



2024 - 2025

# Food Saver Challenge Report



Prepared by  
The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia

August 2025

[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, and the participating Saxbys cafes which made this challenge possible.

Saxbys cafe locations included: Temple University, Drexel University, The University of Pennsylvania, Community College of Philadelphia, Rowan University, Rider University, Montclair State University, Northeastern University, Penn State University, Marist University, Purdue University, Georgia State University, Holy Family University, University of Pittsburgh, John Carroll University, University of Virginia, Saint Joseph's University, Robert Morris University, Bowie State University, Boston University, Mount St. Mary's University, and West Chester University.

***Thank you to all the 2024 - 2025 Food Saver Challenge participants, partners, and to the NRDC's Food Matters Initiative for making this challenge a success!***



# About SBN & NRDC

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## 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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# Partnering with Saxbys

## SBN's partnership with Saxbys

This year, SBN launched its Food Saver Inventory Wind-Down Challenge in partnership with Saxbys. In total, 28 cafes participated in the challenge with nine cafes in the Greater Philadelphia Area (labeled below).

Saxbys is an experiential learning company that transforms college campus spaces into immersive, academically-integrated learning labs through student-run cafes. Student CEOs® serve as paid executives with real P&L responsibility while earning academic credit, creating high-impact learning opportunities that blend operational excellence with leadership development. By empowering the next generation with both business acumen and human-centered leadership skills, Saxbys delivers proven outcomes that launch careers and transform lives. Saxbys operates over 30 cafes with over 25 university partners, including: Boston University, Georgia State University, Drexel University, Temple University, Marist University, University of Virginia, and an array of incredible campus partners nationwide.

At many of Saxbys' E.L.P.® partner campuses, cafes close for semester breaks, in alignment with the university's academic calendar. The Challenge's goal was to maintain product availability during the final weeks of the semester. At the same time, Student CEOs needed to minimize waste, as any perishable items at risk of expiring over break would need to be thrown away. Teams earned points for all decisions made, both in terms of their weekly ordering decisions from Saxbys suppliers, and their production decisions to prepare perishable menu items, or keep the bakery case stocked.





# Establishing Points

During the final five weeks of the Fall and Spring semesters, Saxbys Student CEOs were responsible for completing a weekly Inventory Wind-Down Tracker. The Trackers were used to allocate points to individual cafes that made progress in eliminating food waste. Inversely, points were deducted for items going completely out of stock during the period.

Action	Points Available
Note the expiration dates for all indicated items on tracker	20 per week
Make a purchasing decision based on the data in the Tracker for each order	20 per decision
Item goes out of stock during wind-down period	-20 per item
Make a production decision that helps reduce waste	10 per decision
Complete the Waste Log in xtraCHEF each day	10 per Waste Log
Donate food to a campus partner and/or compost collection organization.	5 per donation



# Strategies & Methods in Mitigating Food Waste

## Food Saver Challenge Goals

- Highlight the issue of food waste and its relationship to sustainability and food security
- Support Saxbys Cafes in their food waste reduction efforts.
- Educate Student CEOs and team members about the resources available to help them reduce food waste.



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

### Prevention (*Most Preferred Method*):

- **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.

### Food Redistribution:

- **Food donation:** Another effective strategy is donating excess food waste. The Greater Philadelphia area has a large amount of food banks, community fridges, soup kitchens, and community grocers. All menu items at Saxbys are made-to-order, including staples like Breakfast Burritos, Grilled Cheese, Cold Brew, Matcha, and Smoothies. Each recipe uses different amounts and types of perishable food items, with specific expiration and use-by dates. Saxbys Student CEOs needed to determine how to manage their ordering practices to avoid excess food waste, and to consider donating food that would otherwise be wasted upon the cafe's closure for the end of the semester.

### Waste Reduction:

- **Composting:** The Rowan Saxbys cafe donated excess coffee grinds to be composted by a local farm. Composting or Anaerobic Digestion involves using excess food scraps to improve soil health, leading to nutrient-rich plants. Composting can be done with a wide variety of materials including eggshells, paper tea bags, fruit, vegetables, and even coffee grinds.



# Fall Winner: Temple University Liacouras Walk Cafe



**Student CEO Julia Knies, Marketing Major, Class of 2027**

**The Temple University Liacouras Walk Saxbys cafe was the top overall cafe in the Fall Semester Wind Down challenge!**

Saxbys uses Periodic Automatic Replacement (PAR) as its inventory management method, and Julia noted that the Challenge helped her learn to manage her inventory in real time.

"At the beginning of my Student CEO term, I understood how PARs were supposed to work in theory, but it took me some time to understand how to put them into practice," Julia said. "By the time the challenge came around at the end of my term, I was really confident in knowing how much we needed to order and prep because I was in the cafe every day and had a better sense of what to expect."

## First In, First Out

Julia also took the Challenge as an opportunity to retrain her team on waste reduction best practices, including the "First In, First Out" (FIFO) process. FIFO ensures that items with the closest expiration date are used or sold first, so that they are not wasted unnecessarily. Julia and her team gained a lot of points to their total from noting expiration dates for the FIFO process.



**1660 OVERALL POINTS**

## Team Effort

Julia noted that the Challenge victory was very much a team effort. "When the challenge was first announced, that was coincidentally right around the time that I held one of my team meetings. I decided to sit with my Team Leads first to discuss as a group about the best way to approach the challenge. Then, at the team meeting, I was able to make sure everyone was aware of the challenge expectations," she said.



# Spring Winner: Rowan University Cafe



The Rowan University Saxbys cafe was the top overall cafe in the Spring Semester Wind Down challenge!

**1205 OVERALL POINTS**

Through the challenge, participating cafes were able to track their total points against other cafes – creating a sense of friendly competition between schools.

“My team was very motivated by the concept of competing against other teams and thinking about, like, ‘wow, we’re winning, we’re in the lead,’” said Kelsey. “That kind of helped to motivate them to try to meet other teams and be number one.”

## Biggest Surprise?

Kelsey noted that she thought her cafe “used a lot more cheese” than they actually did. Tracking cheese usage allowed her team to make data-driven purchasing decisions. According to Kelsey, this lead directly to a decrease in food waste.



**Student CEO Kelsey Przygoda, Environmental and Sustainability Studies and Geography Major, Class of 2026**

## Coffee Redistribution

Kelsey and the Rowan cafe were able to donate excess coffee grinds to Rowan University West Campus Farm in order to gain points while cutting down on waste. “It’s nice to repurpose our waste,” she said. These grinds, in turn, were used on the farm for compost.



# City Spotlight: Community College of Philadelphia Cafe



**Student CEO Anisa Kurbanali, Secondary Education Major, Class of 2026**

The Community College of Philadelphia (CCP) Saxbys cafe was the top scoring cafe in Philadelphia for the Spring Wind Down challenge!

The CCP cafe, spearheaded by Student CEO Anisa Kurbanali, donated their excess food to The People’s Fridge— a community-driven fridge for people suffering from homelessness. Kurbanali explained the fridge rarely saw baked goods, so daily donations of muffins and brownies were welcomed.

**535 OVERALL POINTS**

“If we were continuing to like prep as much as we did, order as much as we did, it would have been extremely wasteful,” said Kurbanali

## Data Results



Fall data:

At 9 Philadelphia Cafes, Saxbys saved 96% of food that could have been wasted

Compared to Fall 2023, Saxbys saved over \$24k in cost of goods sold



Spring data:

At 9 Philadelphia Cafes, Saxbys saved 96% of food that could have been wasted

Compared to FY2023, Saxbys saved \$50K in cost of goods sold



# Conclusion & Lessons Learned

The 2024 – 2025 Food Saver Challenge gave SBN the chance to improve upon last year’s successful inaugural challenge, and we did just that. Through a full partnership with Saxbys, we saw great leaps in the reduction of food waste in participating cafes. Our lessons learned will help us continue to innovate the challenge for future Food Saver participants.

## Lesson 1: Engaging Student CEOs with friendly competition

One of the key lessons learned was the importance of cultivating friendly competition between participating cafes. All of the Student CEOs who were interviewed for the completion of this report detailed that “winning” the challenge motivated their cafes to cut down on food waste.

Moving forward, it will be crucial to amplify the competitive aspect of the Food Saver Challenge. This can be accomplished through emailing participating cafes weekly “leaderboards,” or holding a “kickoff” event with all participants.



## Lesson 2: Rewarding and Assisting Donations

Another lesson SBN learned was the importance of rewarding food donations. Both the Rowan and CCP cafes took advantage of donating items in distinct ways, cutting down food waste while helping their local communities. In the future, it will be imperative to assist managers in finding local donation centers. Along with the giving a point-based incentive for donating, pointing our partners towards specific centers will further encourage donations. As SBN saw so much success this year with various donation centers, the continuation and improvement of this strategy is paramount moving forward.

## Lesson 3: Increasing Participation

An area for improvement that SBN recognizes pertains to issues logging data. The Fall semester saw just a 71.4% participation rate amongst cafes. Meanwhile, the Spring semester saw just a 62.5% participation rate. In order to continue to create meaningful change in Philadelphia, SBN will improve direct communication with partners to increase participation.

Moving forward, partners will be contacted their establishment has missed a weekly log. Once a partner misses a log, it is likely they will continue with this pattern. It is imperative to send a friendly reminder as soon as a log is missed, so it does not happen again.

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