

Pollution Prevention (P2) Opportunities with Restaurants

A hotel's restaurant can often be a focal point for the facility. Your hotel's fresh take on how the restaurant is operated through pollution prevention can lead to new interest and excitement from guests. These tips will help you get there with little to no cost. Rallying guests and staff alike to pollution prevention can be as simple as bringing it to their attention.

Inventory Control

Restaurants must keep tight control over their food inventory. 4 to 10 percent of food purchased by a restaurant never makes it to the table.¹ Practices talked about in this section will be respected by your customers for keeping food fresh, but also contribute to pollution prevention. Keeping track of how much of each dish is being sold and ordering ingredients to reflect that will help to reduce waste from spoilage. You may also consider removing a dish entirely if it is not ordered frequently enough to justify ordering the ingredients. Using a first-in, first-out system will also help to ensure products are being used from beginning to end before another one is open. This will help to eliminate the need to throw away something that was only partly used. Be sure to also make use of labels displaying dates stored and clear containers, where applicable, to ensure proper tracking of inventory. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services have created a website and app to help with knowing storage dates of various food items, it can be found here.² Make sure to train your staff frequently on these practices.

Minimizing Leftovers

A well informed staff and curated menu offers another pollution prevention opportunity. In addition to tracking the most popular menu items, track when dishes are not completely finished. Using this information, adjust the portion size of those dishes.³ A blanket half-portion option on the menu allows customers a better option than wasting food. Dishes that are being sent back because of technical mistakes can help to identify an opportunity for more staff training. Try not to overproduce in day-to-day operations. Consider more than just time and day of the week. You can factor in nearby events, weather, past sales. Also, prioritize small batches when preparing for an influx of customers.⁴ When prepping the food consider how much is being trimmed and if those trimmings can be used elsewhere. Have your menu accommodate these opportunities. Cooking food to order is the best option as there's no worries of overproduction.

If your hotel restaurant is a buffet, consider ditching the tray. Trays tend to encourage customers to overload their plate to



the point where they can't finish all of the food. 25 college campuses that decided to remove trays from their dining halls saw a 25 to 30 percent reduction in wasted food.³

Reusability

Reuse is another pillar of pollution prevention. Restaurants can often overlook small changes within their structure that add up to large cost saving practices. A restaurant in San Francisco, CA was able to save \$5175 and reduce waste by over 1000 lbs. annually only by switching their dine-in plating to be reusable.⁵

Some simple strategies that can be utilized that have low initial cost are using self-serve dispensers, refillable seasoning and condiment containers, and implementing an ask to receive policy for certain items. (i.e. not providing a straw with every drink). The dispensers encourage customers to only use what they need and allows the bulk purchasing of these items making it cheaper and more environmentally friendly.

Take a moment to consider areas where single use items are used and question if you need them. For example, wraps for sandwiches, burritos, etc. are often not needed. If you would still like to keep these items, look for post consumer recycled material replacements

Efficient Commercial Kitchen Equipment

When replacing or upgrading your kitchen equipment, make sure to keep in mind ENERGY STAR certified appliances. A kitchen fully outfitted with these appliances can look to save around \$5500/year. A list of supported appliances, certified models, and cost calculators can be found here.⁶

Local Foods

Designing a menu around the locally grown produce and available meats helps to alleviate the emissions from transporting food. It can also help to facilitate interest from

customers by supplying fresh and more sustainable menu items. The National Restaurant Association found that 66 percent of adults prefer to eat at restaurants with locally sourced food.⁷

Donations

Food donations are a great way to save food that won't be used. For non-perishable items you should look to donate to food banks. The Association of Arizona Food Banks has a search function to find a location near you, found here.⁸ Food rescue programs focus more on perishable items to quickly pick up and deliver food to those in need. Waste Not is an organization to help do just that found here in Arizona. They partner with facilities like Phoenix Day to help them serve more than 3500 children, families and community members annually.⁹ Either option will sort through the donated items for you and provide you with monthly totals.

An important detail to remember is that as long as the donation is in good faith you do not have to worry about legal action from spoiled food. This is because of the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Food donations will also give businesses significant tax benefits when donating to qualified nonprofit organizations.¹⁰ The provided monthly totals will give you an easy time calculating tax deduction.

Getting Started

There are numerous ways to help move to a more P2-oriented restaurant. One such way is the Food Recovery Challenge (FRC) hosted by the EPA.¹¹ Participants of the challenge gain access to the SMM Data Management System, which can be used to help track reduction and diversion of food waste. Goals can also be set to help establish identified opportunities. Recognition is also given to those that perform well through awards and social media. For a more rigorous challenge, the U.S. Food Loss Waste 2030 Champions, also made by the EPA, requires that participating businesses and organization reach a food loss and waste reduction of 50 percent by 2030.¹²

In order to get more exposure and insight into other businesses in terms of sustainability, you may also want to join the National Restaurant Association's Sustainability Executive Study Group, who tries to utilize the knowledge of industry leaders to share their best practices, news, and weigh in on pertinent discussions. Some more resources include Hotel Kitchen's toolkit and quiz.¹⁴ The unique part of this resource is the hotel specific focus on information that will help you to prevent, donate, and divert food waste. There is also an outline of Food Loss Prevention Options for Restaurants by the EPA.¹⁵ Utilizing the checklist will give you a quick overview of waste prevention that you could be or are already are doing.

References

1. National Restaurant Association. Measuring food waste can bolster your bottom line.
2. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. FoodKeeper App.
3. EPA. Reducing Wasted Food & Packaging: A Guide for Food Services and Restaurants.
4. National Restaurant Association. Measuring food waste can bolster your bottom line.
5. Clean Water Action. Reusable Food Serviceware Guide.
6. ENERGY STAR. Commercial Food Service Equipment.
7. National Restaurant Association. Local and sustainable foods draw customers.
8. Association of Arizona Food Banks. Find a Food Bank Near You.
9. Waste Not. Food Donors.
10. U.S. Department of Agriculture. Recovery/Donations.
11. EPA. Food Recovery Challenge (FRC).
12. EPA. United States Food Loss and Waste 2030 Champions.
13. National Restaurant Association. Sustainability Executive Study Group.
14. Hotel Kitchen. Change the Flow of Food.
15. EPA. Food Loss Prevention Option for Restaurants.