

Reducing consumer food waste: recommendations for schools

Food waste is a pressing issue with significant environmental, social and economic consequences. In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food waste (131 kg/inhabitant) are generated each year. The largest share of food waste is generated in households and food services. The food groups that are most commonly wasted are vegetables, fruits and cereals.

Consumers can change many behaviours that lead to food waste (e.g. cooking too much), but their capacity to prevent food waste is influenced by a number of factors (e.g. related policies, lifestyle factors). Reducing consumer food waste requires collaboration between all actors in the food system, in which educational establishments play a key role.

53 %

of EU food waste
is generated in households
(70 kg/person/year).



9 %

of EU food waste arises in restaurants
and food services, including school
canteens (12 kg/person/year).

The role of schools

Educating young children and adolescents about food waste is essential to raise awareness of the importance of preventing and reducing it. Schools play a key role in sharing information about healthy and sustainable food habits that can help shape the behaviours of new generations, including in relation to food waste. Addressing food waste in school canteens can also set a positive example for children and young people and inspire them to take similar action at home.



Taking action against food waste in schools

1 Classroom education programmes

Primary and secondary school pupils can be educated through classroom activities to reduce food waste arising from meals at school and at home. A programme could consist of one or two lessons or be implemented over the entire school year. Monitoring the effectiveness of such programmes is highly recommended, either by measuring food waste before and after the programme or by conducting interviews to get pupils' feedback. Involving teachers, catering staff and parents will contribute to the success of the initiative.

Teaching pupils how to reduce food waste

- Check if educational materials (e.g. those provided by [the Wasteless project](#) in Hungary) are available in your country from the Ministry of Education or other organisations (e.g. non-governmental organisations, public institutions).
- Coordinate with other teachers, educators and canteen staff in your school to create momentum and facilitate the organisation of the lessons/programme.
- Inform parents about the lessons/programme to get their support and engage them in food waste prevention at home.
- Introduce activities that pupils can do at home, such as keeping a food waste diary or making shopping lists.

Some successful examples:

- An [educational package on food waste](#), available in several languages, for primary and secondary school pupils. The package is freely available online and includes a manual with lessons and activities, instructions for teachers, posters and food waste reduction tools for school canteens.
- A [food literacy programme](#) about food and eating for 4- to 12-year-old primary school pupils, which includes a module on food waste.
- A [cooking challenge](#) for secondary school pupils that was promoted on social media.

2 Nudges in school canteens

Nudges are small changes in an environment that are easy to implement and make it more likely that an individual will make a particular choice or behave in a particular way. Nudges can encourage pupils to reduce food waste, influencing their behaviour. The duration of the programme may be short (e.g. 1 week) or it may run throughout the school year. The involvement of canteen staff is crucial, as they can play an active role in measuring food waste, identifying solutions to reduce it and supporting children in changing their behaviours to save food.

Taking action in your school canteen

- Define a simple methodology to measure children's plate waste and monitor progress in food waste reduction over time.
- Introduce games, challenges, smart educational technologies and other discovery activities (e.g. listening to chefs' or local food suppliers' stories about how they provide and cook food) to get children interested.
- Get to know your pupils' preferences – which may depend on the context – through questionnaires or open discussions, as this will increase the effectiveness of the action.
- Establish partnerships with actors involved in the food supply chain. For example, waste management operators could support the initiative (e.g. through a partnership between the school and the waste management company in charge of collecting organic waste in the region/municipality); collaborating with producers, restaurants, local chefs and research organisations can also be effective.

Some successful examples:

- *Demonstrations of optimal food preparation to avoid food waste, done by school canteen staff.*
- *When safe to do so, encouraging the use of doggy bags for left-over food.*
- *Allowing pupils to choose their portion sizes and meals.*



Some examples show a potential reduction in food waste of up to

40 %
after 2 years.

Find more information in the [compendium of tools, best practices and recommendations to reduce consumer food waste!](#)

The [European Consumer Food Waste Forum](#) is an EU pilot project of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The project has collected data and identified evidence-based, practical solutions to reduce food waste at the consumer level.

The EU and its Member States are committed to meeting [sustainable development goal target 12.3](#): halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by 2030 and reducing food losses along the food production and supply chains. Learn more about EU actions to reduce food waste [on the Commission's food waste web page](#).

Further information:



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