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**ORGANICS > FOOD WASTE**

## How Food Businesses are Taking the Lead to Reduce Waste

*At WasteExpo, representatives from ReFED, Compass Group and the Food Marketing Institute will discuss solutions to the problem of food waste.*

Arlene Karidis | Mar 08, 2018

Food waste is a big problem across the supply chain, totaling 63 million tons a year and worth \$218 billion, reports ReFED, a national nonprofit focused on food waste solutions. But with good strategies, food waste can be reduced by 20 percent over the next 10 years, generating \$100 billion in savings, the organization projects.

The foodservice industry and nonprofits are looking hard at how to cut waste for economic, social and environmental reasons. Some of what's evolved is vetted business sector-specific guidelines, interesting partnerships between stakeholders and technologies to address the problems.

Forty percent of this waste is generated by consumer-facing businesses. Because of this, ReFED has focused on the foodservice industry.

In 2016, it created a national food waste roadmap addressing how much food is wasted and ideas for reducing that waste, but most recently, the organization developed guidelines specific to three sectors: restaurants, foodservice providers and grocers .

With set goals and plans to reach them, the grocery sector alone could save up to \$18.2 billion, representing double their current profits, says Chris Hunt, communications director at ReFED. Hunt will speak at a WasteExpo session titled "From Insight to Action: How Food Businesses are Taking the

Lead to Reduce Waste from Supplier to Consumer,” held on April 23 at 1 p.m PT.

“Among ways to do it is dynamic pricing where food is discounted as the sell-by date gets closer, boosting sales and reducing food waste,” says Hunt.

Prevention is the most effective approach, he says, citing some methods foodservice businesses are leveraging, like analytics apps that work to prevent waste by tracking from the time it’s prepared through the time it’s served. Then, there are no-tech methods like smaller plates and tray-less dining to discourage people from taking too much food.

Now, ReFED is working to put its business sector-specific guides in decision makers’ hands nationwide.

“We did the research in partnership with companies and trade associations to make sure our suggestions make sense for their operations,” says Hunt. “Then, we created these action guides. We hope for dramatic reduction in food waste. Our work with food businesses is a step in that direction.”

Cutting food waste is a front-and-center priority for the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), which represents food wholesalers and retailers.

“The most important lesson we’ve learned is that you have to measure, and it’s hard because each company is unique in how they generate and measure food waste,” says Andy Harig, senior director for sustainability, tax and trade at FMI. “We also learned you must set firm goals, even if it looks hard to achieve, as well as a firm plan to achieve those goals. And it’s important to have benchmarks.”

Technology is speeding up the pace of change across the supply chain. At the consumer level, there are apps such as those used to create shopping lists or recipes from leftovers. Higher on the chain, products have come to market like better sensors on trucks to prevent food loss through temperature changes.

As it looks for solutions higher up on the chain, says Harig, “We have reached a point where a lot of low-hanging fruit has been plucked, like finding ways to increase donations of food for human consumption and working with local partners that may do animal feed.”

Now, FMI is looking to address more complex challenges to ultimately promote a business culture and effective systemwide approaches.

Compass Group, a multinational foodservice company, serves 9.8 million meals a day in the U.S. alone and is committed to cutting food waste in the U.S. by 25 percent by 2020, focusing on reducing at the source.

Among its strategies has been leveraging a customizable menu management system to guide chefs in areas like portioning and what to do with leftovers. It is also involved in the Imperfectly Delicious program, in which it purchases “ugly” fruit from farmers.

“We, for instance, would take a second cut of spinach or romaine lettuce that’s too big to fit in plastic bags to sell commercially,” says Amy Keister, vice president of sustainability at Compass Group, who will also speak at WasteExpo. The company reduced three million pounds of food waste through this program alone.

Compass also facilitates a day of action with 36 countries participating to boost awareness and give tips for those across the whole supply chain.

“We want everyone globally, not just in the foodservice business, to get involved in cutting food waste,” says Keister. “We want to create a movement to show that if everyone changes a little it can have a global impact.”

**Source URL:** <http://www.waste360.com/food-waste/how-food-businesses-are-taking-lead-reduce-waste>