



HOW WRI REDUCED ITS OFFICE FOOD WASTE BY MORE THAN 75 PERCENT

WRI's Food Program does a lot of work on food loss and waste. For instance, we convene the FLW Protocol (www.flwprotocol.org) which developed the Food Loss and Waste Accounting and Reporting Standard, the first global standard for food loss and waste measurement. We continue to produce guidance on food loss and waste measurement for the public and private sectors. We are the co-Secretariat of Champions 12.3 (www.champions123.org), a coalition of leaders dedicated to inspiring ambition, motivating action, and accelerating progress toward Target 12.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals—the target that calls for halving the rate of food loss and waste by 2030.

With all this work, we realized that we need to “walk the talk” ourselves. The Champions 12.3 coalition has coined the mantra “Target, Measure, Act” when it comes to reducing food loss and waste. Targets set ambition. What gets measured gets managed. And what ultimately matters is on-the-ground action.

So WRI applied this mantra to its own office operations.



TARGET

First, we adopted SDG Target 12.3 ourselves. We set a target of reducing the amount of food waste we generate in our global office in Washington, DC by half by the year 2030. A forthcoming step is to do the same for our international offices.

MEASURE

After we set our target, we needed to start measuring our food waste. In mid-2017, a dozen staff volunteers sorted through the office trash to figure out how much and what kind of waste we produce. This was WRI's first waste composition analysis, which we now conduct on a quarterly basis. They found that our office was sending about 14 pounds of food to the landfill each day. That may not sound like a lot, but it adds up to more than 1.5 tons of food in a year for just one office.

ACT

Conducting a waste composition analysis is pretty easy for an office. First, volunteers collect all the waste receptacles (e.g., trash, recycling) from around the office and sort the waste into different categories (e.g., food waste, paper recyclables, glass, trash). We then weigh each category with a simple digital scale, just like the one you use to weigh yourself in the morning. All in all, the process takes about an hour and a half. After the audit, volunteers are rewarded with some pizza and a beverage of their choice (which just might include a beer!). It turns out that incentivizing staff with free food is a great way to get more volunteers!

We do these waste audits every quarter, at the end of a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. When we started, we worried that the audits would be too messy, that no staff would want to participate, and that we may not be able to reduce our waste and meet our target. All three of those concerns proved unwarranted.

Armed with information about the type and source of food waste, we identified the three biggest waste hotspots in our office:

1. Leftovers from catered events,
2. Uneaten lunches by staff, and
3. Forgotten food in the office kitchen refrigerators.

To address catering waste, our office events manager now cuts the amount a team thinks it needs to order for an event by up to 25 percent. Most people tend to over-order catering out of fear that they won't have enough, but we've found that this fear is usually unfounded. Our general rule of thumb is that for groups of 10-15, we order for that many people, but for groups of 20 or more you can order 25 percent less than you think you need and will probably still end up with leftovers.

Of course, we still sometimes have leftovers. At WRI we have a long-standing tradition of making food remaining from events available to staff. If one sees a bee-line of interns rushing toward our conference facilities around 2:00 in the afternoon, it's a good bet that one of those "free food outside the conference center" emails was just sent. Any food that still remains afterward is donated to a nearby charity.

We have done this “free food for staff” or “donation to charity” for many years, so we can’t attribute any of our food waste reductions since mid-2017 to this strategy. But we highly recommend that others begin a similar tradition if they don’t currently have one.

To address lunches staff didn’t finish, we started a composting program. While we want to reduce the amount of waste we generate overall, we also want to make sure that the waste we do generate at least goes to a good use and not to the landfill. Our kitchen and coffee break areas all now have green composting bins with clear, visual instructions on what can be composted. In addition, we have increased our education of staff on tips for saving food.

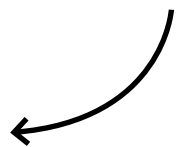
To our surprise, forgotten leftovers in the office refrigerators were a huge source of waste. Our office facilities manager now informs staff by email quite a bit in advance of when refrigerators will be cleaned out, so staff use up their food in time. And these reminders are sent repeatedly in the run-up to the monthly refrigerator cleaning. This has also contributed to a higher level of staff awareness about food waste, and we have seen the number of forgotten leftovers fall dramatically. Finally, we also asked the building janitors to put the remaining food they do clean out into the composting bins rather than the trash.

CONCLUSIONS

After just one year, we reduced our office food waste by more than 75 percent, from 14 lbs per day to just under 3 lbs per day. Additionally, we’re not only reducing the amount of waste going to landfill, we’re composting the amount of waste we still have. The process of reducing our office food waste has been surprisingly easy. Staff are proud of the role they are playing in making us more sustainable, and as an added benefit, we’ve even been able to save money on events. Measuring and reducing our food loss and waste has become a part of office culture.



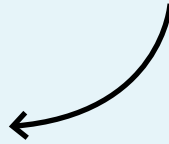
We recommend wearing gloves!



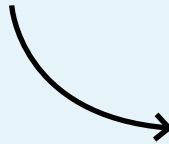
WRI staff sorting waste from around the office into different categories.



WRI staff measuring and recording our sorted waste.



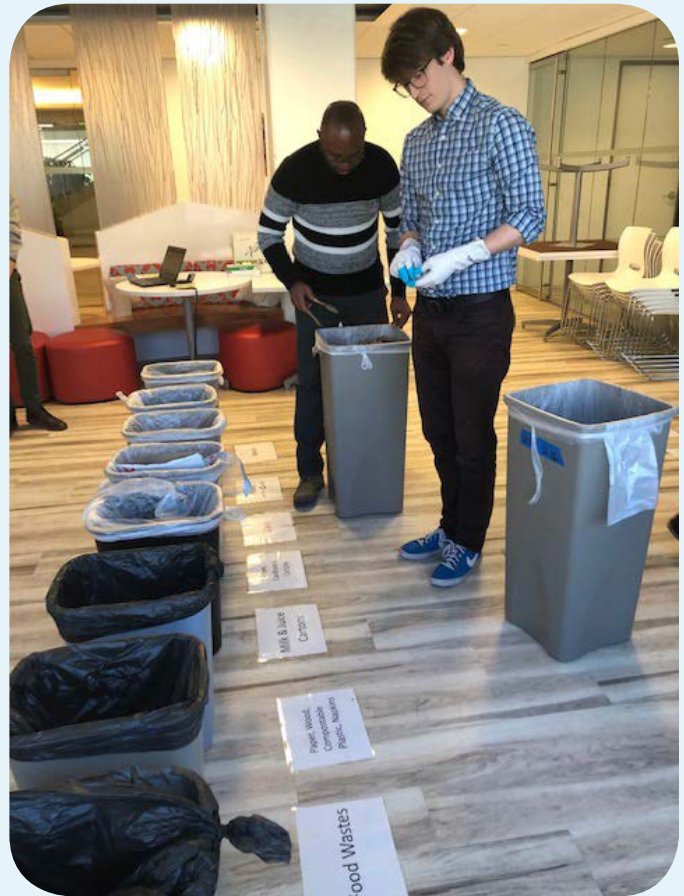
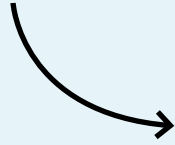
WRI staff showing off sorted waste.



Waste categories, ready for sorting.



WRI staff sorting waste.



WRI staff sorting waste.

