Food Loss Prevention Options for Grocery Stores

Below is a list of ideas and activities that grocery stores may consider implementing to help prevent food loss and waste. Contact your local EPA representative for log sheets, signs, and other tools.

☐ Perform a food waste audit. See what’s being thrown out and why. Pick a day and be there at the waste bin with volunteers, buckets, a log sheet, a table, and a weight scale. Record the following:
  o What is being thrown out,
  o Weight or number of items,
  o The reason the food is being disposed (if known),
  o The expiration date of the product when applicable,
  o Whether the food was still wholesome/edible before being thrown out, and
  o Identify the most wasted to least wasted items.

Based on the results, consider changing procedures to minimize loss (e.g., reduce order quantities of low sold or otherwise tossed items).

☐ Clarify date labelling and date encoding to reduce confusion to customers. Work with your supply chain to clearly label or define the difference between safety-based and quality-based dates. Some options might include:
  o Make “sell by” dates invisible to the consumer,
  o Use more “freeze by” dates where applicable so the customer knows they have that option,
  o Remove "best before" or other quality dates from shelf-stable, non-perishable foods for which safety is not a concern, or
  o Make sure all printed dates on products have descriptive language, not just a date.

☐ Call a meeting to discuss food waste prevention strategies with staff. Get their thoughts and ideas.

☐ Share practices with others outside your business to improve waste reduction industry-wide.

Purchasing Tips

☐ Take an accurate inventory first and base orders on what you currently have.

☐ Buy surplus or odd shaped produce from farms or wholesalers that would otherwise be wasted and sell them at a discount.

☐ Send order estimates more frequently to suppliers to better align production planning with order timings.

☐ Start or increase regular communication with suppliers to reduce food waste.

☐ Revise your supply contracts to require the supplier to have a food waste reduction or food donation program.

☐ Change contracts to include methods or techniques to prevent food loss (e.g., use innovative packaging such as vacuum sealed meat).
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- Make food waste reduction a key performance indicator in operations, supply chain and employee performance.

### Prep and Storage Tips

- Use leftovers from the day before. Steak one day can be used for beef stew the next day.
- Train staff on knife skills to make more efficient knife cuts to use more of the food being prepared.
- Use as much of the food as possible. Cook up carrot greens and don’t peel cucumbers or potatoes.
- Reconstitute stalky vegetables that have wilted by immersing them in warm water (100°F) for 15 minutes.
- Marinate meats to extend their shelf life for a few more days.
- Different foods like different storage conditions. Refresh staff on storage techniques for different foods (e.g., don’t store tomatoes and lettuce in the same container or near each other).
- Use see-through storage containers. Easily see what is available and keep an eye on freshness.
- Cook, freeze, juice, or otherwise process foods that are approaching the end of their peak freshness to prolong their useful life.

### Store Set Up and Display Tips

- Set up a discount shelf for ripe, near-to-expire, discontinued, or slightly damaged food. Provide clear communication about this reduced price section.
- Redesign product displays with less excess. For example, instead of a pile of produce, have a back support that makes it look like a pile to keep produce fresher.
- Allow prepared foods to run out near store closing. Track these items and only make as much as you can sell.

### Engaging with Customers Tips

- Provide taste samples. Train staff to remind customers that they can try a sample to see if they like a product before they buy it.
- Have best storage practices information available in appropriate departments for certain foods, including how long food should last when stored properly.
- Offer various options to your customers on produce (e.g., whole, sliced, and mixed fruit). This will assist them in eliminating food loss in their own homes.