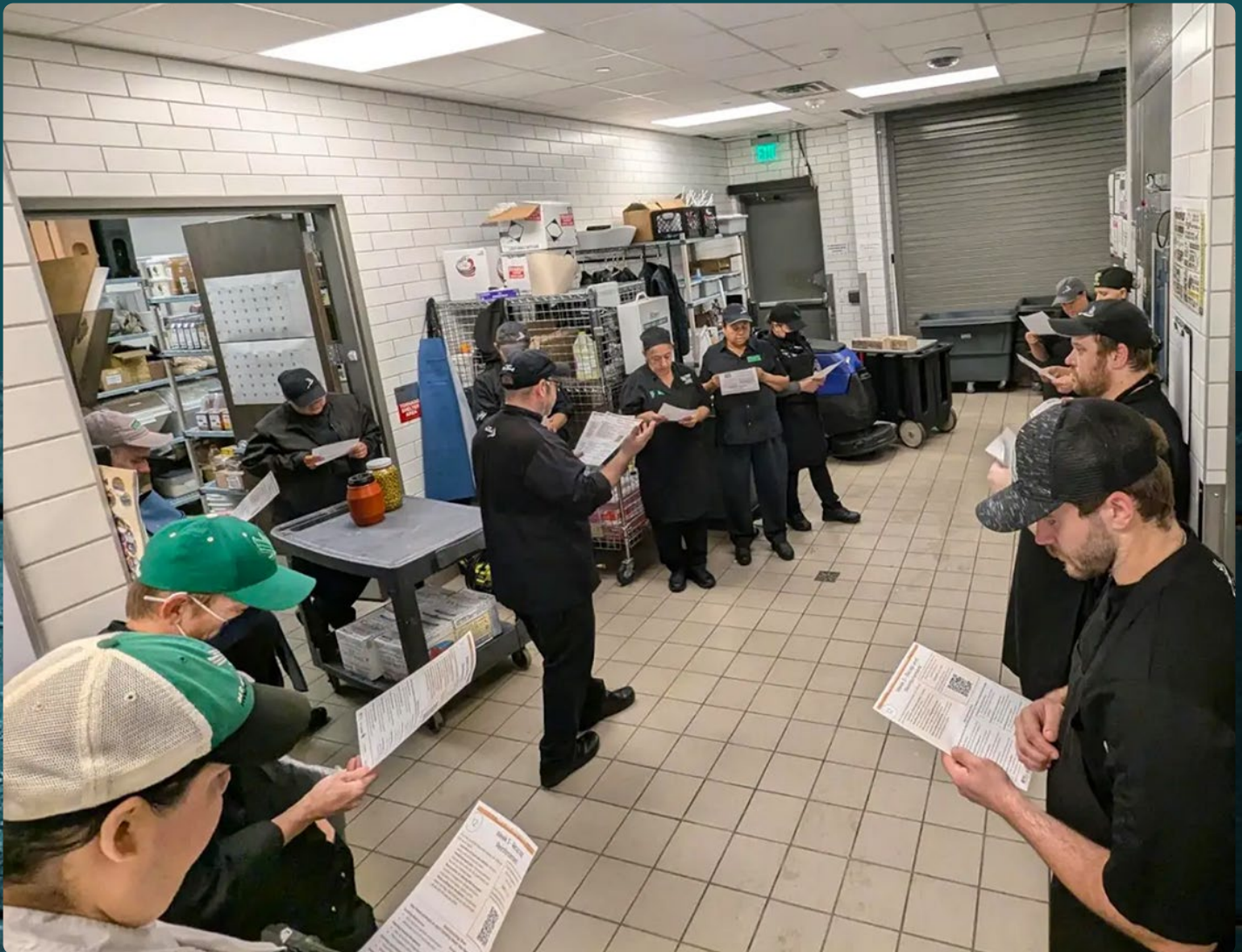


CASE STUDY

Empowering Staff in Foodservice for Sustainable Impact

A FoodWISE Approach to Reducing Food Waste



Executive Summary

Foodservice signatories of the U.S. Food Waste Pact (Pact) and the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment (PCFWC) collaborated with the R&DE Stanford Food Institute on the FoodWISE¹ pilot project. The R&DE Stanford Food Institute, also a signatory of the U.S. Food Waste Pact, partnered with the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC), which is co-founded and jointly led by Stanford Residential & Dining Enterprises, Stanford Prevention Research Center, and The Culinary Institute of America, to engage collegiate sites for this project.

Participating signatories piloted interactive training on food waste, an employee idea generation challenge, and implementation of a winning employee idea at ten foodservice sites across the United States. The goal of the project was to demonstrate the power of employee engagement in reducing back-of-house food waste.

The project ran over a six-month period (August 2024 to January 2025) across ten diverse foodservice sites, including:

- 3 colleges and universities with self-operated foodservice programs (MCURC members).
- 3 colleges and universities with contract-managed foodservice programs (including 2 MCURC members).
- 4 contract-managed corporate sites.

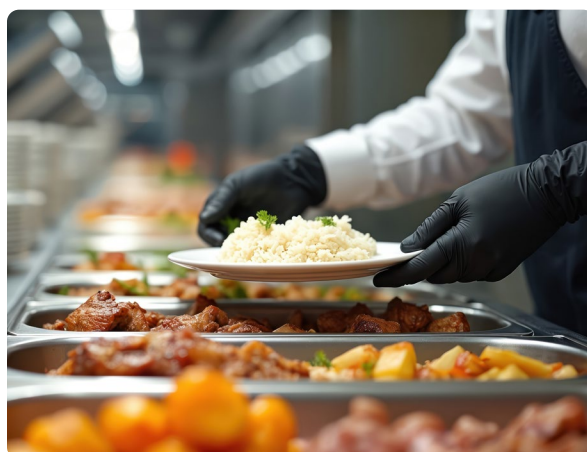
Over 120 consolidated ideas, submitted by 140 employees, were organized based on the key themes listed in the table to the right. Of these ideas, 83% were simple, low-cost changes that required minimal effort to implement.

Key Themes in Submitted Ideas

1. Using Technology and Data
2. Optimizing Storage and Inventory
3. Employee Engagement and Training
4. Reducing Overproduction and Adapting Service
5. Repurposing Overproduction and Substituting Ingredients
6. Composting and Waste Management
7. Enhancing Food Donation Programs

Open-Source Resources

- 1. Site-specific case studies:** quick summaries of the employee idea piloted at each site
- 2. Training materials:** downloadable content for foodservice companies to engage employees around food waste
- 3. Idea hub:** a full list of employee ideas generated from the pilot



¹ FoodWISE (which stands for Food Workforce Initiative for Sustainable Engagement) was the name given to this intervention pilot project.

FoodWISE Pilot:

Empowering Staff for Sustainable Impact

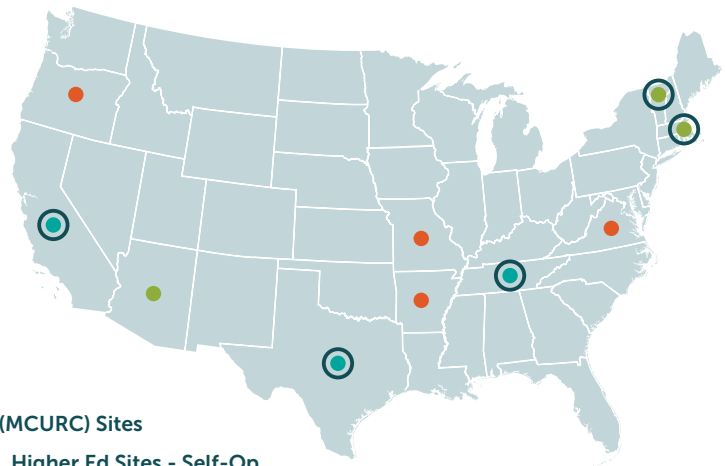
215 Employees. 10 Sites. One Mission: Reduce Food Waste.

The FoodWISE pilot empowered frontline staff to generate actionable change in foodservice sustainability.

Widespread participation



215
employees engaged



○ Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC) Sites

● Corporate Sites ● Higher Ed Sites - Vendor-Op ● Higher Ed Sites - Self-Op

Collective innovation



181
employee submissions

Crowdsourced outcome



120+
consolidated ideas

Measuring engagement



179
pre-surveys



81
post-surveys

Engaging those employees closest to the food waste challenge is essential to reducing inefficiencies, cutting costs, and meeting sustainability goals.

Food waste reduction is not just an environmental challenge.

It is a frontline business solution.

Project Background

Introduction

Foodservice signatories of the Pact and the PCFWC collaborated with the R&DE Stanford Food Institute on this study to address food waste reduction by directly engaging foodservice staff. Food waste is a critical challenge in foodservice operations, impacting both financial sustainability and environmental responsibility—and the challenges vary widely depending on factors such as size, hours of operation, and diner volume. Participating foodservice sites, including corporate cafeterias and university dining halls, saw this as an opportunity to empower staff with knowledge and tools to make a meaningful impact on food waste reduction.

Project Context and Summary

The foodservice intervention pilot builds on prior employee engagement pilot projects published by the PCFWC in collaboration with the Pact. These intervention pilots—conducted at CPG (consumer packaged goods) manufacturing plants owned by [Bob's Red Mill](#), [Land O'Lakes](#), and [Fresh Del Monte](#)—used a successful, three-pronged strategy of education, company-wide engagement, and Quick-Win implementation to achieve meaningful food waste reductions.

FoodWISE is the program name for the foodservice pilot that was structured around three key activities: employee training, an idea submission contest, and pilot implementation of selected ideas. Employees at each site participated in interactive training sessions covering food waste reduction strategies.



This pilot was conducted across ten sites in various U.S. states, representing a diverse set of institutions. These included contract-managed corporate locations and colleges and universities, as well as self-operated campus dining programs, including members of the MCURC.

A total of 181 employee idea submissions were collected across all ten sites, reflecting a diverse range of practical and innovative solutions. After consolidation, this represented over 120 actionable ideas. The selected ideas were tested in real-world conditions, with feedback collected through surveys and food waste tracking systems.

Impact Measurement Metrics and Tools

The FoodWISE Pilot was designed with a comprehensive evaluation framework to assess its effectiveness across multiple dimensions. The framework focused on four key areas:

1 Utilization

Measuring participation and engagement in training and idea submission

2 Satisfaction

Assessing employee perception of the training content, delivery, and relevance

3 Mindset and Behavior Change

Evaluating shifts in attitudes, self efficacy, and actions related to food waste reduction

4 Business Impact

Understanding how the pilot influenced operational efficiency, cost savings, and food waste reduction efforts

While Utilization, Satisfaction, and Business Impact are traditionally used in program evaluations, Mindset and Behavior Change is equally if not more important to evaluate, though it is also often the most challenging to measure. Unlike simple participation or satisfaction scores, mindset and behavior shifts provide deeper insight into the long-term effectiveness of the intervention. **These changes indicate whether employees not only understand the importance of food waste reduction but also feel empowered and motivated to take action.**



Results

The FoodWISE Pilot successfully engaged employees in identifying and implementing solutions for reducing food waste across ten sites. These results highlight strong participation and enthusiasm from staff, reinforcing the importance of frontline engagement in sustainability initiatives and how they relate to business efficiency.

BY THE NUMBERS

10
sites

181
ideas submitted by
140 employees

215
employees
engaged

179
pre-surveys
collected

81
post-surveys
collected

Employee-Submitted Ideas: Insights and Trends

Employees submitted a diverse range of ideas covering various food types and operational areas.

Food Types Targeted

Ideas addressed all major food categories, including:

- High-cost waste items, such as animal proteins and dairy
- High-volume waste items, such as vegetables and grains
- Multiple food types, with shared potential for reduction

While many ideas were broad in application, others specifically tackled food categories with the highest waste reduction potential.

Operational Areas Addressed

Ideas spanned multiple aspects of foodservice operations, reflecting the wide range of opportunities available for waste reduction. Those areas included:

- Storage and inventory management
- Service adjustments to reduce waste
- Production efficiencies
- Tracking and data utilization
- Donation and composting strategies

Key Themes in Submitted Ideas

The ideas fell into seven main categories:

1. **Using Technology and Data:** Leveraging tracking tools and analytics
2. **Optimizing Storage and Inventory:** Reducing waste through improved organization and monitoring
3. **Employee Engagement and Training:** Encouraging staff participation and awareness
4. **Reducing Overproduction and Adapting Service:** Adjusting portioning and menu planning
5. **Repurposing Overproduction and Substituting Ingredients:** Finding creative ways to use surplus food
6. **Composting and Waste Management:** Enhancing disposal and recycling efforts
7. **Enhancing Food Donation Programs:** Redirecting edible surplus to those in need

A quick poll of managers involved in this project revealed that the strategies they were most interested in were:

- Employee engagement and training
- Reducing overproduction and adapting service
- Using technology and data

On the other hand, opinions were more divided on storage optimization, repurposing overproduction, and waste management, and food donation programs were of least interest

to most managers. These findings suggest that managers prioritize business-focused solutions that offer a clear operational and financial benefit alongside sustainability goals.

Furthermore, although food donation and rescue are often the most visible programs to diners and the examples most thought of among consumers as downstream solutions, they are the least beneficial environmentally when compared to better forecasting, higher utilization rates, or reducing overproduction.



Idea Implementation: Scope and Levels of Difficulty

Submitted ideas were assessed and categorized based on their feasibility and level of organizational change required. The breakdown was as follows:

- **Quick Wins (44%)** – Simple, low-cost changes that require minimal effort to implement.
- **Developments (39%)** – Incremental improvements that require training and planning.
- **Disruptions (8%)** – More radical changes that challenge existing workflows.
- **Transformations (9%)** – High-impact structural shifts that require long-term investment.

These categories help identify where efforts should be focused for both immediate and long-term food waste reduction.

Short Term		Long Term	
QUICK WINS - 44%		DEVELOPMENTS - 39%	
Simple	Easily implementable ideas that require minimal changes, resources, or approvals. They align well with existing practices and have an immediate, measurable impact.	■ Low-cost or no-cost interventions. ■ Require little to no additional training. ■ Align with current workflows and priorities. ■ Can show results within days or weeks.	Incremental improvements that enhance existing processes over time. These ideas require more planning and coordination but do not fundamentally challenge the way things are done. ■ Require investment in training and/or new tracking methods. ■ Align with institutional goals but need structural adjustments. ■ Medium-level commitment from staff and management. ■ Impact may take months to materialize.
	DISRUPTIONS - 8%		TRANSFORMATIONS - 9%
Challenging	Radically new approaches that can be implemented quickly but challenge the status quo. These ideas often require strong leadership support and can face initial resistance.	■ Demand shifts in behavior or processes. ■ Require breaking from tradition or hierarchy. ■ Short-term implementation but high engagement effort. ■ Potential for high impact if successfully adopted.	High-impact ideas that fundamentally change food waste management in the institution. They require significant investment, mindset shifts, and often multi-stakeholder collaboration. ■ Require substantial buy-in from leadership and staff. ■ Need infrastructure changes, policy adjustments, or new technologies. ■ Potential to redefine best practices for the institution. ■ Long-term monitoring and adaptation needed.

Case Studies: Key Takeaways

The variety of approaches between sites highlights the flexibility and adaptability of food waste reduction initiatives.

- Collaboration and communication tools like shared shelves, whiteboards, and pop-up stations proved effective at increasing awareness and motivating employees to reduce waste.
- Behavioral shifts were strongest when teams felt involved in solutions, rather than being told what to do.
- Data tracking varied widely, from sites using ENABLE+ or Leanpath² to those relying on manual logs or informal estimates.
- Training engagement was high, but some sites suggested making content more concise, hands-on, and relevant to daily operations.
- Simple culinary innovations, such as vegan mayo, stock from trimmings, and creative reuse of produce, demonstrated that small changes can lead to significant waste reduction.

By building on these successes and refining the training program, future efforts can further empower employees to take action and sustain long-term waste reduction efforts.

See all of the case studies ➔

- Self-operated foodservice universities
- Contract-managed foodservice universities
- Contract-managed corporate campuses

Employee Satisfaction and Engagement

Employee satisfaction was high, with a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 57%. Training sessions were well received for their content, format, and accessibility in multiple languages. Employees reported increased confidence in tackling food waste and a stronger sense of ownership over their roles in reducing waste.

Beyond satisfaction, key takeaways included:

- Increased engagement and conversations around sustainability and business efficiency.
- A stronger connection between waste tracking and business operations, particularly regarding forecasting and procurement.
- Better understanding of how sustainability initiatives align with business efficiency and cost reduction.

What is the Net Promoter Score (NPS)?

NPS is a metric that measures customer loyalty and the likelihood of customers recommending a program or a product. It ranges from -100 to +100, with 0 meaning that a company has as many promoters as it has detractors. A 57 score is very high.

² Leanpath and ENABLE+ are food waste tracking platforms that help commercial kitchens measure and reduce surplus food by capturing data on waste generation and facilitating more informed operational decisions.

Key Strategies and Recommendations

Training and Workforce Empowerment

Training was a key success factor of the FoodWISE Pilot, fostering engagement and awareness among employees.

The University of North Texas (UNT) reported that employees felt “absolutely more empowered to suggest and implement food waste reduction ideas” after completing the training.

R&DE Stanford Dining, Hospitality, and Auxiliaries expressed the need for more simplified content in training materials than the content used in the FoodWISE Pilot. Others, like UNT, found that incorporating interactive elements such as quizzes and real-world application exercises reinforced learning effectively.

Moving forward, training should continue to be practical, engaging, and tailored to frontline employees. Expanding training accessibility by offering multilingual options and integrating it into daily workflows helped further enhance participation and impact, as several participants noted.



Technology and Data Use

Tracking food waste data played a crucial role in identifying reduction opportunities. Tracking mechanisms can range from AI-driven web applications to simple spreadsheets.

Arizona State University (ASU) leveraged Aramark’s ENABLE+ system for detailed waste logging.

A corporate site relied on Excel spreadsheets and manual entry.

To maximize efficiency, future initiatives should focus on standardizing data collection methods and training employees on proper data entry techniques. Implementing waste tracking tools like ENABLE+ and Leanpath where feasible could further enhance accuracy and insights. This would enable sites to make data-driven decisions to reduce waste, while justifying the investment with clear metrics.

Leadership and Prioritization

A key finding of the pilot was the role of leadership in sustaining engagement. Sites like ASU and UNT flourished under strong managerial support, with employees actively participating in waste reduction efforts. Another corporate site reported that recognizing employees for their contributions increased motivation and commitment. However, some locations noted that without clear leadership reinforcement, engagement was more challenging.

To sustain momentum, leadership should continue to highlight food waste reduction as a priority. This can be achieved through structured recognition programs, performance-based incentives, and integrating waste reduction goals into managerial responsibilities. A culture of encouragement and accountability can help solidify long-term commitment.



Communication and Awareness

The pilot demonstrated that improved communication can significantly enhance waste reduction efforts. Successful communication examples included:

- Better coordination with event planning teams to optimize production planning.
- Fostering collaboration across kitchen stations to improve resource utilization and reduce surplus.

Beyond internal communication, reinforcing waste reduction efforts through visibility and recognition is essential. UNT suggested displaying daily waste statistics and fun fact sheets to keep employees engaged. R&DE Stanford Dining, Hospitality, and Auxiliaries also noted that QR codes made it convenient and fast for the employees to submit feedback about the FoodWISE training, whereas other participating sites found paper surveys easier, highlighting the need to evaluate staff “tech savviness.” Providing real-time feedback through dashboards or team meetings can further enhance accountability and motivation, ensuring that waste reduction remains a shared priority.

Learnings and Next Steps

The following lessons from the FoodWISE Pilot will inform future initiatives:

- Structured training, when engaging and accessible, significantly enhances employee participation and awareness about food waste reduction.
- Standardizing data collection methods further improves the ability to measure and track food waste reduction efforts.
- Leadership involvement and fostering cross-departmental communication ensures that waste reduction remains a sustained priority.

As with any pilot, there were challenges. While many strategies were successfully implemented, short-term waste reduction was not always evident, which aligns with expectations given the pilot's design. Data-sharing barriers remained a persistent issue, highlighting the need for better integration of

procurement, menu design, and food waste tracking to improve forecasting accuracy. These results emphasize the importance of measuring waste consistently and bridging data gaps to maximize impact.

Looking ahead, future use of FoodWISE assets could incorporate these learnings to refine training materials, enhance data tracking capabilities, and expand employee engagement strategies. Training could be made available in multiple formats, including digital modules and in-person sessions, ensuring accessibility for all employees. Greater emphasis could be placed on leadership-driven recognition programs to celebrate contributions and reinforce commitment. By building on these insights, FoodWISE can continue to drive significant impact in foodservice waste reduction, empowering employees to play a pivotal role in sustainability efforts and business efficiency.

Resources

The FoodWISE Pilot was structured around three key activities: employee training, an idea submission contest, and pilot implementation of selected ideas. In addition to the case study findings, the resources developed for the pilot are being made available.

Case Studies: Highlights, by participating site, of the selected pilot idea and site-specific learnings and outcomes. See the [site-by-site case studies](#) on the case study page.

Training Resources: Materials covering a training checklist, pre- and post-training surveys, training materials in the form of huddle cards, and educational posters. Employee-facing materials are also available in Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole and Tagalog (Filipino). For the full list of training resources, see the [Training Resources](#) on the case study page.

Idea Hub: The FoodWISE Pilot generated 181 submissions, covering a broad spectrum of waste reduction strategies. After consolidation, this represented over 120 actionable ideas. These ideas were categorized based on feasibility and impact, ensuring a structured approach to implementation. For the full list of ideas, see the [FoodWISE Idea Hub](#) on the case study page.

Acknowledgments

The U.S. Food Waste Pact and the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment would like to thank the R&DE Stanford Food Institute for their leadership, and Aramark, the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative, and Sodexo for their invaluable participation in this project.

About the R&DE Stanford Food Institute

The Stanford Food Institute was created by Stanford University's Residential & Dining Enterprises (R&DE) to advance research, education, policy, business, and practice to promote a holistic approach to improving what people eat, how people access food, and the role that food plays in our lives. SFI is a collaborative platform to inspire and share ideas and investigate solutions for a better food future by uniting a community of students, faculty, staff, producers, chefs, and entrepreneurs from many disciplines, all with a common passion for delicious, healthy, and sustainable food. Together with our growing stakeholder ecosystem, we can accelerate innovative, evidence-based pathways to the systems-level changes needed to secure a nourishing, equitable, climate-smart food future for every generation to come.



About Aramark

Aramark serves the world's leading educational institutions, Fortune 500 companies, world champion sports teams, prominent healthcare providers, iconic destinations and cultural attractions, and numerous municipalities in 16 countries around the world with food and facilities management. Because of its hospitality culture, employees strive to do great things for each other, partners, their communities, and the planet.



About the Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC)

The Menus of Change University Research Collaborative (MCURC) is a global network of colleges and universities using campus dining halls as living laboratories for behavior change. These dynamic learning environments where applied research is bridged with operational innovation to advance the Menus of Change Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus. The MCURC is composed of more than 500 individuals from over 80 colleges and universities, contract companies, ex officio organizations, research innovation affiliates, and research collaborator organizations. Our members include senior university administrators, dining directors, executive chefs, nutrition and sustainability managers, and academic faculty.



About Sodexo

Sodexo specializes in sustainable food service and valued experiences, in all 50 U.S. states, Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam, at every moment in life: learn, work, heal and play. Sodexo is committed to meeting the challenges of everyday life with a dual goal: to improve the quality of life of its employees and those they serve, and contribute to the economic, social and environmental progress in the communities where they operate. Their purpose is to create a better every day for everyone to build a better life for all.



About the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment

The Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment (PCFWC) arose out of the [Pacific Coast Collaborative](#) in 2016 and is an innovative public-private partnership made up of West Coast jurisdictions, U.S. food industry leaders, and nonprofit resource partners that together seek to eliminate food waste in the region by 50% by 2030. Learn more about the initiative and its members at pacificcoastcollaborative.org/food-waste.



U.S. Food Waste Pact

The U.S. Food Waste Pact is a national voluntary agreement to help food businesses accelerate progress toward their waste reduction targets. Led by national nonprofit partners ReFED and World Wildlife Fund, the U.S. Food Waste Pact is aligned around the global framework of "Target, Measure, Act" to help food businesses reduce waste within their operations.



Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment

Business Signatories (As of Summer 2025)

Retailers



Hospitality and Foodservice



Manufacturers



Growers

Resource Partners



U.S. Food Waste Pact

Business Signatories (As of Summer 2025)

Retailers



Hospitality and Foodservice



Manufacturers



Partner Leads

