

Food Waste Prevention at the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)



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INTRODUCTION

School meals are nutritious food source for American school children (USDA, 2021). The SFSP helps ensure that children in Seattle have access to nutritious meals while school is out by offering free meals during the Summer for anyone 18 and younger (City of Seattle, 2025).



(City of Seattle, 2025)

Food waste is a public health concern because it misuses the resources of food production, and contributes to emissions that can harm human health (Rudziak et al., 2024).

This project is supported the City of Seattle's aim to minimize food waste across public food programs, including the SFSP.

METHODS

Interviews with program staff shed light on the characteristics of the SFSP structure that could be contributing to food waste.



5 KEY THEMES & EXAMPLES OF PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Strict regulations: Strict regulations interfere with the site staffs' flexibility to create solutions to minimize food waste. **Example proposed solution:** Address the root-cause by modifying the regulations, such as asking the Seattle Public Schools for flexibility with ordering time-frame during the first 2 weeks of the program.

Supply & demand mismatch: Too many ordered meals and/or too few consumers contribute to wasted meals. **Example proposed solution:** Increase awareness about SFSP through improved & individualized signage, such as the sample presented with clear details of who is eligible, days and times for meals, and exact location.



(Healthy School Recipes, 2020)

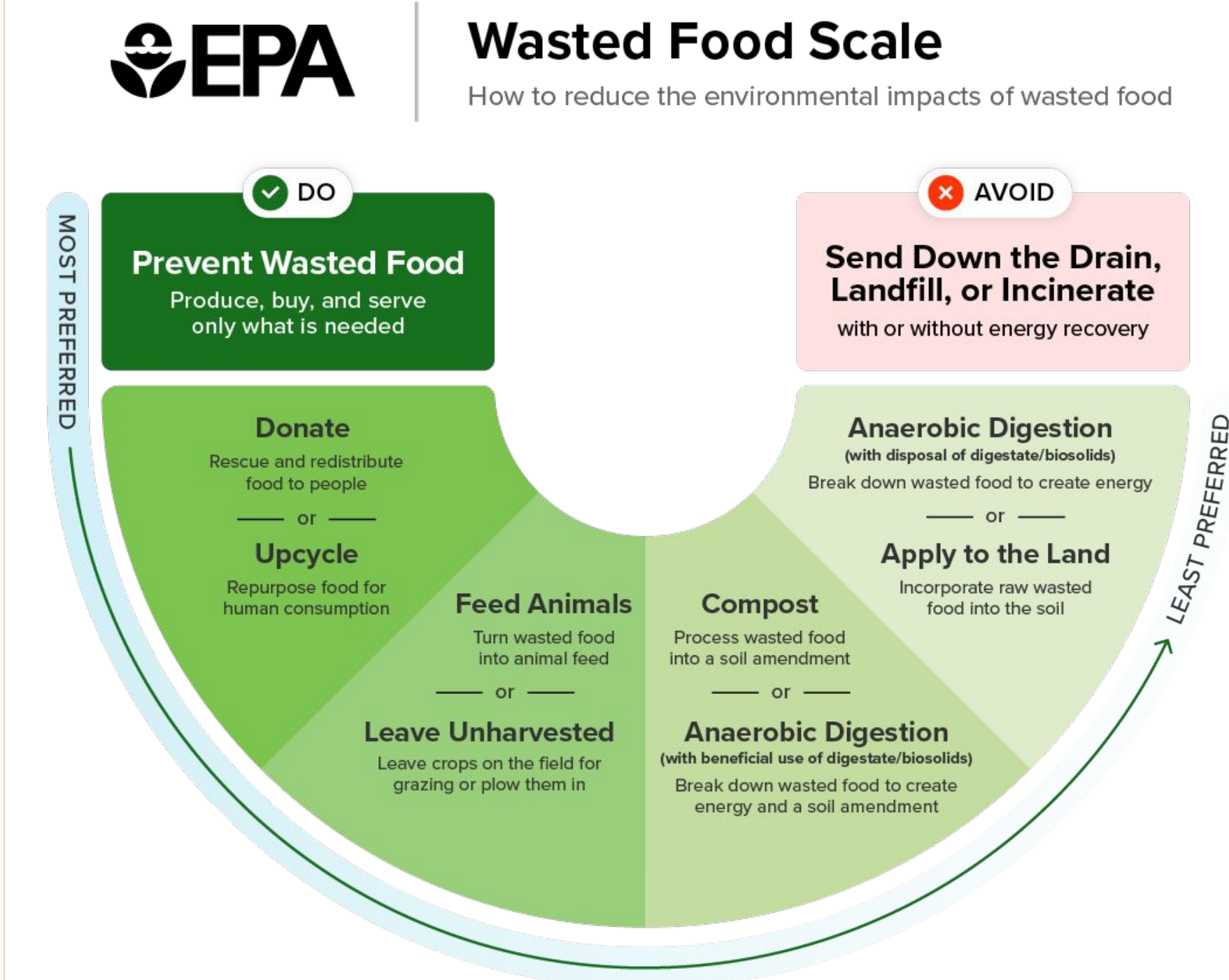
Food preferences: Meals that do not meet food preferences are not consumed and end up being wasted. **Example proposed solution:** Work with a Registered Dietitian to create nutritious and balanced versions of meals that there is demand for (such as a balanced noodle dish). Presented here is a picture of a tofu with noodles and Bok Choy that meets the program's recipe requirements.

Cultural food needs: Meals that do not align with the cultural and/or religious food restrictions are not consumed and end up being wasted. **Example proposed solution:** Collect data for 3-5 meal ideas that communities with cultural/religious dietary restrictions enjoy, and incorporate these into the meal rotation schedule for all sites.

Limited guidance/system for excess meals: Not having a system for donation of excess meals causes fresh food that could be served elsewhere (such as at a food bank) to be instead be thrown to the landfill. **Example proposed Solution:** Partner with local organization that could benefit from the excess fresh meals.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Following the EPA Wasted Food Scale framework, prioritize most preferred solutions that prevent wasted food before relying on least preferred solutions that deal with the wasted food.



(EPA, 2023)

Short-term: Prioritize surface-level changes to handle the existing food waste appropriately.

Long-term: Create a full-time position to address food waste at the root-cause. With a staff focusing on this topic full-time, implement structural-level changes that prevent food waste.

References:
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