



UPDATE ON USA'S FOOD DONATION POLICY LANDSCAPE

In June 2024, the United States published the *National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics*, a comprehensive roadmap to halve food loss and waste by 2030 and meet a 50% national recycling rate.¹ The strategy, spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Food and Drug Administration (FDA), addresses every stage of the food supply chain—from farm to fork—and reflects best practices from global models, including an emphasis on prevention, interagency coordination, and investment in infrastructure and education.

SYNOPSIS OF PRIOR POLICY

Prior to this strategy, the United States had a national goal to reduce food loss and waste by 50% by 2030, aligned with SDG Target 12.3.² However, this target was not accompanied by a unified strategy or governing framework. The Federal Interagency Collaboration to Reduce Food Loss and Waste, established in 2019, marked a first step toward national coordination by formalizing efforts across USDA, EPA, and FDA, but lacked binding targets, accountability mechanisms, or broad stakeholder engagement.³ Efforts to prevent food waste and increase food donations were often fragmented across federal, state, and local levels, and implementation was inconsistent. The new national strategy represents a shift from this patchwork approach to a centralized, interagency framework with clear goals, cross-sectoral coordination, and concrete actions.

PROVISIONS OF THE NEW NATIONAL STRATEGY

The strategy was informed by an extensive public comment process, which allowed stakeholders to provide input and shape the final framework. The strategy reflects this feedback through stronger commitments on measurement, equity considerations, and infrastructure investment.⁴

To organize its work, the strategy sets out 17 categories of actions under four overarching objectives: preventing food loss, preventing food waste, expanding organics recycling, and enabling supportive policies and incentives.⁵ This structure provides both breadth and clarity, ensuring coordinated action across the food system.

Codified National Goal and Whole-of-Government Implementation

The strategy formally commits the U.S. to achieving a 50% reduction in

food loss and waste by 2030, reinforcing SDG 12.3 and national recycling.⁶ It also adopts a whole-of-government approach, engaging USDA, EPA, FDA, and state and local governments in coordinated implementation. To operationalize this goal, the strategy includes four key objectives’ materials management grants—that will be used to implement the strategy.^{7,8}

Food Loss and Waste Prevention Across the Supply Chain

The strategy emphasizes prevention as the highest priority, consistent with the food waste hierarchy. At the farm level, actions include funding for on-farm storage, cold chain improvements, and technical assistance for producers to reduce losses.⁹ During processing and distribution, the government will support innovations such as upcycled food ingredients, advanced logistics technologies (including AI), and biodegradable packaging.¹⁰ Youth education, public-private partnerships, and national food literacy efforts are also central to preventing downstream waste.¹¹

Enhanced Food Donation and Redistribution Infrastructure

A core component of the strategy is to facilitate surplus food donation as the preferred pathway after prevention. The USDA and EPA commit to expand outreach on liability protections (provided under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act) and tax incentives for food donors, and to support cold storage and donation infrastructure through programs like the Farm Storage Facility Loan Program¹² and Rural Energy for America Program.¹³ The strategy also commits that EPA will update its Excess Food Opportunities Map¹⁴ to identify donation and recovery opportunities nationwide. Food safety guidance, including updates to the FDA Food Code, will support streamlined food donation from businesses to hunger relief organizations, with a special focus on culturally appropriate and nutritious food.¹⁵

Beyond donation, the strategy also prioritizes expanding organics recycling and diversion to animal feed. Investments in composting facilities, anaerobic digestion, and regional recycling hubs will help manage food scraps that cannot be recovered. At the same time, USDA will advance research and technical support to scale the use of surplus food in animal feed, ensuring that remaining waste is redirected into productive pathways rather than landfilled.

Data, Monitoring, and Innovation

The strategy acknowledges the data limitations in current food loss and waste measurement and outlines efforts to fill these gaps through improved federal estimates, research investments, and life cycle impact assessments. USDA and EPA commit to invest in behavioral science research. The strategy also discusses a national food waste measurement model for households under development to support consistent, representative data collection.¹⁷ These efforts will support transparent progress tracking toward the 2030 goal and inform evidence-based adjustments to the strategy towards a more circular economy.





CONCLUSION

The release of the National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics marks a pivotal step in the U.S. food policy landscape. By establishing clear federal leadership, aligning with international climate and hunger reduction goals, and prioritizing food recovery and organics recycling, the strategy transforms aspiration into action. The U.S. now joins global peers like Australia, Brazil, and the United Kingdom in adopting a unified national plan to tackle food loss and waste. Its success will hinge on robust implementation, sustained funding, and strong partnerships across all sectors of the food system.

For more best practices related to national FLW strategies, For more best practices related to donation requirements, please see FLPC’s [Food Waste Deterrence Policy Issue Brief](#).

Endnotes

- ¹ United States Govt., *National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss & Waste and Recycling Organics*, 2023. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/NATIONAL-STRATEGY-FOR-REDUCING-FOOD-LOSS-AND-WASTE-AND-RECYCLING-ORGANICS.pdf> (hereafter “National FLW Strategy”).
- ² <https://www.usda.gov/about-food/food-safety/food-loss-and-waste/us-food-loss-and-waste-2030-champions>
- ³ <https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/interagency>
- ⁴ National FLW Strategy, page 40.
- ⁵ National FLW Strategy, page 10.
- ⁶ National FLW Strategy, page 3.
- ⁷ National FLW Strategy, Page 10.Objectives.
- ⁸ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: Transforming U.S. recycling and waste management. <https://www.epa.gov/infrastructure/bipartisan-infrastructure-law-transforming-us-recycling-andwaste-management>.
- ⁹ National FLW Strategy, Page 11, Strategic Actions, A. Optimize the harvest or collection of raw commodities and foods
- ¹⁰ National FLW Strategy page 16-17.
- ¹¹ National FLW Strategy, page 8, Challenges
- ¹² National FLW Strategy page 12.
- ¹³ National FLW Strategy, page 18.
- ¹⁴ Env. Protection Agency, *Excess Opportunities Map*, <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/excess-food-opportunities-map>
- ¹⁵ National FLW Strategy, page 18.
- ¹⁶ National FLW Strategy, page 16.
- ¹⁷ National FLW Strategy, page 15, Objective 2A



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