

A photograph of a dining table. In the center is a large, round wooden board with a salad consisting of green leafy vegetables, sliced radishes, and pieces of bread. In the foreground, a white plate holds a smaller portion of the same salad. To the left, a glass of white wine is partially visible. The background shows a person's arm and hand holding a white napkin. The entire image has a semi-transparent green overlay at the top.

Food Waste in the Tourism Sector

BC Tourism
Sustainability
Network



The BC Tourism Sustainability Network gratefully acknowledges that we live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the 204 First Nations in British Columbia.

Image: Smoking salmon in Village of Gitlaxt'aamiks of the Nisga'a Nation.



Ministry of
Tourism, Arts,
Culture and Sport



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA®



Fort Nelson

Stewart

Fort St. John

Dawson Creek

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Terrace

Prince Rupert

Prince George

Haida Gwaii

Quesnel

Williams Lake

Bella Coola

Port Hardy

Golden

Campbell River

Kamloops

Invermere

Comox

Vernon

Kelowna

Nelson

Vancouver

Penticton

Castlegar

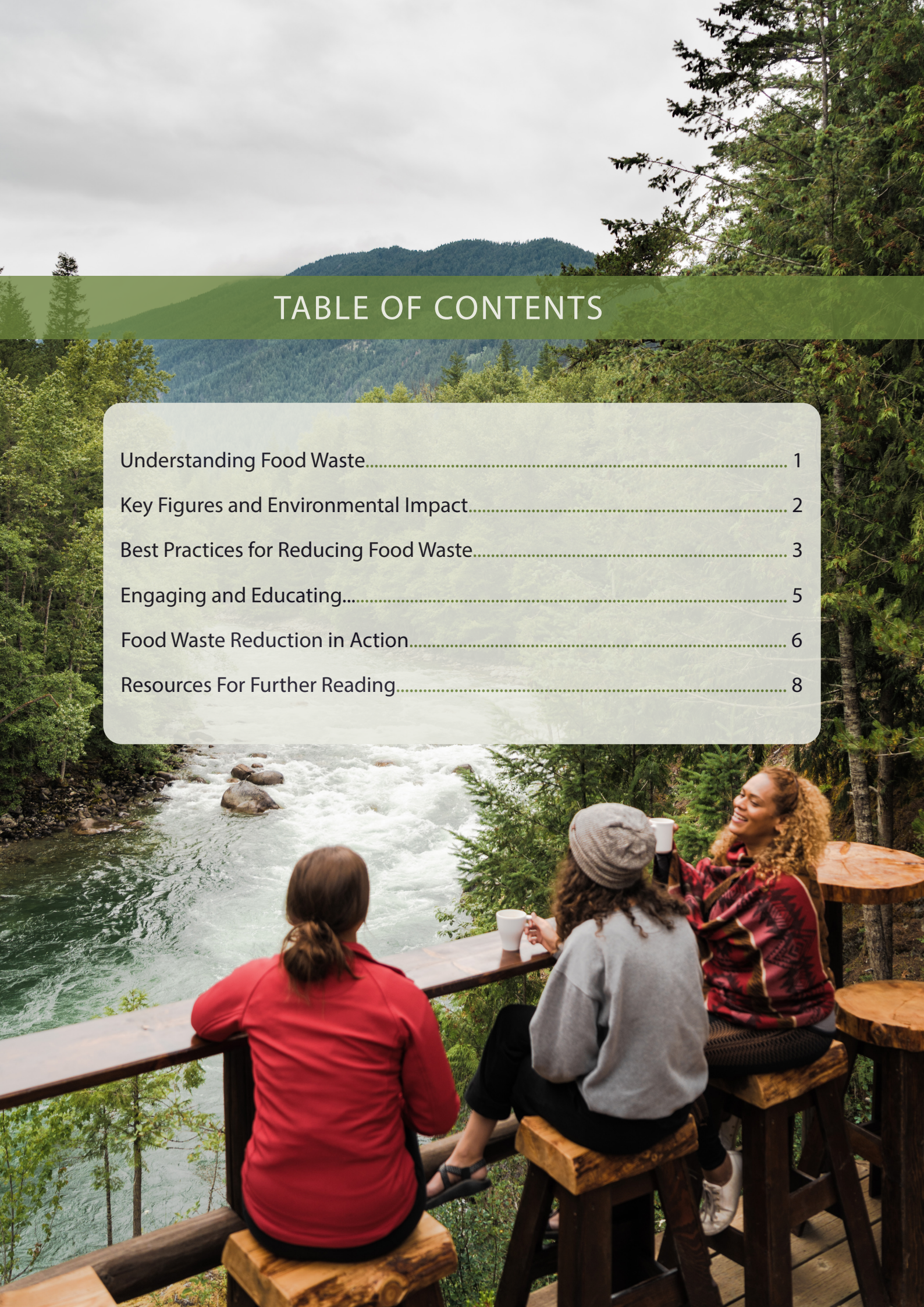
Cranbrook

Abbotsford

Victoria

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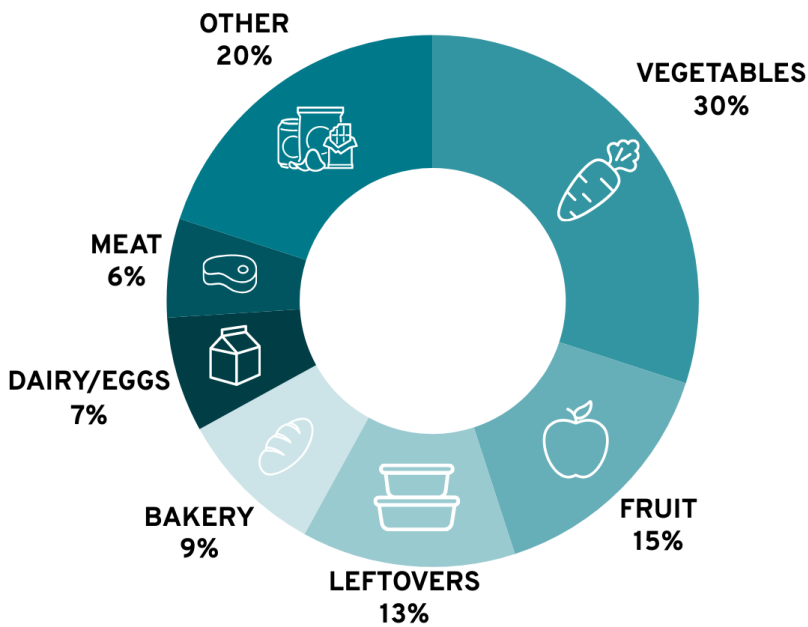


Understanding Food Waste

Definition and types of food waste

Food waste covers any uneaten or thrown-away food from the different stages of a visitor's journey. This involves the kitchens and dining areas in hotels, restaurants, and cafes, as well as events and attractions catering to travelers. We can categorize food waste into different types, such as spoilage due to improper storage, waste during food preparation, and plate waste. Excess buffet items and unused ingredients also add to the problem, leading to environmental impact and economic inefficiency associated with food wastage.

TYPES OF FOOD WASTE FROM CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS



Source: [Love Food Hate Waste](#)

Causes of food waste in the tourism industry

Food waste is caused by various factors, including logistical challenges, consumer behavior, and operational procedures. One key factor is the unpredictability of guest numbers, leading to difficulties in accurately estimating food quantities. This uncertainty often leads tourism operators to stock more perishable items than needed, leading to spoilage. Inefficient kitchen processes, lack of staff training, and inadequate inventory management also play significant roles. Addressing these root causes is essential for reducing food waste.



Key Figures and Environmental Impact

According to the “Global food losses and food waste” report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2011, approximately [one-third of the world’s food](#) produced for human consumption is lost each year. The global carbon footprint attached to this food waste and loss is the equivalent of [4.4 billion tonnes](#) of CO2 annually, representing [8% of total emissions](#) worldwide.

In Canada, “almost [2.3 million tonnes](#) of edible food [are] wasted each year, costing Canadians in excess of \$20 billion”. In British Columbia, [40% of waste](#) sent to landfills is organic matter, and “retail food stores and food service lose an estimated [\\$1.3 billion](#) worth of food per year”. The tourism and hospitality industry plays a substantial role in those numbers, as the province counted over 16,650 tourism businesses and \$13.5 billion in revenue generated (Government of BC, 2021). “Food waste is responsible for 56.5 million tonnes of the greenhouse gas emissions that Canada produces annually” (seeds.ca, 2021).

The impact of food waste touches all three dimensions of sustainability. From an environmental perspective, food waste significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. Economically, the cost of producing, transporting, and disposing of unconsumed food adds up and directly affects business profitability. Socially, food loss within local communities directly contributes to food insecurity.

Food waste management is at the intersection of social responsibility, sound environmental practices and positive economic impacts. It is paramount for tourism businesses to address this interconnection with a robust food waste management plan.

SDG #12

To address food waste globally, the United Nations set an ambitious reduction target through [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) #12](#) - Responsible Consumption and Production. Target 12.3 aims to cut food loss and waste by half by 2030.

Best Practices for Reducing Food Waste

Reducing food waste for tourism operators is at the forefront of any sustainable operation. The key principles of “Reduce, Repurpose, Recover” lay a great foundation for developing a waste management framework. By using “Reduce, Repurpose, Recover”, tourism businesses play an important role in the circular economy of their regions.

REDUCE: Create a food waste reduction plan; strengthen purchasing policy and optimize storage practices.

REPURPOSE: Redistribute surplus food to food banks or donation programs; use scraps into new dishes.

RECOVER: Make sure that food waste is properly disposed of to generate compost.



Establishing a food waste reduction plan

Creating a food waste reduction plan starts with a thorough assessment of a business’ current food handling and disposal practices. The first step of the process is to identify areas where food waste occurs. Conducting a food waste audit and analyzing the results will allow the business to pinpoint inefficiencies. Hospitality and tourism operators can then define clear and realistic goals to reduce waste and implement strategies to achieve those goals. One element of a waste reduction plan is menu planning and portion control: ingredients are intentionally selected based on seasonality and local proximity, and portion sizes are carefully calibrated. For example, restaurants can consider offering half size meals for smaller appetites.



Procurement practices

Procurement practices are another element of a food waste reduction plan. Businesses can start by creating a responsible procurement purchasing policy (more information in the guide: [Responsible Purchasing for Tourism Organizations](#)), which includes information about the business’ procurement practices in alignment with the business’ values. This document becomes the starting point of any new supplier relationship or refreshing existing relationships. Strong procurement practices benefit organizations at every level of the supply chain. Authentic and long-lasting partnerships are built on similar values, and tourism operators feel more in control of their purchasing choices. One example of a sustainable procurement practice is opting for a food supplier offering sustainable packaging options.



Inventory management and proper storage

A strong food waste reduction plan relies on inventory management and proper storage. A business' food inventory should remain up-to-date at all times, using a labeling system including name, description and date. Changes in inventory should be carefully recorded (items received, old items, etc.), and status of each food item, tracked (in stock, on order, out of stock, etc.). Adopting a system such as "first in, first out" is a great method to avoid food waste by using older items first. All food items must be stored under proper conditions with the correct temperature, humidity, and lighting to prolong their shelf life. To learn more about inventory management and proper storage, [BC FOODSAFE](#) provides [tools and resources](#) to support your kitchen team.



Implementing a food donation program

Tourism businesses can sometimes find themselves with surplus food. Implementing a food donation program and collaborating with local food banks and non-profit organizations can also reduce food waste and give back to the community. Once the surplus food items have been identified, businesses can reach out to their local food banks and discuss interest, timing and transportation. Food rescue non-profit organizations such as [Second Harvest](#) can also support as an intermediary to get surplus, edible food to the people that need it.

In Quesnel BC, [the Canadian Mental Health Association](#) is working with community partners (restaurants, farmers, etc.) to fight food insecurity. [Cobs Bread](#) has implemented a program where volunteers pick up unsold bread and baked goods at the end of each day and redistribute them through charitable food programs.

The Food Donor Encouragement Act

In British Columbia, the [Food Donor Encouragement Act](#) provides protection from liability for businesses and their employees from liability when donating or distributing donated food, "as long as the food was not rotten or unfit for consumption, and the food was not donated or distributed with reckless disregard for safety."



Engaging and Educating

Employee training and awareness can play a crucial role in effective food waste management. Training programs can educate staff on the economic and environmental impact of food waste, equipping them with the skills to identify, prevent, and manage waste effectively. Businesses can significantly reduce unnecessary waste by providing team members with knowledge about portion control, proper storage techniques, and efficient inventory management. For example, training kitchen staff to repurpose food scraps into dishes minimizes waste and adds value to the menu. Creating a culture of awareness among employees encourages them to make informed decisions that contribute to food waste reduction.

Similarly, engaging guests in adopting new habits is essential to creating a sense of collective commitment around tackling food waste. Displaying information (paper or digital) regarding waste reduction measures adopted by a business can educate guests about the importance of mindful consumption and offer practical suggestions for reducing food waste. By including travelers in food waste management initiatives, tourism operators create a culture of responsibility at every level of the supply chain, resonating beyond the business.

Food waste management not only contributes to environmental sustainability and social responsibility, but it also creates a significant economic impact for tourism operators. The cost-saving benefits of addressing food waste are substantial, as they directly contribute to lower operational expenses. Waste management strategies can also reduce disposal costs.

The Government of British Columbia has initiated programs to curb food waste in the tourism sector. These initiatives include incentives for businesses adopting sustainable practices, educational campaigns to raise awareness, and enforcing regulations that encourage responsible food management. The National Zero Waste Council is one of the main actors in addressing food waste and advancing waste prevention in Canada. Find more information about British Columbia food waste management initiatives and business support in the Resources section at the end of this guide.

Love Food Hate Waste

Created in 2018 by the National Zero Waste Council in Canada, the "[Love Food Hate Waste](#)" campaign is spreading awareness around food loss and the significant collateral damages for the Canadian economy. Love Food Hate Waste Canada works with governments, businesses and local communities to address food waste and implement solutions.



Food Waste Reduction in Action: Sheringham Distillery

Started by the two founders in their garage, Sheringham Distillery soon evolved from a backyard operation to a recognized BC brand. Their comprehensive approach to sustainability, from sourcing clean ingredients to implementing efficient waste management and water recycling practices, exemplifies its commitment to environmental responsibility. Their practices include using sustainably harvested green tea leaves and flowers, upcycling byproducts like cacao bean shells and husks for their chocolate liqueur, and sourcing coffee beans for their Coffee Liqueur. Additionally, they have adopted a water capturing and recycling process in their distillery and are developing products from bi-products of their ingredient and production processes, showcasing their innovative approach to waste reduction. They are certified Carbon Neutral, Biosphere Committed, and proud members of BC Green Business.



[Do you have a food waste reduction plan or responsible purchasing policy for your operations?](#)

The distillery's waste reduction plan encompasses responsible purchasing, highlighting the importance of sourcing clean, sustainable ingredients, and the use of a water capturing and recycling processes. This plan is part of our broader sustainability strategy, which aligns with our BC Green Business (Green Level) and Surfrider Approval, reflecting a comprehensive approach to minimize environmental impact.

[How have you implemented food waste considerations in your operation?](#)

Sheringham Distillery's commitment to sustainable ingredient sourcing is evident in our partnerships with local suppliers such as Dakini Tidal Wilds, Westholme Tea Company, Sirene Chocolate, and The Stick in the Mud Coffee Beans. These local collaborations ensure that ingredients like winged kelp, green tea leaves and flowers, and lavender are not only high quality but also sustainably harvested, reflecting the distillery's dedication to environmental stewardship and clean product design. We conduct research about suppliers first and screen their sustainable practices, and we choose local as much as possible with a focus on minimizing food waste.



How do you foster employee and guest awareness of food waste practices?

Sheringham showcases its sustainability commitments on product labels, website content, and social media platforms. By highlighting our partnerships and sustainable sourcing initiatives, we educate employees, guests, and the broader community about the importance of environmental responsibility.



What challenges or barriers have you faced in implementing these practices?

Challenges include the complexity of sourcing sustainable ingredients, the costs associated with implementing advanced water recycling technologies, and the ongoing development of products from by-products which require innovation and market acceptance. However, our proactive approach and commitment to sustainability help overcome these barriers.

What would you recommend other businesses be aware of when it comes to food waste reduction?

Our approach underscores the importance of sourcing clean ingredients, investing in waste reduction technologies, and forming strategic partnerships. Other businesses should consider the environmental impact of their supply chain, engage in community and conservation initiatives, and adopt measurable sustainability practices that drive long-term benefits.



Image credits: Sheringham Distillery, James Jones Photography, Jon-Mark Photography.

Resources for Further Reading

[Government of BC - Food waste prevention for businesses](#)

[UNWTO: Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in the Tourism Sector](#)

[National Zero Waste Council - Waste prevention](#)

[Better Table](#)

[BC FOODSAFE](#)

