

You focus on prevention as your top food waste solution. Check. You track your food waste, and learn what you're wasting and why. Check. You use that data to make informed reductions in purchasing and prep and your food waste reduces. Check. And if a kitchen never changed, the work of food waste prevention would be done.

### THE DEBUNK

## Food waste prevention has to be an ongoing component of kitchen culture

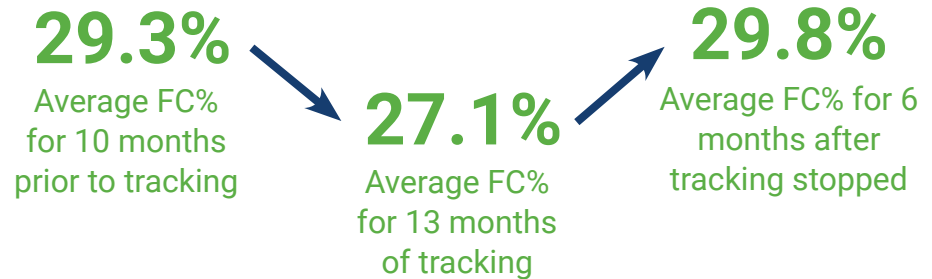
Kitchens change. Menus change. Staff change. Management and chefs change. And habits change. All of those changes can lead to backsliding on food waste. Food waste measurement and prevention is an ongoing part of operating an efficient, sustainable kitchen. And while measurement generates data to make informed decisions, it also acts as a daily practice to raise awareness about food waste and to continuously move kitchen culture to greater efficiency. Memories are short, especially in high-pressure, high-turnover environments like kitchens. Measurement and prevention have to be the new business as usual.



### What happens when a kitchen stops tracking food waste

When a kitchen stops tracking food waste, it doesn't just stop collecting valuable data, it also loses that daily awareness of food waste that tracking provides.

At one large UK facility, we looked at food cost percentage before the site tracked food waste, during tracking and after it stopped tracking.





## Myth #6

# It's not the time. I have too many other priorities.

---

### Why this myth exists:

Any business is a juggling act of priorities. This is particularly true in foodservice and hospitality where many factors dictating business success are outside of the business's control: food costs, labor costs and customer attitudes. And unless a kitchen wants to "see" its food waste—actually track it and understand it—that waste can remain "invisible." In other words, with many competing priorities, food waste can be ignored and accepted as a cost of doing business.

### THE DEBUNK

## Food waste prevention addresses many top priorities at once.

Food waste is a "nexus" issue: when an organization prevents food waste it addresses several issues at once, including food and labor costs, as well as bigger issues like climate change and food insecurity.

According to Leanpath data, a typical foodservice kitchen wastes between 4 percent and 10 percent of its food purchases before that food ever reaches a diner. That doesn't include the cost of labor wasted purchasing, inventorying, prepping, cooking, and ultimately discarding that food waste.

But financial concerns are only part of the argument for tackling food waste right now. And for a foodservice organization focused on triple-bottom-line impacts, it is the least persuasive argument. The more pressing risks foodservice organizations—and the world—face are climate change and food insecurity, both of which are fueled by, and can be addressed by preventing, food waste.

As important as it is to not waste food, it's even more important that we don't waste time. Climate change and food insecurity are not going to wait for us to act.



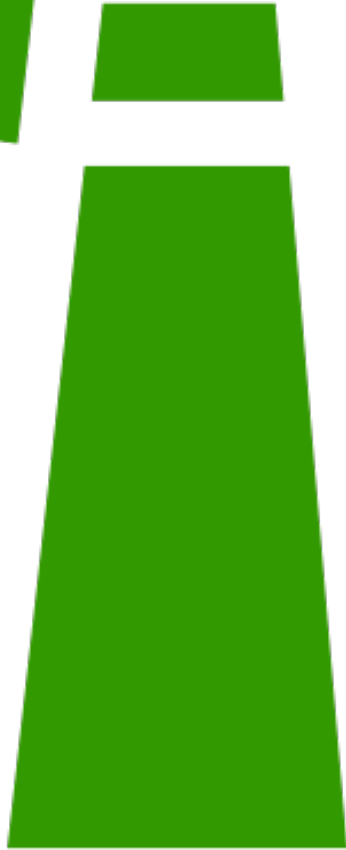
In its 2020 Drawdown Review, Project Drawdown ranks the importance of various solutions aimed at keeping global warming to under 2°C. “Reduced food waste” is ranked #1.

Of the total  
**51B tons**  
of CO<sup>2</sup> emitted annually...



Food waste contributes

**3.3B tons**





**“All the food produced [in the world] but never eaten would be sufficient to feed two billion people. That’s more than twice the number of undernourished people across the globe.”**

**-United Nations Food Programme**

# Conclusion

---

It's time to debunk the myths about food waste that are standing in the way of taking action.

Foodservice kitchens can't afford to waste food. They can't afford the financial impact, the wasted labor or the environmental and social damage caused by the food waste crisis.

Food waste prevention delivers triple-bottom-line benefits, but tracking food waste is new in many kitchens and it is reasonable to have questions. Ask those questions, get answers and then drive for change in your organizations.

The food waste crisis has to be addressed and the foodservice industry can make a huge difference while making their own kitchens more profitable and sustainable.



Contact Leanpath today at [info@leanpath.com](mailto:info@leanpath.com) to get started on your food waste prevention journey.





[www.leanpath.com](http://www.leanpath.com) • [info@leanpath.com](mailto:info@leanpath.com)