

Wasted food prevention plan



May 2025



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Introduction



We all have an impact on food and food waste – from growing and harvesting food to preparing and enjoying it or ultimately throwing it away when it's spoiled or unused. To reduce our climate impacts and meet zero waste goals, Hennepin County wants to cut the amount of food we toss in half.

About 40% of food is wasted somewhere along the supply chain in the U.S. Wasted food has both upstream and downstream impacts, from the energy used to grow, transport, process, and refrigerate it to the methane generated when food waste is landfilled. The amount of food, particularly edible food, that is wasted represents an opportunity to significantly reduce waste, better use resources, take action on climate change, and address food insecurity.

This plan is a first of its kind in the U.S. because the strategies focus solely on prevention rather than disposal of wasted food. It also sets a target for reducing edible food from both the trash and compost stream.

Preventing wasted food is critical to meeting the county's climate-action and zero-waste goals. The Hennepin County Climate Action Plan includes numerous strategies and actions for preventing food waste, and the county's Zero Waste Plan includes strategies to establish a food waste prevention target and develop food waste prevention plan.



Photo: Lucinda Hershberger on Unsplash

Preventing *wasted* food

Food waste is an overarching term more commonly used to describe all food that is not eaten – edible and inedible. This plan specifically focused on wasted food, which describes food that was meant for people to eat but was not used for its intended purpose.



Food waste covers food not meant for consumption such as bones, vegetable peels and fruit rinds, in addition to edible food intended for human consumption.



Wasted food describes food created for human consumption that was not used for its intended purpose. Examples include unsold food from retail stores, uneaten prepared food, or produce not used in home kitchens.

Food that could have been eaten makes up 14 percent of the trash.¹ The average person in Hennepin County wastes 3.5 pounds of food per week. Of that waste, two-thirds, or 2.3 pounds, is potentially edible.²

¹ 2019-2022 Food Waste Generation and Composition Study Analysis, <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-sw1-67.pdf>

² <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste#:~:text=In%202018%20alone%2C%20over%2063,percent%20of%20municipal%20solid%20waste.>

Plan development process

The plan's development process included:

- Researching the current system to understand the flow of food and food waste in and out of the county.
- Assessing programs and policies related to reducing food waste and examining what other communities are doing to set targets and reduce food waste.
- Engaging with commercial entities to better understand what parts of the food production and distribution process create food waste and what opportunities exist to reduce wasted food.
- Conducting residential and commercial surveys to evaluate support for the plan's proposed strategies.
- Establishing a wasted food prevention target.
- Identifying strategies in various sectors, including residential, commercial, schools, and food rescue, that outline the potential impact, timeline, and resources needed.
- Applying the county's racial equity impact tool to understand how the current food system benefits or burdens certain communities and adjust strategies to reduce disparities.



Wasted food prevention target



Cut discarded edible food in half



The wasted food prevention target was established based on research, engagement, data collection, and feedback from county subject matter experts. Achieving this target means reducing wasted edible food in the trash and organics streams from both the residential and commercial sectors from 14 percent to 7 percent.

This ambitious goal is supported by the strategies outlined in this plan. These strategies identify actions, programs, resources, and regulations to reduce wasted food among residents, businesses, and schools within the county as well as support the food rescue system.

Tracking the amount of food waste and resulting reduction will be key for monitoring progress toward achieving this goal. The county will continue to quantify the amount of edible food in the waste stream through data collection, waste characterization studies, program metric tracking, and other mechanisms. The county will use additional qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure the impacts of the implemented programs and policies.

Key strategies

Although all the strategies listed in this plan are important, some strategies are key to meeting our goals. The following have been identified as key strategies because of the impact they will have on keeping food out of the trash and shifting the mindset among the overall population.

Overall

- Adopt and enforce a landfill food waste ban (strategy 1.1)

Residential

- Increase awareness through a broad consumer-focused campaign (strategy 2.4)
- Support and promote local food sharing networks (strategy 2.6)
- Encourage residents to track their wasted food and pair prevention education with organics recycling and composting programs (strategy 2.8)

Commercial

- Create business cohorts to collaborate and share resources (strategy 3.1)
- Partner with grocery stores (strategy 3.3)
- Promote resources for donating food (strategy 3.4)

Schools

- Educate cafeteria staff on reducing wasted food (strategy 4.1)
- Encourage and fund best practices in school cafeterias (strategy 4.5)
- Support the donation of surplus food (strategy 4.6)

Food rescue

- Train restaurant inspectors on food donation (strategy 5.1)
- Rescue surplus prepared food from the catering system (strategy 5.4)
- Support food rescue organizations (strategy 5.3)

Current system assessment



A first step in developing this plan was to research the current system to understand the flow of food and food waste in and out of the county, assess programs and policies related to reducing food waste, and examine what other communities are doing to set targets and reduce food waste.

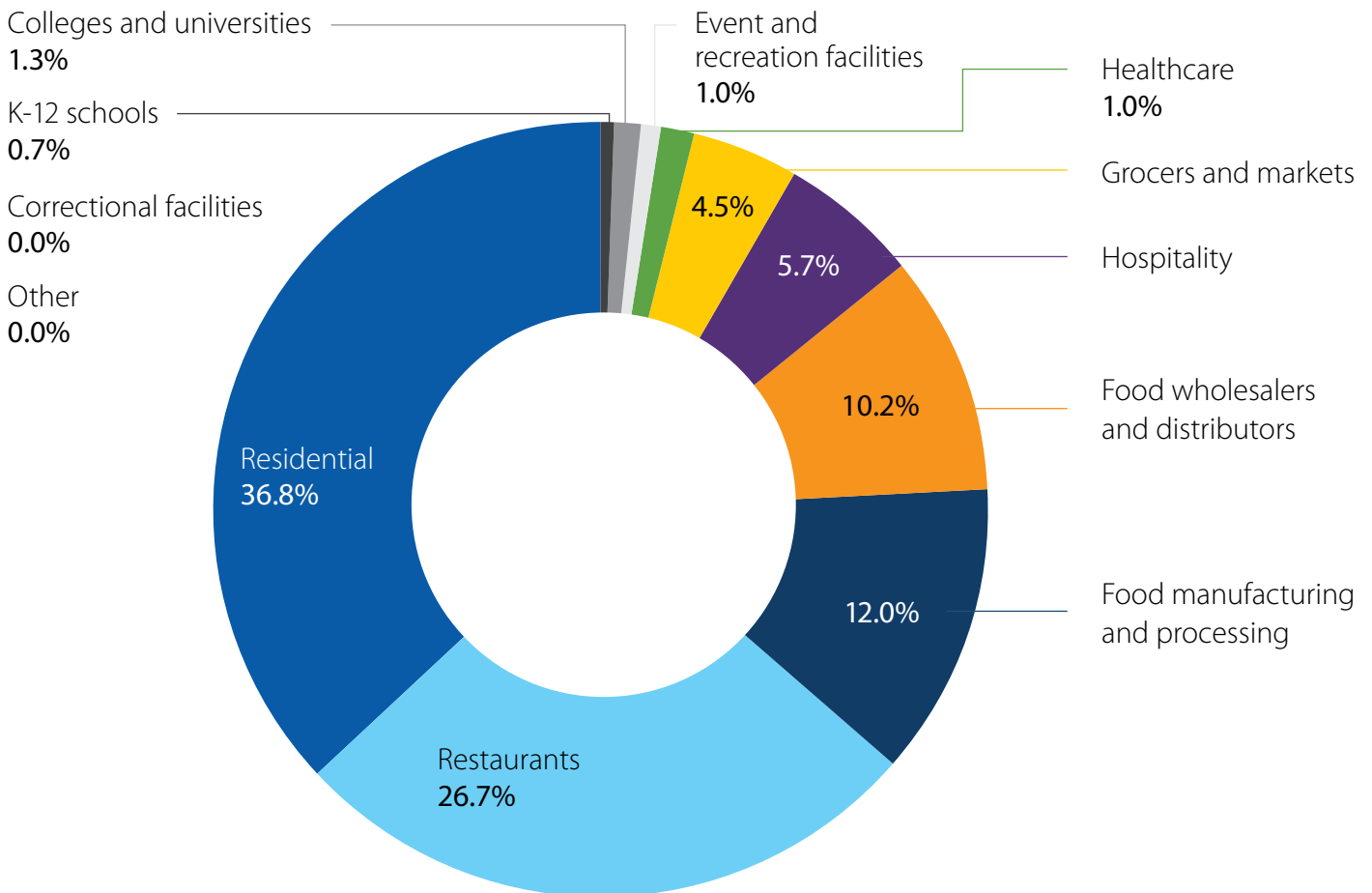
The following is a summary of the current food system research. Access the full report at hennepin.us/solidwasteplanning#wasted-food-prevention-plan.

Sources of food waste

Hennepin County partnered with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to use their Wasted Food and Rescue Potential Calculator to estimate the sources and quantities of surplus edible food generated in the county from both residential and commercial sectors. The chart below shows the estimated contribution of each sector to all food waste generated in the county.

The calculator also estimated that nearly 5,000 tons of food could potentially be rescued in the county each year. This is enough food to fill almost 50 percent of the identified meal gap in the county.

Amount of food waste generated by sector in Hennepin County



Current programs and policies

Hennepin County currently has many programs and policies related to food waste. This includes dedicated staff and resources, educational efforts, grants, and regulations.



County staff

The county has a permanent staff position focused on preventing wasted food and supporting the food rescue system.



Education

The county offers numerous education and outreach programs for residents, including the Stop Food Waste Challenge and Trash or Cash campaign.



Funding

The county offers grants to schools and businesses to reduce food waste and provides funding to support food recovery organizations.



Policies

The county's recycling ordinance (Ordinance 13) requires specific businesses, organizations, and educational institutions to recycle food waste, which may include donating edible food to people.

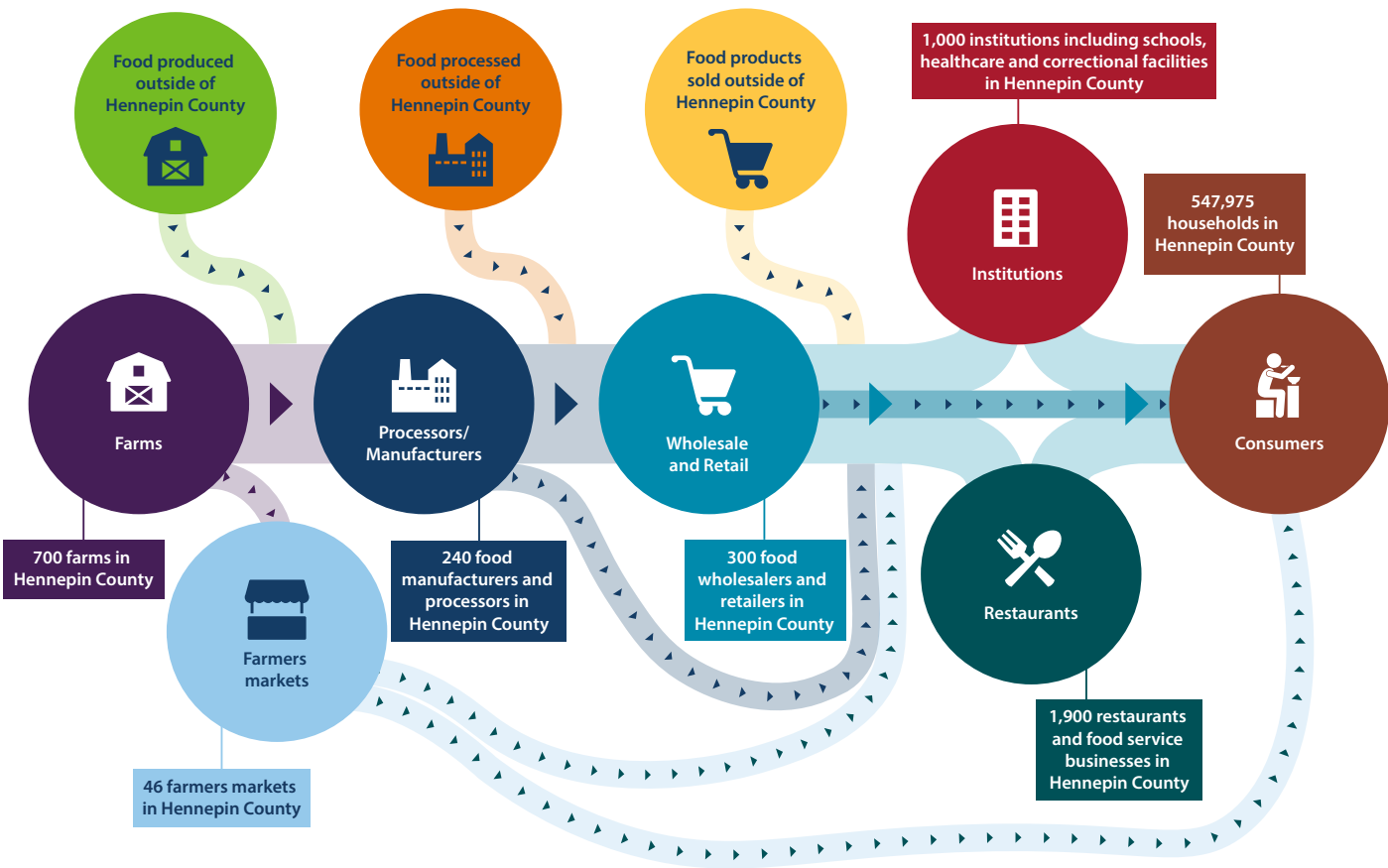
Details about these programs and projects are included in Appendix A (page 35).

Additionally, the county has several plans – the Zero Waste Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Solid Waste Management Plan – that include strategies related to reducing wasted food. These plans are further detailed in Appendix B (page 38).

Understanding the current local and national policies related to food waste management, food donation, and food safety requirements can help the county identify opportunities and barriers for increased food waste reduction. Details about existing relevant policies are included in Appendix C (page 40).

Food flow in Hennepin County

The food flow analysis aimed to understand where food is produced, where food waste occurs across the food supply chain, and how much food waste is generated in the county. In Hennepin County, approximately 20 percent of the trash from homes and businesses is food waste – including both edible food and inedible food scraps – and, on average, residents waste 3.5 pounds of food per person per week.



Commercial food production, processing, distribution, and waste

This analysis considered food production in the county by analyzing available data on the farms, farmers markets, and community gardens.

Potential food waste was estimated for the more than 5,500 food sector businesses in the county, which includes food manufacturers and processors, wholesalers and retailers, restaurants, food service businesses, correctional facilities, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and hospitality businesses. Most of these businesses (93%) have one location and are likely small businesses. The table below shows the estimated quantity of food waste generated by sector in the county.

Food sector businesses in Hennepin County

700 farms

40 farmers markets

40 community gardens

240 food manufacturers and processors

300 wholesale and retail

1,900 restaurants and food service

198,000 students in K-12 public and private schools

177,000 students in higher education institutions

High and low food waste estimates by sector

Industry sector	Quantity generated – low estimate (tons)	Quantity generated – high estimate (tons)
Food manufacturers and processors	58,730	188,260
Wholesale and retail	7,210	64,050
Restaurants and food service	62,830	90,000
Educational institutions	3,240	17,000
Hospitality	3,050	17,240
Healthcare	540	2,910
Correctional facilities	180	300
Total	135,780	379,760

Residential food waste



Residents play a key role in food flow and waste in the county. About 37% of all food waste in Hennepin County is generated from the residential sector, as shown in the chart on page 7. Residents also play a role in food waste at restaurants, which generate about 27% of all food waste in the county.

Poor food management leads to spoilage and ultimately drives food waste in homes.

Many consumer purchases are unplanned, which can lead to over-purchasing, and many families make bulk purchases of food they will never consume. Many consumers also don't know how to repurpose ingredients and store food properly. Misunderstanding date labels often leads consumers to throw away food before it's spoiled.

Raising awareness of the issue and motivating residents to make changes at home, while grocery shopping, and on-the-go is critical to reducing wasted food in the county.

Food donation and disposal



TC Food Justice redistributing edible food.

The final step in the food flow system is managing surplus food and food scraps. Excess edible food can be managed through donation to feed people, while food waste and scraps go to programs that feed animals, are composted, or are disposed of at a landfill or incinerator.

Wasted food prevention efforts in other communities

Efforts in communities with existing plans related to food waste reduction and recovery were reviewed to provide insights into existing plans, successful programs, and lessons learned. The review included assessment of 10 plans and interviews with staff from five communities.

Education and outreach around reducing food waste is a primary focus in many communities. This includes campaigns for residents and sometimes commercial food sectors. This education is often tied to environmental benefits, cost savings, and food justice.

Common commercial strategies include tracking food waste, identifying tools to help entities better monitor food waste, and funding or incentives to monitor food waste.

Policy and regulations are often included as enforceable aspects of reducing food waste. However, most policies focus on diversion and recycling of food waste rather than prevention.

Specific examples of successful programs are included alongside related strategies starting on page 17 of this plan.

Communities reviewed

The following communities were included in the review and assessment.

* indicates communities that participated in interviews

- City and County of Denver, Colorado – Denver Food Action Plan and Denver Food Vision of 2030*
- City of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada – Circular Food Innovation Lab*
- Denmark, European Union – Stop Wasting Food Movement
- King County, Washington – Re+ Strategic Plan
- San Diego County, California – Food Vision 2030*
- Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio, Ohio – Save More Than Food*
- State of Illinois – Wasted Food Action Plan
- State of Rhode Island – Rhode Island Food Strategy
- State of Vermont – Vermont 2019 Materials Management Plan and Universal Recycling Law
- State of Washington – Use Food Well Plan*

Engagement and strategy development



Engagement efforts for this plan focused on the food industry sector because the county has not broadly researched challenges and opportunities to reduce wasted food in commercial and institutional facilities, which includes grocery stores, restaurants, and schools.

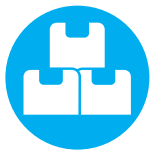
The county has previously conducted research to better understand the food rescue system³ and tested messaging that will help residents overcome barriers to preventing wasted food.⁴ There has also been ample research conducted on residential wasted food behaviors locally and nationally.

Commercial and institutional engagement

Commercial entities and institutions were engaged to better understand what practices produce food waste, what resources could help them reduce edible wasted food, and what barriers exist that the county could help address.

A survey was distributed to over 1,100 food industry contacts. The survey was also promoted through county outlets, business associations, and Chambers of Commerce. More than 80 entities responded to the survey. Survey respondents who chose to provide contact information were invited to provide deeper insights, and interviews were held with 13 participants.

Representatives from the following types of businesses and institutions participated in the engagement efforts.



Food distributors

Food wholesalers, distributors, manufacturers



Food retailers

Grocery stores, farmers markets



Food service

Restaurants, hotels, caterers, events with food, event centers



Dining services

Hospitals, facilities with cafeterias or dining services (such as nursing homes, senior care facilities, office and college campuses)



Large locally based food corporations

General Mills, Target



Schools

Public and private K–12

³ Food rescue in Hennepin County, 2023, hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/your-government/projects-initiatives/solid-waste-planning/food-rescue-report.pdf

⁴ Engaging residents to reduce food waste, 2021, hennepin.us/-/media/hennepinus/your-government/projects-initiatives/solid-waste-planning/reduce-food-waste-report.pdf

Common themes across food industry sectors

Common themes emerged throughout all sectors of the food industry related to motivations for reducing food waste and what is needed to prevent wasted food.

Lowering costs, improving efficiencies, saving time, and reducing environmental impacts are common motivators for reducing wasted food. Additionally, more than half of survey respondents noted that the public relations and social impacts of reducing wasted food are motivators for their organization.

When asked what would help their organization prevent wasted food, the most frequent answers were assistance with donating surplus food, staff training, and educational resources. They also requested physical resources, such as refrigerators and loading equipment, software, such as inventory management and routing software, and technical assistance.

Nearly all participants indicated that educational resources, for both internal staff and customers, would be beneficial in their efforts to prevent wasted food. Education would help entities better communicate why reducing wasted food is important both for financial and environmental reasons.

Key findings by sector

The following sections summarize additional key insights from each food industry sector.



Food distributors

This group includes food wholesalers, distributors, and manufacturers. In this sector, food is most often wasted because it is spoiled or past the food date label. These entities also need to manage food that cannot be distributed due to quality or appearance issues. Optimizing manufacturing operations helps to reduce wasted food.



Food retailers

Food retailers include grocery stores and farmers markets. Retailers indicated that food waste results from products that do not sell or are past their shelf life, excess inventory, quality concerns, employee error, or food spoiling before it can be picked up by food rescue organizations. Many of the larger businesses in this sector noted they reduce food waste by donating surplus food, using food-to-animals programs, and/or participating in organics recycling. A few retailers use software to track inventory or offer products at discounted rates when food is near the end of its shelf life.



Food service

Food service includes restaurants, hotels, caterers, and event centers or other events with food. The most common type of food waste for food service businesses is plate waste from customers and prepared food or meals not being served to customers. Wrong orders, uneaten food, quality standards, overproduction, and inedible food scraps all contribute to food waste in this sector. Inventory tracking and efficient kitchen practices, such as food prep, were commonly noted as actions that reduce food waste. Some food service entities have adjusted portion sizes, found ways to use misshapen or blemished foods, or used excess food to make “family meals” for staff.



Dining services

Dining services include hospitals and other facilities with cafeterias or dining services, such as nursing homes, senior care facilities, and office and college campuses. Most food waste from this sector is the result of prepared food or meals that are not served to customers or patients. Some dining services noted they have adjusted portion sizes to reduce food waste.



Food corporations

Food corporations include large, locally based corporations like General Mills and Target. Most food waste in this sector is food byproducts. They have processes to upcycle these food byproducts.



Schools

Schools include public and private K-12 schools. The most commonly wasted food items in schools are milk and entrees, followed by produce. Some schools said that the Free School Meals Program has increased food waste due to requirements for portion sizes and items students must take. Limited staff and time make it challenging for school staff to support food waste reduction. Practices in schools that help reduce food waste include “offer versus serve” programs, holding recess before lunch, making announcements reminding students to focus on eating, and establishing food sharing tables that allow students to take uneaten items.

Residential food waste research



Hennepin County has conducted several residential and consumer behavior research studies related to food and food waste. These studies built upon a breadth of national research, and the findings were used to inform strategy development for this plan.

A consumer behavior research study conducted by the county in 2021 tested messaging strategies to help residents overcome barriers to preventing wasted food. The study involved three cohorts of focus groups that intentionally received differing levels of communication throughout the study to assess whether variations in of consumer engagement had an impact on behavior change.

Recommendations from this study include:

- Develop campaign content that appeals to specific demographic groups such as families, singles, older adults, young adults, and children.
- Create outreach messaging that is simple, quick to read, and emphasizes money savings as a key motivator.
- Emphasize that changing behavior requires addressing multiple behaviors in four specific phases: planning, purchase, preparation, and preservation.
- Cultivate key partnerships such as local grocery stores and provide message placement in locations that will reach consumers at each stage of the decision-making process (planning, buying, eating, and disposal).

A residential study that included a survey and focus groups was conducted in 2023 to inform the development of the county's Trash or Cash campaign. Key findings from this study include:

- Half of county residents believe they waste less food than the average household, illustrating that they do not see themselves as contributors to the issue.
- The top two reasons for wasted food at home are food spoiling before it's eaten and leftovers being stored but not consumed.
- Meal planning and grocery shopping are areas residents most need to improve on in order to waste less food.
- Money is the top motivator for getting residents to waste less food.

Food rescue in Hennepin County



Hennepin County conducted research in 2022 to understand the food rescue system. This research included interviews, focus groups, and surveys with organizations involved in the food rescue system and community members who have experienced food insecurity.

In the county, 7.5 percent of residents experienced food insecurity in 2020, and Black, Indigenous, and communities of color were disproportionately impacted. The goals of this study were to identify gaps and opportunities for diverting food that would otherwise go to waste to people and increasing the food rescue system's responsiveness to community needs for both highly nutritious and culturally significant food.

Key learnings

- Intentionally aligned partnerships between donor organizations and food rescue organizations are fundamental to the success of food rescue efforts.
- Although intermediary organizations are key to the current food rescue system, food security organizations have complex and mixed experiences partnering with these organizations.
- Staffing and labor are a significant challenge in the food rescue system.
- Supply chain and transportation logistics continue to pose a significant challenge to ensuring the safety and quality of rescued food.
- The experiences of community members underscore the need for innovation across the food rescue system.
- Adequate finances and appropriate donations are key for organizations to participate in food rescue and meet community members' needs.
- Creative adaptations made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020 social uprising identified promising strategies to improve food rescue efforts.

Recommendations for Hennepin County

In the transition to an equitable, zero-waste future, Hennepin County can have a meaningful and transformative impact on the food rescue system by:

- Expanding on-the-ground support for donor organizations to operationalize and improve food rescue efforts in their organizations.
- Establishing internal and external collaborations focused on continuous improvement of food rescue and county supports.
- Leveraging data to promote food rescue efforts and identify system-wide improvement opportunities.
- Working with food rescue and security partners to implement creative and innovative strategies to enhance food rescue efforts and community impacts
- Embedding disparity reduction and racial equity throughout the design and implementation of county strategies.

Strategy development

Insights gained from the engagement with commercial entities, residential and food rescue research, and food systems assessment were used to develop the wasted food prevention target and strategies. Feedback sessions were held with staff to assess the potential impact, feasibility, and implementation timeframe for the strategies.

The county solicited feedback on the strategies through residential and commercial surveys and additional listening sessions with food industry businesses. The survey asked respondents to rate their level of support for strategies related to wasted food prevention applicable to their commercial or residential perspective. The survey was distributed via county newsletters and email distributions and was completed by 187 residents and 33 businesses.

Common themes included an emphasis on public education about reducing wasted food and easy-to-use programs. Both residents and businesses noted they do not want additional regulations, and some respondents shared concerns that more regulations could lead to an increase in consumer prices. Both residents and businesses noted that reducing prices for food close to expiration dates could help reduce wasted food. Residents highly rated behavior change campaigns and incentivizing food donations. Businesses highly rated resources for food donation and incentivizing prevention and donation of surplus food.

Hennepin County staff also sought feedback from schools through the Sustainable Schools cohort. The plan's school strategies were shared with this group to gather feedback on the potential impacts and required effort. Participants highly rated allowing students and staff to take home excess food and allowing students to contribute to menu planning. Additionally, participants felt funding staff time to address wasted food prevention could have high impacts.

Feedback from residents, businesses, and school representatives was considered and used to refine and finalize the strategies.

Wasted food prevention strategies



The strategies in this plan were identified to continue and expand wasted food reduction efforts within the county. Strategies include those that will have an impact on reducing wasted food overall as well as in residential, commercial, schools, and food rescue sectors. The following elements are identified for each strategy:

Status

- ★ New
- ↔ Expanded from current efforts
- Continuing as is

Potential impact

in terms of tons diverted
from the waste stream

- Low
- Medium
- High

Timeframe for implementation

- Short-term
- Medium-term
- Long-term

1. Overall

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
1.1 Adopt and enforce a landfill food waste ban	Continuing	High	Long-term
1.2 Advocate for an update to national date labeling requirements	New	High	Medium-term
1.3 Identify relevant ways to track wasted food within all sectors	New	Low	Long-term
1.4 Explore and support options to adjust waste disposal fees to incentivize waste reduction	New	Medium	Long-term

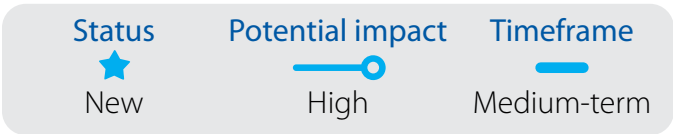
1.1 Adopt and enforce a landfill food waste ban



The Hennepin County Solid Waste Management Plan identifies banning recyclables and organic materials from landfills as an essential component of a zero-waste system. A food waste ban has the potential to divert a significant amount of food waste from the landfill and would encourage wasted food prevention. Requirements would apply to landfills, haulers, and waste generators – including both residents and businesses.

Implementing a ban is a complex process that involves major changes to the existing waste management system and regulatory requirements at the state level. Action on this strategy depends on the state legislature and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The county will support MPCA efforts to lead bill development and enforcement by conducting engagement, advocating for language that provides optimal solutions, and educating about the requirements.

1.2 Advocate for an update to national date labeling requirements



Current date labeling practices on food packaging are inconsistent and confusing. Not knowing the meaning of terms like sell-by, best-by, use-by, and best before can lead consumers to prematurely discard food that is still safe and edible. Standardizing date labels can help distinguish true safety risks and enable foods with dates that only indicate quality to be eaten, sold, or donated past their date labels. This issue is included in the county’s federal platform, and more information about national date labeling requirements is available through ReFed.⁵

⁵ ReFed solutions database, standardized date labels, insights-engine.refed.org/solution-database/standardized-date-labels

1.3 Identify relevant ways to track wasted food within all sectors

Status

★

New

Potential impact

Low

Timeframe

Long-term

Quantifying the amount of wasted food generated by residents, businesses, and schools is key to monitoring and improving food waste reduction efforts.

The county’s Zero Waste Plan calls for the development of a food waste prevention and rescue plan that includes strategies to improve data tracking. The Zero Waste Plan also says the county will establish metrics to identify the largest areas of food waste and track progress in those areas.

In addition, the MPCA’s Policy Plan has a section dedicated to improving the reliability of data, including a state-led strategy to develop appropriate and consistent waste reporting systems to measure all waste. In 2024, the MPCA supported the introduction of a bill at the state legislature to require the tracking of surplus food and food waste.

1.4 Explore and support options to adjust waste disposal fees to incentivize waste reduction

Status

★

New

Potential impact

Medium

Timeframe

Long-term

Options to adjust waste disposal fees include:

- Increasing the cost of trash hauling and/or reducing the cost of organics recycling.
- Organizing collection of trash, recycling, and organics as a consolidated service offering and incentivizing diversion through creative cost models.

Variable rate pricing (also called pay-as-you-throw) programs charge waste generators based on the amount of material collected, with higher fees for more trash generated. Pricing based on volume or weight is already required by state law, but that variable rate structure is not enforced and could be improved.

The county should consider implementing additional policies and/or strengthening regulations that adjust the pricing model so that overall waste management costs remain the same but the rate structure shifts costs within the system. This means those who generate less waste pay less, and those who generate more pay more. The approach could be revenue-neutral, without an increase to the total revenue collected from fees.

2. Residential

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
2.1 Educate residents on meal planning best practices and provide tools to use up food at home	Expanded	High	Short-term
2.2 Increase kitchen skills and confidence through classes, recipes, and other resources	New	Low	Medium-term
2.3 Develop and implement culturally focused outreach and resources, working with partners/ community groups to develop and deliver relevant messaging	New	Medium	Medium-term
2.4 Increase awareness of wasted food issues and solutions through a broad, consumer-focused behavior change campaign	Continuing	High	Medium-term
2.5 Continue to facilitate an annual wasted food prevention challenge	Continuing	Medium	Short-term
2.6 Expand partnerships with and financial support for community groups to educate and engage their audiences on preventing wasted food	New	High	Medium-term
2.7 Support and promote local food sharing networks for residents	New	Medium	Medium-term
2.8 Explore options and technology to encourage residents to track their wasted food and pilot solutions	New	High	Short-term

2.1 Educate residents on meal planning best practices and provide tools to use up food at home

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

↔

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Expanded

High

Short-term

Residents say they need help better planning meals to use up food. The county will expand education programs with a focus helping residents understand how meal planning can reduce waste and save money.

2.2 Increase kitchen skills and confidence through classes, recipes, and other resources

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

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New

Low

Medium-term

People often buy food with good intentions, but they might lack the necessary skills to prepare, cook, and store their food. Classes, recipe guides, and other resources can help increase skills and confidence among residents. Including educators with diverse voices within the community to teach culturally specific classes or utilize culturally relevant ingredients will help make this strategy relevant to diverse audiences.

2.3 Develop and implement culturally focused outreach and resources, working with partners/ community groups to develop and deliver relevant messaging

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

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New

Medium

Medium-term

Conducting culturally relevant outreach and giving voice to diverse community members is a priority for the county in all programs. With so many local and culturally specific traditions around food, there are ample opportunities to work with partners to develop educational materials, implement culturally focused outreach, and deliver messaging that will resonate with the county’s diverse audiences.

2.4 Increase awareness of wasted food issues and solutions through a broad, consumer-focused behavior change campaign

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

→

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Continuing

High

Medium-term

Residents do not see themselves as contributors to the food waste issue, yet they represent the largest potential for wasted food prevention. The county will increase awareness of the issue and help residents understand what they can do to reduce their wasted food through new and innovative campaigns, such as the county’s Trash or Cash campaign.

During June and July 2024, Trash or Cash promotions were viewed more than 4 million times with 60,000 residents clicking on the ads to get to the TrashorCash.org campaign website.

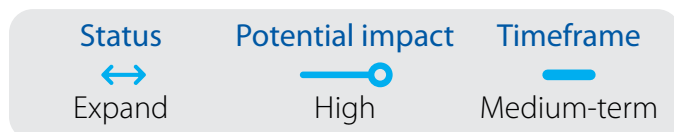
2.5 Increase participation and engagement in the annual wasted food prevention challenge



The county has held the annual Stop Food Waste Challenge since 2020 to help residents learn why food goes to waste and commit to actions that work best for their households. The challenge was recently expanded to include Ramsey and Washington counties. These challenges have successfully engaged residents and partners in raising awareness about food waste and taking actions that prevent wasted food.

In 2024, 771 participants – half of which were Hennepin County residents – joined the Stop Food Waste Challenge. The combined efforts of participants resulted in 3,500 pounds of food waste prevented and 7,270 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions avoided.

2.6 Expand partnerships with and financial support for community groups to educate and engage their audiences on preventing wasted food



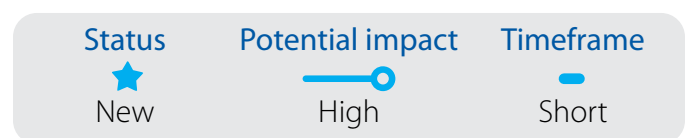
Peer-to-peer education is highly effective because the message comes from trusted sources. The county successfully uses this approach through the Green Partners program and Community Zero Waste Grants. The county could do more to partner with and financially support trusted community groups specifically on offering education and engagement related to preventing wasted food. Ideas to explore with community groups include kitchen skill classes, produce preservation workshops, and incorporating messaging into existing programs.

2.7 Support and promote local food sharing networks for residents



The county will support and promote existing programs, such as phone apps and social groups, to encourage residents to share edible food that might otherwise go to waste.

2.8 Explore options and technology to encourage residents to track their wasted food and pilot solutions



Some studies have shown a connection between collecting food for composting and increased awareness and overall reduction of wasted food. In-home approaches that could be piloted include countertop dehydrators or composting systems with an emphasis on tracking and reducing wasted food.

3. Commercial

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
3.1 Create cohorts of food businesses to collaborate on wasted food reduction tactics and share resources	New	Medium	Long-term
3.2 Implement a campaign for restaurants to reduce customer plate waste	New	Medium	Medium-term
3.3 Build stronger partnerships with grocery stores to reduce wasted food generation and increase consumer education about meal planning and food storage	New	High	Long-term
3.4 Educate and provide resources for food service and food retailers to donate food	Expanded	Medium	Medium-term
3.5 Connect and educate manufacturing and production businesses on upcycling	New	High	Long-term
3.6 Continue to promote and provide funding for food waste tracking software and inventory management systems for commercial entities	Expanded	High	Short-term
3.7 Identify and fund trusted third-party individuals or companies to encourage food waste tracking and prevention	New	Medium	Long-term
3.8 Offer grants for businesses implementing programs to reduce edible food waste	Continuing	Medium	Short-term
3.9 Expand outreach to businesses through existing connections to engage on food waste reduction and donation	New	High	Long-term
3.10 Identify and promote innovative opportunities for businesses to use up surplus food	New	Medium	Long-term

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
3.11 Explore revisions to the county's commercial food waste diversion requirements (Ordinance 13) to focus on preventing wasted food	Expanded	High	Long-term
3.12 Explore incentives for businesses to prevent wasted food	Expanded	Medium	Medium-term
3.13 Consider implementing best practices in county operations that manage meal service and food distribution	New	Medium	Medium-term

3.1 Create cohorts of food businesses to collaborate on wasted food reduction tactics and share resources

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 New	 Medium	 Long-term

The county will create peer-to-peer spaces for restaurants, grocery stores, and possibly hospitals to explore opportunities to prevent wasted food and share ideas and resources.

The Circular Food Innovation Lab launched by Vancouver, British Columbia offers grocery stores and food retailers a space for peer networking and resource sharing related to reducing food waste.

3.2 Implement a campaign for restaurants to reduce customer plate waste

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 New	 Medium	 Medium-term

Nearly 70% of the total surplus food in full-service restaurants comes from plate waste, or customers not eating what they have taken or been served.⁶ The county can work with restaurants and other applicable food service businesses to adjust portion sizes, encourage sharing plates, and educate customers on using leftovers. This could include developing messaging and education resources for customers about plate waste and funding restaurants to pilot these practices and track wasted food reduction.

⁶ ReFed stakeholder recommendations for restaurants and foodservice, refed.org/stakeholders/restaurants-and-foodservice/

3.3 Build stronger partnerships with grocery stores to reduce wasted food generation and increase consumer education about meal planning and food storage

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

★
New

High

Long-term

Residents trust grocery stores to provide them with information about meals and food storage. The county will build partnerships with grocery stores to educate consumers where they purchase food.

Grocery stores in Finland host happy hour events where stores sell food at discounted prices that are close to expiration or damaged. This unique concept allows them to sell items and reduce food waste.

3.4 Educate and provide resources for food service and food retailers to donate food

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

↔
Expanded

Medium

Medium-term

Confusion over liability laws and concern over the safe handling of food donations are two of the main reasons businesses cite for not participating in food donation. Updating existing resources on national and local regulations to safely donate food and creating an engagement plan to get this information to businesses would help increase food donations.

3.5 Connect and educate manufacturing and production businesses on upcycling

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

★
New

High

Long-term

Upcycling involves converting food byproducts that would otherwise not be used for human consumption (such as spent grains, fruit or vegetable pulps, and rinds) into a new ingredient or edible food product. This reduces the amount of food going to landfills and feeds people.

3.6 Continue to promote and provide funding for food waste tracking software and inventory management systems for commercial entities

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

↔
Expanded

High

Short-term

Tracking and analyzing waste helps food businesses identify opportunities to reduce waste, optimize operations and increase profits. The county will make businesses aware of options for software programs and continue to offer grants to businesses to use food waste tracking software, especially targeting specific sectors like grocery stores and restaurants.

Many commercial entities noted they already track food via inventory management and are aware of programs to track wasted food. Many indicated such programs are beneficial but lack the staff time or resources to implement them.

3.7 Identify and fund trusted third-party individuals or companies to encourage food waste tracking and prevention

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 Medium	 Long-term


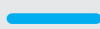
Hennepin County already reimburses fees for tracking software, but businesses have been reluctant to implement these tracking tools. Enlisting people or companies that are trusted by food service businesses would help convince business to try out tracking.

3.8 Offer grants for businesses implementing programs to reduce edible food waste

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 Continuing	 Medium	 Short-term

Hennepin County will continue to offer grants and promote funding to specific industries with high diversion potential or those identified as generating significant food waste. The funding could be used to pilot innovative projects like active and intelligent packaging.⁷

3.9 Expand outreach to businesses through existing connections to engage on food waste reduction and donation

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 High	 Long-term

Businesses often do not know about existing resources and funding available to help them reduce their wasted food. More outreach is needed to make the commercial sector aware of those resources and how to access them. The Environment and Energy Department will collaborate with county and city staff in different departments to explore ways to work with food businesses through existing interactions, such as inspections.



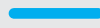
3.10 Identify and promote innovative opportunities for businesses to use up surplus food

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 Medium	 Long-term

Innovative options for using food already in grocery stores and other food sector businesses include:

- Promoting the use of equipment cooperatives for on-site produce preparation (for example, chopping or freeze-drying equipment).
- Encouraging the sale and consumption of seconds, imperfect, or surplus food at grocery stores and farmers markets through discount programs or dynamic pricing.⁸

3.11 Explore revisions to the county's commercial food waste diversion requirements (Ordinance 13) to focus on preventing wasted food

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 Expanded	 High	 Long-term

Requirements for specific businesses have the potential to divert significant amounts of wasted food and provide benefits to the community through rescue. Revisions could include:

- Mandates based on the amount of wasted food generated
- Mandates based on type of wasted food generated (edible versus nonedible)
- Requiring businesses to donate a certain amount of food based on waste generation and/or type of wasted food generated

Enforcement and compliance will need to be explored.

California law that requires certain food businesses send edible food to food recovery organizations has been successful in diverting food waste and providing edible food to many communities.

⁷ ReFed solutions database, Active and Intelligent packaging, insights-engine.refed.org/solution-database/active-intelligent-packaging

⁸ ReFed solutions database, Dynamic Pricing, insights-engine.refed.org/solution-database/dynamic-pricing

3.12 Explore incentives for businesses to prevent wasted food

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 Expanded	 Medium	 Medium-term

Financial incentives could reduce the cost of implementing wasted food prevention practices by aligning economic and operational benefits with waste prevention goals. The Environment and Energy Department will collaborate with internal and external partners to identify potential mechanisms that motivate businesses to reduce wasted food.

3.13 Implement best practices in county operations that manage meal service and food distribution

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 New	 Medium	 Medium-term

Hennepin County operates several facilities that feed and house people. Sharing best practices and resources with commercial kitchen operations within the county system will lead by example and reduce waste from county-operated facilities.

4. Schools

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
4.1 Develop and encourage implementation of staff education related to reducing wasted food in school cafeterias	New	High	Medium-term
4.2 Develop and share educational materials for K-12 students on wasted food prevention through curriculum, classes, and other resources	New	Medium	Long-term
4.3 Develop and share educational materials for college students on wasted food prevention through campus-wide communications, classes, and other resources	New	Medium	Long-term
4.4 Explore ways for K-12 students or staff to take home extra food	New	High	Long-term
4.5 Encourage and fund best practices for reducing wasted food at K-12 and college cafeterias	Continuing	Medium	Medium-term
4.6 Support schools in donating surplus food	Expanded	Medium	Medium-term
4.7 Explore how to support staff at school districts to work on preventing wasted food	New	High	Long-term
4.8 Coordinate with health departments to provide clear and consistent messaging about rules and best practices for practices like sharing tables and donations	New	Medium	Short-term
4.9 Advocate for changes to state and federal regulations on school meal portions that result in wasted food	New	High	Long-term
4.10 Support adjustments to lunch time that have been shown to reduce food waste	New	High	Medium-term

4.1 Develop and encourage implementation of staff education related to reducing wasted food in school cafeterias

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

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New

High

Medium-term

Cafeteria staff at K-12 schools must balance requirements for reimbursement meals and what students will eat. Developing educational materials about the impacts of wasted food and working with state and local health inspectors to encourage best practices, such as offer versus serve allowances, can reduce the amount of uneaten food in school cafeterias. “Offer vs. serve” refers to providing students with a variety of food options that align with national nutrition requirements and allowing them to only take what they want to eat, rather than requiring them to take specific food items.

4.2 Develop and share educational materials for K-12 students on wasted food prevention through curriculum, classes, and other resources

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

★

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New

Medium

Long-term

Educating K-12 students can help drive lasting change by teaching future generations the importance of how we get our food and what to do with it. There are many ways to educate students, such as by conducting hands-on cafeteria waste audits, integrating into science curriculums, or visiting local community gardens or farms. The county can support schools to incorporate food waste education into curriculum by funding classroom educators, providing curriculum that matches state standards, and aligning prevention best practices with other school food programs, such as the county’s healthy school initiatives.

4.3 Develop and share educational materials for college students on wasted food prevention

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

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New

Medium

Long-term

College students are often learning how to live independently and developing their household skills. This can be a key time to instill skills and best practices that prevent wasted food. The county can support campus-wide communications, classes, and other useful resources and tools that teach household and kitchen skills, help students make the most of their food, and set them up for future success.

Feedback from listening sessions identified college campuses as having unique challenges related to food waste due to cafeterias on-site and dining packages.

4.4 Explore ways for K-12 students or staff to take home extra food

Status

Potential impact

Timeframe

★

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New

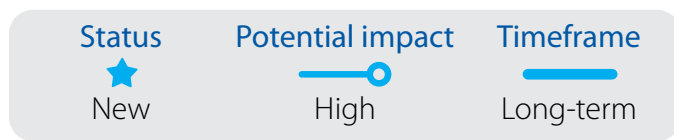
High

Long-term

Federal reimbursement meal programs have strict rules on how food can be used inside and outside of the cafeteria. Legal, health, and safety requirements should be reviewed and addressed in order to expand these programs.

The Sustainable Schools group rated this strategy as one of the highest in potential impact.

4.5 Encourage and fund best practices for reducing wasted food at K-12 and college cafeterias



School staff might not know about existing best practices for reducing wasted food in schools or they have limited time to implement these changes. The county will continue to educate staff on best practices, such as not using trays, creating sharing tables, and offering flavor stations, and offer funding to implement these practices.

The Sustainable Schools group noted that allowing students to contribute to menu planning could help reduce food waste.

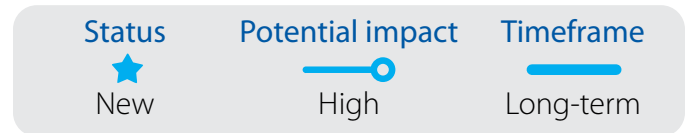
Removing trays from college campuses has become common to reduce food waste and encourage students to only take what they will eat. Rutgers University noted a 22 percent decrease in food waste as a result of trayless dining services.

4.6 Support schools in donating surplus food



Schools are allowed to donate surplus food, but school staff say that the logistics of setting up and maintaining a program can be challenging. Providing technical assistance, reducing logistical hurdles by providing containers and supplies, and providing a list or directory of community groups that collect donated food, what they accept, and when they can pick up items would help increase food donation.

4.7 Explore how to support staff at school districts to work on preventing wasted food



Schools said that limited time is their biggest barrier to working on waste reduction initiatives. Additional support could enable more focus on wasted food prevention work, such as setting up food donation programs or educating cafeteria staff.

The Sustainable Schools group rated this strategy as having some of the highest potential impact.


4.8 Coordinate with health departments to provide clear and consistent messaging about rules and best practices for activities like sharing tables and donations



School staff report confusion about city, county, and state requirements regarding what is allowed for sharing tables and reusing food. Providing schools with clear and consistent guidance would help staff implement new programs to address reducing wasted food.

“Sharing tables” are tables or stations where students may return whole food or beverage items they choose not to consume. These food and beverage items are then available to other students who may want additional servings.

4.9 Advocate for changes to state and federal regulations on school meal portions that result in wasted food

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 New	 High	 Long-term

Food waste at school is often the result of meal portion requirements. For example, a Kindergartener might be required to take the same portions as a 5th grader even though they have different nutritional needs. The county should work with others in this field to understand and advocate for changes in federal and state food requirements.

4.10 Support adjustments to lunch time that have been shown to reduce food waste

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
 New	 Medium	 Medium-term

Students may get 15 minutes or less to eat their lunch, which results in uneaten food being thrown away. Making adjustments to lunch time, such as making lunch time longer for elementary students, encourages eating and prevents wasted food.



5. Food rescue

Strategy	Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
5.1 Provide training opportunities for restaurant inspectors to educate food establishments and distributors on food waste prevention	Expand	Medium	Short-term
5.2 Explore ways to identify how much food is wasted and how food is wasted across the food rescue stream	New	Medium	Medium-term
5.3 Establish funding options to support food rescue organizations	Continue	High	Short-term
5.4 Support and provide funding for efforts to collect prepared food within the catering and restaurant system	New	Medium	Medium-term
5.5 Support the Food Security Partners Network	Continue	Low	Short-term
5.6 Develop and maintain a list of preferred foods for donation and distribute to potential donors	New	Low	Short-term
5.7 Explore the feasibility of centralized or neighborhood-based food storage hubs	New	High	Long-term
5.8 Explore strategies that address transportation and access barriers for community members experiencing food insecurity	Expand	Medium	Medium-term
5.9 Address barriers that prevent businesses from using several organizations for food donation	New	Medium	Medium-term

5.1 Provide training opportunities for restaurant inspectors to educate food establishments and distributors on food waste prevention



Potential food donors and recipients are often confused about food safety rules regarding donation. Information from health inspectors on what is allowed will encourage donors and receiving organizations to rescue more food. Education is also needed to prevent overproduction of foods least preferred by food rescue organizations. The Environment and Energy Department will collaborate with partners to develop and provide training opportunities for health inspectors. The goal is to share clear and consistent messaging with food establishments and distributors on food donation handling and legal protections. This extends to helping potential donors who have access to culturally appropriate foods overcome barriers to food donation.

5.2 Explore ways to identify how much food is wasted and how food is wasted across the food rescue stream



In the county’s 2023 food rescue study, some organizations shared they felt some donor organizations are focused on the quantity of food delivered and don’t consider the food security organization’s capacity, the quality of food being donated, and the community members’ needs. This creates waste that the recipient organization must handle. Emergency food organizations estimate around 20 percent of food donated cannot be given to residents.

5.3 Establish funding options to support food rescue organizations



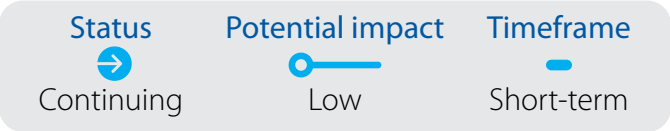
Staffing and labor play an integral role throughout the food rescue system. From the education and training of workers to the challenges that come with relying mainly on a volunteer workforce, the human part of the food rescue process has a profound impact. Consistent funding is needed to maintain and expand the capacity of these organization to rescue food.

5.4 Support and provide funding for efforts to collect prepared food within the catering and restaurant system



One the most requested items for food rescue organizations is prepared meals. While some organizations have been successful in rescuing prepared food, many food service businesses and emergency food organizations are hesitant to work with donated prepared food because of additional food safety rules, such as temperature control. Consistent education about donating prepared foods and financial or logistical support would expand food rescue in this area.

5.5 Support the Food Security Partners Network



Hennepin County Public Health launched the Food Security Partners Network in 2024 and will continue facilitating networking meetings and sharing resources. The network is a space to explore collaborative opportunities, identify service gaps and needs, review and deploy innovative solutions and best practices, and close the gaps in access to food for residents facing food insecurity

5.6 Develop and maintain a list of preferred foods for donation and distribute to potential donors

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 Low	 Short-term

Communication is key to building relationships with food donors and recipients. The county will work with emergency food organizations to understand what foods they are able to collect and distribute and use the list to educate potential donors.

5.7 Explore the feasibility of centralized or neighborhood-based food storage hubs

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 High	 Long-term

The transportation and logistics required to adequately support food rescue is a significant challenge for most food security organizations. Large donations require significant amounts of storage and many volunteers to sort, store, and distribute the food. In addition to lack of adequate space, the timing of donations can be problematic. Food rescued during the weekend and at night might not have a place to go if food shelves are not open during those times. A separate logistical hub open during needed hours might be a solution to these issues. This hub would facilitate quick transfer of perishable foods in coordination with food rescue organizations through private/public partnerships.

5.8 Explore strategies that address transportation and access barriers for community members experiencing food insecurity

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
↔ Expanded	 Medium	 Medium-term

Transportation is an issue for food rescue organizations as well as the recipients of the donated food. In a 2023 survey, transportation was the number one barrier for clients accessing food from organizations. Residents in need often lack the means to get to a place at a specific time to pick up food and to transport food home. Solutions to these issues might include ride sharing, food delivery, and pop-up and mobile food shelves through private/public partnerships.

5.9 Address barriers that prevent businesses from using several organizations for food donation

Status	Potential impact	Timeframe
★ New	 Medium	 Medium-term

Food security organizations have expressed frustration with the limitations set by larger food banks on what food they can access. Agreements between food banks and food security organizations specify that food received through the partnership cannot be shared with other food security organizations, which has resulted in edible food being thrown away. Food banks also ask their donor partners to not donate food to rescue organizations outside of their network. The county will facilitate conversations between food banks and food security organizations to better understand existing practices and explore solutions to the barriers identified.

Appendix A: County programs and projects



Program/Project	Description	Audience
County staff: Food Waste Prevention Specialist and Food Security Coordinator	The County has dedicated resources by establishing two permanent staff positions focused on food waste prevention and food security.	Residents and businesses of all types.
Stop Food Waste Challenge	The Stop Food Waste Challenge is part of the County's Zero Waste Challenge programs. This one-month challenge encourages participants to examine wasted food in their household and then apply tips and tricks from the County's website and additional resources focused on educating participants about how to reduce food waste. Participants are encouraged to create a profile, join a team and select up to ten specific actions to reduce food waste.	Residential households of all types.
Zero Waste Challenge	This Zero Waste Challenge offers personalized one-on-one support and accountability from trained waste experts over eight months to approximately 50 households per round.	Residential households of all types.
Food Rescue System Audit	Environment and Energy, Public Health and Strategic Planning are County departments that work with food security organizations. These departments worked to identify gaps and opportunities to divert more food to people and identify gaps in the food rescue system's responsiveness to community needs for both highly nutritious and culturally significant foods. The audit identified who participates in hunger relief, how the system needs to evolve and ways client voices could be more prominent.	Food donation partners and organizations, and the individuals served by such organizations.
Waste Prevention Grants	This grant opportunity helps businesses prevent waste in their operations. An organization that wants to reduce its food waste can apply for funding for equipment or technology to prevent or redistribute surplus food.	Businesses generating food waste such as commercial kitchens, grocery stores, meal programs for people experiencing food insecurity and other related industries.

Food Recovery Grants	Environment and Energy, Public Health, and Human Services departments created the Food Security and Recovery Services Grant to assist emergency food providers in purchasing food and rescuing surplus food. Funding aims to support new and existing programs that collect and redistribute surplus food to feed residents.	Emergency food providers or organizations that support emergency food providers
Residential Education	<p>The County's website includes numerous articles and educational information focused on reducing food waste at home including Creating Meals, Not Waste and Eat the Food You Buy articles.</p> <p>County staff also give presentations and host event booths about the benefits of reducing food waste, environmental and economic impacts, social and ethical impacts, sources of food waste and resources to improve habits.</p>	People who live, work or visit the County, general outreach and education.
Trash or Cash Campaign	The County launched the Trash or Cash campaign in 2024 to reduce the estimated \$1 billion in food that goes to waste in County households annually. The campaign has a game-show theme including a dedicated website, printable materials, interactive tools and social media content. Residents are encouraged to sign up for Fridge Check Friday emails, which remind people to use up what is in their fridge.	County residents, focused on primary grocery store shoppers between ages 21-45.
Business Organics Recycling – Ordinance 13	Hennepin County revised its recycling ordinance to take effect January 2020 requiring organics recycling for specific businesses, organizations and colleges. Organics recycling for businesses and organizations can include management through composting, anaerobic digestion, food to people or food to animals.	Businesses operating in the County.
School Waste Prevention and Recycling Program and Grants	The County offers technical assistance and grants to schools to facilitate food waste prevention or donation. Funding is available for establishing food sharing tables, donating, storage capacity and tracking software.	Schools in the County, including preschools, K-12 schools and higher-education institutions.

Free Food Resource Map	The County's interactive Free Food Resource Map provides information on where individuals can access free food in the County. The locations identified include food shelves, food box programs, and free meal sites. Many of these sites depend on rescued surplus food.	Anyone in the County in need of free food.
Community Recycling Ambassadors	Volunteers are trained on waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting and effective communication skills through this County program. The program focuses on waste prevention and thoughtful consumption and includes a session on food waste reduction.	Residents who live or work in the County.
City Programs and Ordinance 13	City recycling coordinators offer some wasted food prevention education to residents. Cities are required to make organics recycling service available to all households with curbside recycling service, either through collection or drop-offs.	City staff and elected city representatives

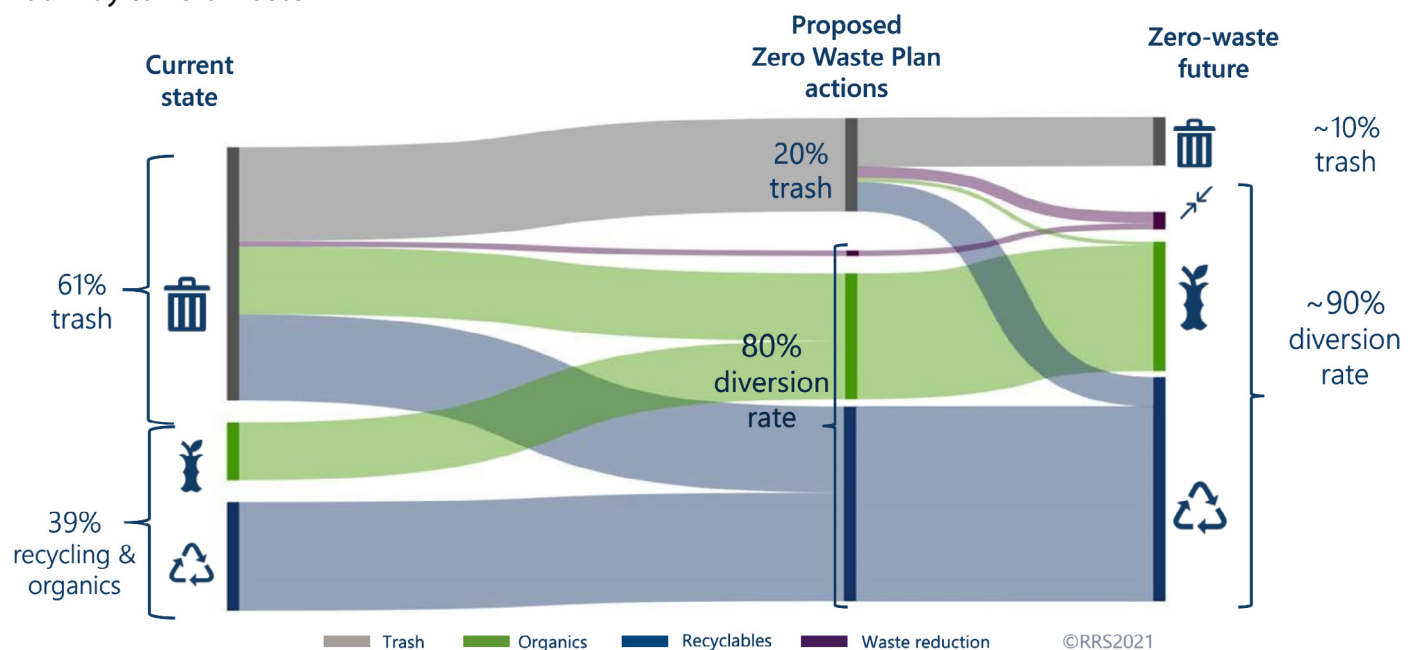
Appendix B: Existing county plans



Hennepin County Zero Waste Plan: The County's Zero Waste Plan includes numerous goals related to waste reduction, reuse and recycling including the following specific goals related to food waste.

- Launch a broad consumer campaign on food waste prevention
- Expand grants for businesses including food waste reduction programs
- Increase compliance with organics requirements (Ordinance 13) and expand requirements, including business food waste recycling requirements and an emphasis on food rescue and donation options
- Establish food waste reduction targets and timelines
- Develop and implement a county plan to eliminate food waste
- Aim to adopt policies that accelerate the transition to a zero-waste future including food waste

Pathway to zero waste



Hennepin County Climate Action Plan: The Climate Action Plan focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, with a goal to reduce emissions by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Goals specific to food waste include:

- Increase the resilience of the built environment and protect natural resources including locally produced food
- Reduce emission in ways that align with core county functions and priorities, including reducing food waste by preventing food waste and diverting organic material from the trash

Hennepin County Solid Waste Management Plan: Metropolitan counties are required to prepare solid waste management plans every six years to meet the goals and objectives identified by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The 2024-2029 Solid Waste Management Plan identifies specific strategies related to food waste including the following.

- Develop and implement a plan to eliminate food waste
- Provide grants for or access to software that can track food waste.
- Establish partnerships between food rescue organizations and restaurants/stores to increase food rescue.
- Launch bi-annual sustainable consumption challenges for residents, including the Stop Food Waste Challenge.
- Work with health inspectors to educate restaurants and other establishments that have excess prepared food to donate.

Appendix C: Federal, state, county, and city policies



Entity	Policy
Federal policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2015, the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) jointly set a national goal to reduce food loss and waste by 50 percent by 2030. In June 2024, the USDA, EPA and the White House released the National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics, detailing objectives to meet the goals of preventing food loss, preventing food waste, increasing recycling for all organic waste and supporting policies to incentivize and encourage these objectives. • Federal Tax Incentives: The federal government provides tax incentives for businesses that choose to donate food, and the results have been very successful in increasing food donation. The Federal Enhanced Tax Deduction for Food Donation provides enhanced benefits for businesses that donate to specific nonprofit organizations. The recipient organization must use the food for charitable purposes and may not use or transfer the food in exchange for money, property or service. • Liability Protection: The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Act is a federal law that protects donors if donated food causes harm to the recipients. The Act was amended by the Food Donation Improvement Act in 2022 and provides civil and criminal liability protection for food donors and nonprofit recipients of food for liability that might occur due to harm from donated food items. Specific qualifying foods and grocery products are included and must meet food safety standards. All qualified donations must be through a nonprofit organization to needy individuals. Donations and distribution of food must be done in “good faith.” The Emerson Act provides coverage for all individuals, government entities, schools, gleaners, farmers and businesses. The Emerson Act also protects against both federal and state law claims. States may choose to enact additional state-level liability protection. • Food Product Dating: Federal law requires food product dating for infant formula only. The USDA requires a “pack date” for poultry and other products to help identify lots and facilitate trace-back in the event of a foodborne illness outbreak. • Food Safety: The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and USDA regulate food safety and labeling. The FDA has the authority to regulate the safety and labeling of all foods with the exception of meat, poultry and some fish, which are regulated by the USDA. Both entities oversee the regulation of egg products. Numerous Acts provide regulation for how specific food items are labeled and safely handled. The Federal Trade Commission is responsible for food advertising regulations. Federal agencies inspect food processing plants and production facilities that create food products that travel between states. • Animal Feed Policy: Federal statutes and regulations detail the use of food waste as animal feed through the following regulations: Swine Health Protection Act, the Ruminant Feed Ban Rule, the Food Safety Modernization Act Rules on Preventive Controls, and FDA regulations regarding adulteration and misbranding. These detailed regulations aim to properly treat food scraps fed to animals to reduce potential for disease outbreaks linked to animal products in livestock feed. Using food scraps as animal feed is widely viewed as a relatively safe, efficient and environmentally preferred method of food waste disposal, saving money for farmers, businesses and increasing waste diversion. • FDA Model Food Code: Model Food Code (and similarly Minnesota Food Code) includes items like Time as a Public Health Control (time as a control), date-marketing requirements for prepared by/use by dates, hot or cold-holding for safety standards and allergen requirements.

Minnesota state policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liability Protection: Minnesota statute for Liability of Food Donors provides liability protection for donation and distribution of food donations. The regulation applies to food that is fit for human consumption at the time of donation and distributed by the food bank or nonprofit charitable organization to the elderly or needy at no charge. This provides liability protection in addition to that provided by the Emerson Act detailed in Federal policies. • Minnesota Certified Food Protection Manager: A certified food protection manager (CFPM) is a leader for a food establishment related to food safety, required by the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The CFPM is required to complete training, certification, exams and forms with the state. • Date Labeling: The state requires date labeling on dairy products, eggs, shellfish and perishables defined in State Statute 31.782 related to a quality assurance date. • Food Safety for Food Donation Guidance: The Minnesota Department of Agriculture and Department of Health created a comprehensive guide for food safety to assist donors, distributors, those serving donated food and regulators to consistently interpret food safety regulations. The guidance is based on state and federal food codes • The Minnesota Department of Agriculture and University of Minnesota Extension provide additional guidance for the sale of locally grown food including eggs, produce and hunter-harvested deer, including donation information. • Animal Feed: Minnesota statute details requirements for using garbage as animal feed, including safety measures for protecting public health and livestock diseases. • State Resources: Many state departments include information and resources about reducing food waste including food donation via the Minnesota Department of Education, food to animals via the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and liability protection for food donation. • Minnesota Free Meals Program: Students are required to take three components including a fruit or vegetable for meals to be qualified for reimbursable, which may increase wasted food.
Hennepin County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinance 13 Recycling for Hennepin County²⁸: This ordinance details requirements for solid waste source separation, including organics material collection requirements for residential households and commercial generators. Under this ordinance, covered generators must implement organic material collection to divert food and food scraps from back-of-house beginning January 1, 2020. Commercial covered generators include restaurants, grocery stores, food wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers, hotels, hospitals, sports venues, event centers, caterers, nursing and residential care facilities, office buildings with dining services, farmers markets, food shelves and food banks, colleges and universities with dining services, shopping centers, airports, golf clubs and country clubs, and rental kitchens or shared-use commercial kitchens. Covered generators are those that generate one ton of trash per week or contract for eight cubic yards or more per week of trash collection service. Beneficial use of organics material includes donation of edible food for human consumption, collection of organic material for food-to-animal programs, collection for composting or for anaerobic digestion. The County provides additional resources regarding how to safely donate food and organizations that accept food donations. • The ordinance requires cities with more than 10,000 residents to provide curbside organics collection, either through a contract or by requiring the haulers in their city to offer the service. • Cities with less than 10,000 residents can choose to provide an organics drop-off instead of providing curbside organics collection.
City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All cities in the County were contacted regarding any existing policies or ordinances related to food waste, food donation or similar programs. Cities reported they do not have such policies.

