

Your business can help transform our food system

As a hospitality or food retail store in the Illawarra, you are a key player in the food system of our region. You have an opportunity not just to impact the community with what you offer, but how you manage your footprint — this guide is here to help you do just that.



Reducing food waste - save money and the planet

Did you know that food businesses in NSW throw away over 30% of their food? We know you see it every day in your business, and it can be generated across the process, from ordering to storage and customer's plates. At the end of the year, it all adds up, losing you money in ingredients, staff hours, and waste collection. Read on for what to do about it, and how your waste can make a difference in the community.



Carla Urosevski
Alexander's Bakery

“ At the close of each day, our staff box up any unsold items and place them in a designated area in our coolroom reserved specifically for donations. Our entire team is trained to follow this routine consistently. ”

1) Start with a waste audit.

A simple waste audit helps you identify what you're throwing out, how much, and why — so you can take targeted action. Here's how to get started:

Step 1: Choose a sample period

- Start with one busy day or one full week.
- Keep it manageable — even a snapshot gives valuable insights.
- Tell all staff and give thorough instructions to ensure consistency

Step 2: Set up 3 labelled bins (or containers):

- Spoilage – food past use-by date or damaged (e.g. soggy greens, expired dairy)
- Prep Waste – offcuts, peels, trims, over-prepped ingredients
- Plate Waste – leftovers from customers' meals

Free tracking printable sheets:

- [Your Food Waste Review](#)
- [Food Waste Action Plan](#)

Food waste apps for business:

- [Leanpath](#)
- [Winnow](#)

Step 3: Track and record

- Use a simple log sheet or app to estimate volume or weight.
- Note the reason for waste where possible (e.g. over-ordering, poor storage, oversized portions).

Step 4: Look for patterns

- Are you regularly tossing out the same ingredient?
- Are customers leaving certain items untouched?
- Are you over-prepping or ordering too much?



WATCH: 'How to do a food waste review'



2) How to Reduce Food Waste in your Business

Once you've done your audit, you'll likely see some clear areas to improve. Here's how to tackle the three biggest types of waste:

Spoilage – food going off before it's used

- Order smart: Track usage trends and order only what you need. Don't overstock perishables.
- Store it right: Rotate stock using first in, first out (FIFO), and label everything clearly.
- Use it up: Create daily specials or staff meals using ingredients close to expiry.
- Prep only what's needed: Avoid over-prepping ingredients unless you know they'll be used.

Preparation Waste – trimmings, offcuts, or over-prep

- Train staff on efficient prep techniques (e.g. using more of the veg, less trimming).
- Repurpose offcuts: Use trimmings for stocks, sauces, or garnishes.
- Standardise recipes: Prep only what's needed based on consistent portion sizes.

Plate Waste – food left uneaten by customers

- Review portion sizes: Are meals too big? Chips and salad are common culprits.
- Offer flexible sides or smaller portions: Let customers choose or upgrade.
- Check in with your team: Front-of-house staff often know what customers leave behind.

3) Design a Smarter Menu with Local, Seasonal Produce

Planning your menu around what's in season and sourced locally isn't just great for flavour — it's a smart move to cut waste. Seasonal produce is fresher, lasts longer, and is less likely to spoil before use. Plus, it supports local growers and reduces your food miles. By building flexible menu items that change with the seasons, you can minimise over-ordering, reduce spoilage, and make the most of what's abundant and affordable.



Discover local growers

We've taken the hassle out of discovering local produce for you. Simply hop on our [Fair Food Directory](#) and search for 'Fruit & vegetable producers' and 'Meat, poultry and egg producers' to find local where you can source fresh, high-quality produce for your customers while supporting our local economy.



The data has spoken – your customers value local food

In the 2024 'Let's Talk About Food' survey completed by Illawarra residents, the majority of respondents expressed they place a high degree of importance on supporting local food producers.

4) Donating surplus edible food

Donating your surplus edible food is an easy way to make a positive impact — and can also help your business save on waste disposal costs. Instead of paying to have good food thrown out, you can redirect it to local food relief organisations who will put it to good use, feeding people in need and strengthening your reputation as a socially responsible business. You are also not liable when you donate food! The Civil Liability Act 2002 (NSW) protects businesses that donate food in good faith, provided it's safe to eat, given freely for a charitable purpose, and accompanied by any info needed to keep it safe (like storage or expiry details).

It's more than just food.

In the Illawarra, over 32 food relief agencies support vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. They assist a wide range of people, from struggling families to individuals experiencing homelessness - but it's not just about feeding people. Food relief often serves as a soft entry point to build trust and connect people with broader support services like counselling, financial advice, and legal aid.



IN ACTION: How Balinese Spice Magic lower food waste and give back to the community

What does this look like practically in your business? Here's how Balinese Spice Magic owner Jules Mitry weaves reducing waste and food relief seamlessly into daily life in the kitchen.

Reducing food waste

The restaurant orders only what it really needs straight from the farmers, and use a nose-to-tail ethos. Celery? Don't throw out the leaves! Jules trains all her staff to utilise whole produce in dishes, including the leaves and ends. In her words, "it's all good stuff from the earth." Surplus ingredients will be used for weekly meals cooked for food relief.



Catering events

After catering a wedding, BSM packs up untouched leftovers in containers (at no extra cost) for the couple to donate to a charity of their choice.

Diverting surplus food to food relief

On a Monday or Tuesday, between the school run and admin, Jules spends 3-4 hours in the kitchen cooking up over 100 meals for local charities that give them to people in need. She uses up any ingredients that haven't been utilised over the previous few days, helping to reduce the business's waste costs, along with a few fresh items, dishes the meals into takeaway containers, dates them, then jumps in her car to drop them off - but staff and patrons are also happy to help!

Email
foodfairness@healthycities.org.au
to begin donating your surplus food!



Healthy
Cities
Australia



Together
Feeding people
Fighting food waste.

what can you do right now? Join the Illawarra Food Donations whatsapp Group!

Make donating surplus food quick, easy and local.

Whether you have a tray of sandwiches left over, extra produce, or baked goods that won't keep, don't let it go to waste. The Illawarra Food Donations WhatsApp group connects local hospitality businesses and food relief organisations in real time. It's a simple way to reduce waste and feed people in our community when the opportunity arises — perfect for businesses who would love to take action but can't currently commit to a regular donation.

How to use the group

If you've got surplus food that you would like to donate, simply send a message to the group containing:

- 1) What** (Eg. "leftover pastries and sandwiches at COB, amount varies depending on season/day)
- 2) Who** (Your business)
- 3) Contact** (Name + phone number/email)



or scan the code!



Did you know that donating food is also tax deductible?

As a business or organisation, donating your surplus food can provide the added perk of an eligible tax deduction:

- The donation is made to an organisation with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status
- It must be voluntary, meaning the business must not receive any material benefit or advantage in exchange for the donation
- The business donor keeps a record of the donation, generally a receipt from the gift recipient.

For more information, visit the [Australian Taxation Office](#).

Why donate?

- You're helping those in need
- It will save you money on your waste disposal costs
- It's better for the environment
- It can benefit your business

What food can I donate?

- Surplus food from supermarkets, greengrocers, bakers, butchers, markets, cafes, catering etc.
- Blemished/imperfect produce
- Products close to their use-by
- Products close to or past their best before date
- Excess and slow-moving stock
- Products with incorrect, damaged, or no labelling/damaged packaging
- Samples and bulk products
- Leftover unused portions of food that have not been served to customers, eg. salads, sandwiches, cakes etc
- Food grown at farms that doesn't meet the cosmetic or size criteria set by supermarkets

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