



2023 - 2024

# Food Saver Challenge Report



Prepared by  
The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia

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[www.sbnphiladelphia.org](http://www.sbnphiladelphia.org)



# Acknowledgements

## Thank You!

The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia (SBN) acknowledges the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Food Matters Initiative for their generous support, the City of Philadelphia for their recognition, and the partners and participants who made this challenge possible.

Partners included: Bennett Compost, Circle Compost, ClearCOGS, Drexel Food Lab, Share Food Program, and Sharing Excess. Participants included: Bar Hygge, Crust Vegan Bakery, High Fidelity Bakery, LUHV Foods, Mariposa Food Co-Op, Old City Coffee, and the Reading Terminal Market.

***Thank you to all the 2023 - 2024 Food Saver Challenge participants, partners, and to the NRDC's Food Matters Initiative for making this challenge a success!***



# About SBN & NRDC



## About SBN

The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia (SBN) is building a just, green, and thriving economy. We empower the region's diverse independent businesses to do well by doing good; we advance industries critical to a vibrant, local, equitable, and climate resilient economy; and we advocate for an economic ecosystem that centers localism, serves community needs, shares wealth, and protects the environment.

SBN's members are local independent businesses that practice – and measure success by – the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. Our programming educates business owners about financially, socially, and environmentally responsible best practices; facilitates honest and supportive discussions among peers; and provides important opportunities for civic dialogue. Our advocacy focuses on solutions that advance a just, green, and thriving economy.

Since our founding in 2001, SBN has remained the region's only membership and advocacy organization playing the important role of serving Greater Philadelphia's independent values-driven business community.



## About NRDC's Food Matters Initiative

Since 2017, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has been helping to reduce city food waste through our Food Matters Initiative. Our mission is to equip cities with the tools that they need to reduce food waste locally and to provide cities with expert technical assistance to advance progressive food waste policies, forge strategic public and private partnerships, secure essential federal and state funding, and launch high-impact pilots that evolve into enduring city-wide programs.



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# Background: Combating Food Waste in Philadelphia

From **October 2023 through March 2024**, SBN conducted its first-ever Food Saver Challenge, a campaign designed to support food businesses in Philadelphia in reducing their food waste.

The campaign aimed to increase awareness of the overall impact of surplus and wasted food and to advance the City's waste reduction goals.



## Why Reduce Food Waste?

It's a staggering fact that up to 40% of the food supply in the United States is wasted, with Philadelphia contributing up to 25% of its waste stream to this figure. The global impact is equally alarming, with food waste generating over 8% of greenhouse gas emissions and being responsible for 58% of landfill methane emissions. On a local level, approximately 250,000 people in Philadelphia are deprived of access to the nutritious food necessary for a healthy life.

With the support from NRDC's Food Matters Initiative, SBN's Food Saver Challenge tackled these pressing issues. The campaign encouraged local businesses to adopt sustainable practices and become leaders in the fight against food waste. By implementing strategies aligned with the U.S. EPA's Wasted Food Scale, businesses not only contributed to waste reduction but also saved money on food purchasing and disposal costs, reaping significant financial benefits.

## Campaign Impact

Over six months, SBN actively promoted the campaign and its participants, elevating city-wide awareness of the Challenge. The selected businesses collaborated directly with SBN, implementing sustainable practices to reduce food waste and contribute to the City's waste reduction goals. Additionally, upon completion of the Challenge, participating businesses could compete to win the title of "Food Saver Champion," a cash prize of \$5,000, press and public recognition, and other opportunities.



# Establishing Goals and Benchmarks



## Food Saver Challenge Goals

- Highlight the issue of food waste and its relationship to sustainability and food security in Philadelphia.
- Support local food businesses in their food waste reduction efforts.
- Educate businesses across the city about the resources available to help them reduce food waste.

Throughout the Challenge, SBN witnessed remarkable efforts to minimize food waste on all scales. Each month brought new innovative prevention strategies, such as repurposing leftover food into new recipes and adjusting ordering and production patterns to reduce waste at the source. We also saw an increase in food donations and composting through our Challenge partners and other local farms and facilities. Businesses shared that participating in our Challenge provided them with a reason to focus on food waste strategies.

## Benchmarks

Participating businesses committed to implementing or expanding food-saving techniques using a point system. They performed a self-evaluation at the beginning of the Challenge period, followed by monthly updates until the challenge concluded. At each check-in, SBN reported findings and provided needed support.

Participating businesses spent the six month period accruing points based on the EPA's Wasted Food Scale. Participants earned the most points for prevention, followed by food donation/repurposing, and the lowest amount of points for composting. Participating businesses submitted data each month with a goal of earning as many points as possible.

The specific food-saving techniques implemented were at the discretion of each business, based on evaluation results and business priorities. SBN staff worked intensively with the businesses, conducting site visits, troubleshooting questions, and fostering communication between partners and participants of the Challenge. Businesses and Food Waste Challenge partners also provided diversion metrics and related anecdotes throughout the Challenge's duration.



# Partners & Participants

## Partners

SBN's Food Saver Challenge brought together a group of dedicated partners committed to reducing food waste and promoting sustainable practices in the community.

**Sharing Excess**, an organization that redistributes surplus food to those in need, played a vital role in ensuring that excess food reached the right hands.

**Share Food Program's Philly Food Rescue** contributed by providing extensive resources and logistical support to facilitate the distribution of rescued food.

**The Drexel Food Lab** brought innovative solutions and culinary expertise to the table, helping to repurpose surplus food in creative and delicious ways.

**Bennett Compost** and **Circle Compost** both focused on composting organic waste, transforming it into valuable compost for local gardens and farms, thereby closing the loop on food waste.

**ClearCOGS** provided data-driven insights and technological solutions to optimize food inventory and minimize waste. Together, these partners created a robust network that worked tirelessly to tackle the issue of food waste from multiple angles.



## Participants

The businesses that participated in the Challenge were a diverse group committed to sustainable practices and reducing food waste. The official participants for the 2023 - 2024 Challenge were:

- **Crust Vegan Bakery**
- **Philadelphia Foodworks**
- **Philadelphia Catering Company**
- **Bar Hygge**
- **Old City Coffee**
- **LUHV Food**
- **Reading Terminal Market**
- **Mariposa Food Co-op**



# Strategies & Methods in Mitigating Food Waste

## Key Methods Used to Mitigate Food Waste in the Challenge

In collaboration with the Food Saver Challenge partners, four key methods were identified to effectively mitigate food waste:

- **Shifting Purchasing or Production Patterns:** This strategy included implementing systems to prevent over-ordering of food materials and limiting the production of certain items to allow businesses to significantly reduce waste. This involves using technology and data analysis to forecast demand more accurately. Additionally, creating and implementing innovative ways to reuse scraps to make new products can further minimize waste. For example, vegetable peels can be transformed into flavorful broths, and surplus bread can be used to create breadcrumbs or croutons.
- **Food Repurposing:** Another effective strategy is repurposing excess ingredients or scraps from previous products into new products that can be sold or consumed within the business. This not only reduces waste but also creates new revenue streams and offers customers unique products. For instance, fruit that is slightly overripe can be used in smoothies or baked goods, and leftover grains can be incorporated into salads or side dishes.
- **Food Redistribution:** Food donations and the establishment of community refrigerators to give away excess products are vital methods of food redistribution. These initiatives ensure that surplus food reaches those in need, rather than ending up in landfills. Partnering with local food banks, shelters, and community organizations can help facilitate the efficient distribution of surplus food, making a positive impact on the community.
- **Composting:** Inedible food scraps can be composted to create nutrient-rich soil amendments, closing the loop on food waste. Composting not only diverts waste from landfills but also enriches the soil, promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Businesses can partner with local composting companies or set up their own composting systems to manage food scraps effectively. For example, vegetable trimmings and coffee grounds can be composted to support local gardens and farms.

By implementing these four methods, businesses can play a crucial role in reducing food waste, promoting sustainability, and contributing to a healthier environment and community.





# 2023- 2024 Food Waste Challenge: Case Studies

## Case Study 1: Shifting Purchasing or Production Patterns



**BUSINESS NAME:**  
Philly Foodworks



**BUSINESS TYPE:**  
Local food delivery service

**EXAMPLES:**

- Used a weekly demand forecast for ordering to prevent excess food
- Coordinated crop plan with suppliers to limit overproduction of the same crop Uses as much of animal as possible so no edible scraps go to waste

**BUSINESS NAME:**  
Old City Coffee



**BUSINESS TYPE:** Coffee Shop

**EXAMPLES:**

- Changing purchasing methods to prevent over ordering
- Installing new half-brew coffee urn to produce coffee so no edible scraps go to waste

### *Partner Highlight: ClearCOGS*

ClearCOGS provided FSC participants complimentary trials of their program. ClearCOGS offers predictive demand forecasting to help restaurants minimize waste, reduce storage costs, and increase efficiency.

Using a restaurant’s POS data, ClearCOGS cleans and formats data, then provides daily briefings on the information you need to run a more profitable operation.

## Case Study 2: Food Repurposing

**BUSINESS NAME:**  
Crust Vegan Bakery



**BUSINESS TYPE:** Bakery

**EXAMPLES:**

- Leftover cookies used for pie crust
- Overcooked brownies and cookies for ice cream topping
- Coffee cake and biscuits turned into bread pudding
- Turning chickpeas and sweet potato into soup for staff
- Cake scraps turned into monkey bread

**BUSINESS NAME:**  
Bar Hygge



**BUSINESS TYPE:**  
Restaurant & Brewery

**EXAMPLES:**

- Spent grain made into dog treats
- Leftover bread used for croutons
- Orange peels and pith used for cocktails and beer brewing
- Veggie and chicken scraps made into stock
- Recycling fryer oil through Waste Oil Recyclers

### *Partner Highlight: Drexel Food Lab*

Drexel Food Lab offered consultations to all participants who needed inspiration on using their excess ingredients. Drexel Food Lab is a food product design and culinary innovation lab that applies culinary arts and science to improve the health of people, the planet and economies.



# 2023 - 2024 Food Waste Challenge: Case Studies (Cont'd)

## Case Study 3: Food Redistribution



**BUSINESS NAME:** LUHV Food

**BUSINESS TYPE:** Vegan deli



**EXAMPLES:**

- Created a new community fridge outside of LUHV's Point Breeze location, providing access to nutritious food for the community and ensuring no edible food is wasted

**BUSINESS NAME:**

Reading Terminal Market



**BUSINESS TYPE:**

Multi-Vendor Market

**EXAMPLES:**

- Sharing Excess food donations
- Excess food shared among employees across the market

### **Partner Highlight: Sharing Excess**

Sharing Excess is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit that rescues food and feeds communities, with a lifetime impact of over 25 million pounds of fresh food. We work with over 187 food businesses to deliver 15 million meals annually to over 300 organizations and 38 pop-up distribution locations across 66 zip codes in Philadelphia.

Sharing Excess partnered with Food Waste Challenge participants, providing pick-ups to businesses and data for the SBN team.

## Case Study 4: Composting

**BUSINESS NAME:**

Bar Hygge, High Fidelity Bakery, Luhv Food, Old City Coffee, Crust Vegan Bakery, Philadelphia Catering, Philly Foodworks, Mariposa Food Co-op (8 out of 9 participants)

**EXAMPLES:**

- Seven of these businesses worked with local business and food saver challenge partner, Bennett Compost for all inedible food scraps
- One participant, Philly Foodworks, donated compost to a local farm they work with as a supplier



### **Partner Highlight: Bennett Compost**

Founded in 2009, Bennett Compost collects food scraps from over 6000 households and 100 businesses throughout Philadelphia and turns them into compost and other nutrient-rich soil products. Bennett took on all interested participants, tracking pickups and weights.



# Announcing the Winner: Crust Vegan Bakery



On May 2, 2024, SBN recognized Crust Vegan Bakery as its inaugural Food Saver Challenge winner during a closing ceremony. Throughout the Challenge, Crust and the eight other participating businesses used waste prevention, redistribution, and landfill diversion methods to earn points toward winning the \$5,000 prize and being named SBN's "Food Saver Champion." Crust earned the highest points among the other businesses participating in the Challenge, totaling over 1,800, by reusing and repurposing products and ingredients into new recipes, donating leftovers to local community refrigerators, and composting.

Meagan Benz, owner of Crust Vegan Bakery, received a Citation from the City of Philadelphia, a trophy created by Remark Glass, and a \$5,000 check. "I'm incredibly proud that we won this Challenge and that SBN launched it," Benz shared.

***"SBN has long been a champion of small, sustainable businesses – like my own – and I hope they continue to support businesses to explore food waste reduction practices."***

Meagan Benz, owner of Crust Vegan Bakery



# Data Results

Throughout the Challenge, we witnessed remarkable efforts to minimize food waste on all scales. Each month brought new, innovative prevention strategies, such as repurposing leftover food into new recipes and adjusting ordering and production patterns to reduce waste at the source. We also saw an increase in food donations and composting through our Challenge partners and other local farms and facilities.

Over the six-month Challenge, the participating businesses have diverted nearly 85,000 pounds of food from entering the wastestream and donated over \$82,000 worth of food. The specific outcomes are displayed on the right and below.

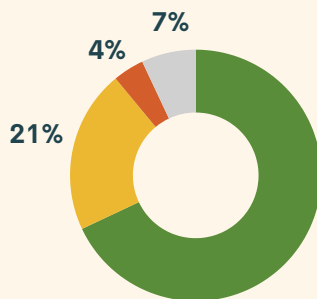
Businesses shared that participating in our Challenge provided them with a reason to focus on food waste strategies.

Other participants, including the Challenge winner, Crust Vegan Bakery, shared that the Challenge encouraged teamwork and collaboration among their staff.

With continued support, SBN is confident that we can reach additional businesses and enact real, long-lasting impact on the restaurant industry food systems and the communities beyond them.

<b>79,043 lbs</b>	Amount of food composted during Food Saver Challenge
<b>5,856 lbs</b>	Amount of food donated during Food Saver Challenge in pounds
<b>\$82,862</b>	Amount of food donated during Food Saver Challenge in retail value

## Prevention, Redistribution, & Compost



Prevention

Redistribution

Compost

Other

- Over the course of the Food Saver Challenge, participating businesses implemented a total of 140 food waste reduction practices.
- Over half (67%) of those practices were categorized as prevention, which included many innovative food repurposing solutions.
- Redistribution/donation practices were the next highest (21%), followed by other solutions (7%), and finally compost (4%).
- The data reveals the participating business' commitment to reducing waste based on the EPA's Wasted Food Scale.



# Conclusion & Lessons Learned

The 2023 – 2024 inaugural Food Saver Challenge was a pioneering effort for SBN to address food waste within the Philadelphia food industry. Through the collaborative efforts of our partners and participants, we made significant strides in reducing food waste, promoting sustainability, and fostering community engagement. In conclusion, the Challenge demonstrated the power of collaboration and innovation in addressing food waste. The lessons learned will guide future initiatives, helping us to better support businesses in their sustainability efforts and create a more resilient food system.

## Lesson 1: Engaging Businesses New to Food Waste Reduction

One of the key lessons learned was the importance of engaging businesses new to food waste reduction. While many of the Food Saver Challenge participants were already familiar with sustainable practices, businesses that were new to these efforts faced more challenges. These businesses often had less time and fewer dedicated staff members to focus on food waste reduction initiatives.

Moving forward, it will be crucial to provide additional support and resources to these businesses to help them integrate sustainable practices into their operations. This includes offering training, creating easy-to-follow guidelines, and fostering a community of support to encourage ongoing engagement.

## Lesson 2: Capturing and Measuring Data

Another important lesson was the complexity of capturing and measuring data across diverse food businesses. The SBN team developed a centralized data collection sheet to streamline data entry, but it became clear that a one-size-fits-all points system was not feasible. By understanding the unique operations of each business, we adapted our points system to include more options for earning points.

This flexible approach allowed businesses to participate in ways that were meaningful and achievable for them. In future Challenges, we will continue to refine our data collection methods and points system to better accommodate the diverse needs of participating businesses.

## Lesson 3: Time and Resources

Time and resource constraints were a common challenge for many participating businesses. To support these businesses, the SBN team conducted regular visits, maintained ongoing communication through monthly emails, phone calls, and social media check-ins. This hands-on support was essential in helping businesses overcome capacity issues and stay committed to their food waste reduction goals. Looking ahead, SBN aims to identify wasteful trends, develop long-term solutions tailored to each business, and provide the necessary resources to sustain these efforts. Additionally, we hope to see increased support from the City of Philadelphia and other local municipalities in assisting businesses to combat food waste and hunger in the region.



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