



# Success with Food Waste

*Wegmans*

Wegmans is a family-owned, regional supermarket chain founded in 1916 by the Wegman family. Wegmans, currently one of the largest private companies in the United States (2017 annual sales of \$8.7 billion), operates 95 stores and employs 48,000 people. Wegmans stores range in size, but a single store can offer up to 70,000 products. Managing demand, and ultimately the excess food that comes with offering such variety, is a constant challenge.

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## Motivation

Meeting customer demand, staying ahead of the curve, managing costs, and being good environmental stewards were four major motivators for Wegmans to implement food waste management projects. Known for being ethically responsible, Wegmans keeps the needs of its customers and communities top of mind. As a result, they saw an opportunity to reduce their food waste and make it a win on multiple levels.







## Solutions

Over time, Wegmans worked to incrementally improve its food waste management, from periodically sending food scraps to pig farmers, to a now robust and scalable system that incorporates creative ways for reducing food waste, donating excess food, and diverting food scraps from landfills.

### Donation

Wegmans' number one priority is to use food for its intended purpose, but when that's not possible, they donate wholesome food to the local food banks and pantries in each of its communities. In 2017, Wegmans donated more than 14 million pounds of food to people in need.

### Organics Collection

Using the Pittsford Wegmans as a test store, Wegmans set out to create a standardized program to decrease food waste and keep it out of landfills. They started by researching food waste disposal options, landing on anaerobic digestion because of the site's proximity to the store. After a search for haulers to collect the waste, Wegmans chose Natural Upcycling (an organics hauler) because the company was willing to work to meet their needs and develop a custom pick-up schedule. From there, Wegmans chose a 64-gallon tote (equivalent to two garbage cans) on four wheels for collecting the food waste – a safer option that requires less effort than a garbage can, reduces the number of times it needs to be emptied and is easily picked up, cleaned, and replaced by the hauler. Currently, two-thirds of Wegmans stores send food scraps for animal feed, anaerobic digestion or composting.

### Organics Diversion

As the program expanded to additional areas and states, Wegmans evaluated the best options for each store. Some stores are closer to composting sites than to anaerobic digesters, so the food waste is sent for composting instead. Wegmans has found that successful organics recyclers tend to price their service competitively with landfill disposal.

### Adaptability

The program Wegmans implemented is easily tailored to each store (and potentially other businesses as a model). For example, one of Wegmans' Massachusetts stores is located in a mixed-use building containing both businesses and residences. Because of smaller loading docks and less storage space, Wegmans had to arrange for a seven-day pick up. In another instance, when Wegmans worked with Natural Upcycling, they tailored the service to a store that preferred a flat monthly rate based on previous monthly averages.

### Training

Any time Wegmans implements a new food waste reduction program, they hold a four-hour training session for department leaders that includes representatives from the hauler and end site, who can answer questions as they arise.

## Challenges

As with any groundbreaking program, Wegmans faced occasional challenges:

- It takes 1-2 months to figure out exactly how many totes each store needs and the collection frequencies, and seasonality can change this schedule.
- Collection in the winter can pose a challenge because cleaning becomes more difficult, potentially requiring the use of liners.
- Finding a hauler was the most difficult aspect to organize because many were unable to meet Wegmans' specific needs.
- All haulers/sites charge differently – some have a combined hauling and tipping fee, while others price each separately

## Results

As a regional supermarket chain, Wegmans was able to front the cost of the initial set up of the program. Because of their partnership with Natural Upcycling, which moved their headquarters from St. Louis to Buffalo for the project, Wegmans indirectly provided the region with additional jobs, infrastructure, and resources. These resources are now available for smaller businesses to set up similar food waste management programs without the initial set up cost.

What makes this possible is the partnership model that Wegmans employs with their haulers, making them an integral part of the solution.

Today, Wegmans benefits from a cost savings at many stores and is at least cost neutral at the remaining stores, while continuing to live up to its brand image of supporting the community and doing the right thing.

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