

# 19 Ways to Control Food Waste

## Attend to Your Back-of-house Processes

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**F**ood is a major cost center for your foodservice operation. So wasting this valuable resource is like throwing money in the trash. Here are several ideas for getting the upper hand on food waste.



1. **Avoid overproduction** – Prepare just what you need. Use your production records as a guide. Document the amount of leftovers you have, and what was done with them. Just-in-time cooking also reduces over-production.
2. **Monitor leftovers** – Continuously monitor your leftovers. Make adjustments in your production, where necessary. Make a note on your production records on the day you use your leftovers.
3. **Have a plan for leftovers** – Unexpected events can occur, so always have a plan on how to use leftovers.
4. **Use a cycle menu** – A cycle menu reduces inventory, and increases staff productivity, because employees are producing the same item every cycle. Production records are even more valuable to reduce overproduction.
5. **Use standardized recipes** – A standardized recipe is tested at your site for consistency and yield.

They help prevent waste, obtain planned yield, and ensure uniform quality and portions. Check your final product to make sure you're getting the amount you planned for. Analyze any differences you find.

6. **Institute “Offer versus Serve” for all grades** – Kids like having choices. That’s why “offer versus serve” is such a good idea. Having a variety of choices, and using “offer versus serve,” are great ways to reduce plate waste, and safeguard against students throwing food in the trash. Remember, accurate production records are even more critical when you conduct business this way.

7. **Use portion control** – Dispensing the correct portion size ensures your standardized recipes yield the number of servings you planned for.
8. **Pare and clean fruits and vegetables moderately** – Use a produce yield chart to determine an average produce yield. Weigh the cost of using pre-prepared produce to the usable yield cost of produce.
9. **Supervise preparation** – Check to see that staff are following waste reduction practices and guidelines when they are preparing food.
10. **Prohibit eating while prepping or serving** – While it’s important to encourage staff to taste what they’re cooking, cut losses by discouraging random sampling.
11. **Practice just-in-time cooking** – Food quality deteriorates when it is held too long. Reduce waste by cooking what you need, when you need it.
12. **Control temperature while cooking** – If you cook at temperatures that are too high, shrinkage increases. According to Bob Oros, roast beef cooked at 425° shrinks by 35 percent, but at 325° it only shrinks by 25 percent.
13. **Avoid over-ordering, and large inventories** – There’s a saying, “the more one has in inventory, the more one uses.” Large inventories of perishable products may encourage food waste, and theft.
14. **Curb opportunities for theft** – Put procedures in place to limit theft. Keep storerooms locked when not in use. Accurate inventories and production records can often alert you to a problem in your facility.
15. **Implement a no-takeaway policy** – Make sure staff know that no food, including leftovers, should go home with them. Having this policy in place will discourage overproduction.
16. **Audit food waste** – Examine your trash to determine what is being thrown away, and find out why.
17. **Have a clean-can policy** – Studies have shown that, on average, one or two servings are often left in a can. Train your staff to use a spatula to help remove all of the product.
18. **Pay attention to storage techniques** – For example, milk is often stored on the cooler door. Each time you open the cooler, you are exposing the milk to warmer temperatures, thereby reducing the time it takes for it to go bad. Also, store your ethylene-sensitive produce away from ethylene-producing items. If you notice your lettuce going “slimy” soon after it has been delivered, it is often because of how and where it was stored in your cooler.
19. **Watch cooking times** – Too often, food has to be thrown out because it was burned or overcooked. Train staff to keep a watchful eye on what they’re cooking.