

# It's Not Just Using The FOGO: Reducing Household Food Waste

September 2025

## The Problem<sup>1</sup>

The figures are shocking.

- Each year Australians waste around 7.6 million tonnes of food across the food supply chain. This equates to about 312kg per person.
- Food waste costs the Australian economy around \$36.6 billion each year.
- As a sector, households generate the most food waste in Australia. Households are responsible for about 30% of the total. This equals around 2.5 million tonnes per year and costs each household up to \$2,500.
- Food waste accounts for about 3% of Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions.
- Australia uses around 2,600 gigalitres of water to grow food that is wasted. This is equal to the water in 5 Sydney Harbours.
- The amount of land used to grow wasted food in Australia covers more than 25 million hectares. This is a landmass larger than the state of Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

The Australian Government is committed to achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (12.3) to halve food waste by 2030. What's being done to meet this goal?

## The National Waste Reduction Plan 2024

The Plan has seven targets.

Target 1. Ban on export of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres, commencing in the second half of 2020

Target 2. Reduce total waste generated in Australia by 10% per person.

Target 3. 80% average resource recovery rate from all waste streams following the waste streams following the waste hierarchy.

Target 4. Significantly increase the use of recyclable content by government and industry.

Target 5. Continued phase out of problematic and unnecessary plastics.

Target 6. Halve the organic waste sent to landfill for disposal by 2030.

Target 7. Make comprehensive, economy-wide and timely data publicly available to support better consumer, investment and policy decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Food waste is food intended for human consumption which is thrown away.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Australia's problem with food waste, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. Reducing Australia's food waste - DCCEEW

## Target 6 – Behaviour Change

It's under Target 6 that households fall and the action to be taken is behaviour change in managing household organic waste.

There have been to my knowledge two Australian studies from which have come specific behaviours

- The Great Unwaste
- Halving Household Food Waste: Which Behaviours Matter?

### 1. The Great Unwaste

This is a campaign run by End Food Waste Australia, 'A growing network dedicated to rethinking the future of our food'.<sup>3</sup> The campaign is 'a nationwide behaviour change campaign designed to inspire and empower all Australians to reduce food waste in their homes.' Research it conducted found that 'nearly half of Australians (46%) agree they could do more to reduce their household waste, while 45% are seeking better information and support to tackle the problem'.<sup>4</sup>

Through its research it has come up with six actions.

#### *Pack it. Stack it. Chill it.*

Proper storage and labelling (in the fridge) are easy secret weapons to longer-lasting food and fewer "what's that smell?" surprises. Treat your food right, and it'll stick around long enough to reach your plate.

#### *Flexi meal plan*

Life's busy, we get it! You never know how the week will go – who might drop by, invite you over for dinner or call you up for lunch? And after a tough day, who can resist a takeaway? But by planning for the unexpected, we can unwaste food and be better prepared for whatever comes our way.

#### *Join the leftovers revolution*

Don't let last night's dinner sulk in the fridge! Leftovers are a quick and easy way to save time, money, and give your taste buds a second helping of something delicious.

#### *First in, first out*

Before grabbing that brand-new bag of salad, remember the opened one patiently waiting its turn. Eating older items first keeps your food rotation fresh and prevents hard-earned groceries from getting thrown in the bin.

#### *Stick to your list*

Buying too much at the supermarket is easily done, particularly when those specials and multi-buys are so tempting. But by sticking to a list, you can keep your kitchen stocked with just the right amount and avoid that unnecessary 'just in case' loaf of bread.

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<sup>3</sup> End Food Waste Australia <https://endfoodwaste.com.au/our-partners>

<sup>4</sup> National Consumer Behaviour Change Campaign - End Food Waste Australia » End Food Waste Australia

### *Cook just right*

Do you often cook too much rice, pasta, or mashed potatoes? Don't worry, we've all been there! By checking how many people are eating, how hungry they are and recommended serving sizes, there are easy ways to prepare just the right amount.

## 2. Halving Household Food Waste: Which Behaviours Matter?

OzHarvest is Australia's leading food rescue organisation. In 2021 Oz Harvest conducted research in collaboration with BehaviourWorks Australia under took research:

- To identify the most impactful behaviours to tackle household food waste in Australia.
- To explore the factors that influence Australians to change their behaviour in order to reduce food waste at home.<sup>5</sup>

A master list was generated of 36 household behaviours that avoided or reduced food waste at home. Behaviours such as composting or giving leftover food to pets were not included, as these are not considered to reduce household food waste volumes.

The research identified 36 top household behaviours. These are Appendix 1.

They then used an Impact-Likelihood Matrix to visually compare the different behaviours based on their impact, likelihood and opportunity for uptake.

The most common barrier identified by consumers to adopting these behaviours was 'mental' effort, namely the amount of thinking and planning needed to carry out the behaviour. 'This suggests that making it easier for consumers to include these food waste behaviours in their thinking and planning would increase uptake'<sup>6</sup>.

The identified target behaviours that combine the highest impact, likelihood and opportunity factors are:

1. Once a week, make a meal that combines food that needs using up.
2. Implement a use-it-up shelf in the fridge, freezer or pantry.
3. Before cooking, check how many household members will be eating.<sup>7</sup>

### **Use It Up Tape**

Developed by OzHarvest 'The Use It Up tape can be used in your fridge, freezer, or pantry to mark a shelf for food that needs using up, or it can also be stuck on individual items. Once you can see what needs to be used, you're more likely to Use It Up™! The tape is made from paper, it can be recycled or reused, it's also dishwasher-proof.

### **FOGO (Food Organics and Garden Organics)**

This scheme is managed by Local Government Area Councils in partnership with NSW Environment Protection Agency.

'NSW has a statewide mandate for Food Organics and Garden Organics (FOGO) recycling, to reduce food waste and stop food waste going to landfill.

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<sup>5</sup> Halving Household Food Waste: Which Behaviours Matter? OzHarvest 2021 Executive Summary p.4

<sup>6</sup> OzHarvest 2021 p.17

<sup>7</sup> OzHarvest 2021 p.18

The NSW Parliament has passed legislation to mandate FOGO collection services for households by July 2030, and for businesses and institutions in stages from July 2026.’

An analysis of the proposed household mandates found that application of the mandates to all households in NSW may result in the diversion of almost 950,000 tonnes of FOGO waste each year from landfill and into circular economy products like compost.<sup>89</sup>

As of September 2025:

- 70 councils across New South Wales have already implemented or are planning to implement, a FOGO service.
- The mandates apply to an additional 58 councils by 2030, 32 of which already have a garden waste service.

I live in a Local Government Area with a Council that operates a FOGO scheme. What that means for my home practice is all vegetable and fruit scraps go into a kitchen shelf small black bin with a compostable small bag. From there I transfer it when partially full – the bags sometimes break if too full - to my large green bin for organic and garden waste. Every two weeks the green bin is put out for collection by Council.

‘At a waste management centre all the organic matter is sorted manually to remove non organics like plastic or glass. Then it’s shredded to a pulp and using a combo of micro-organisms, moisture and heat it is very rapidly turned into what looks like a pellet/soil type fertiliser and is then sold to farms. At present, there isn’t a lot of buy in for the fertiliser on a large scale as it wasn’t well fine-tuned to what farmers need for their crops or soil, but that is rapidly changing with chemists and scientists working to ensure the end product is actually suited to farming and crop production.’<sup>10</sup>

### **Food Waste Management Practices – Networks Study**

I asked my social and familial networks what they did to minimise household food waste. Their answers correspond to the top 36 behaviours identified in the OzHarvest research. Common practices are:

- Buying from local markets / farmers’ markets.
- Menu planning, daily or weekly.
- Shopping from a list.
- Buy as needed.
- Buy in small quantities. Shop more regularly.
- Freezing foodstuffs, left- overs, and pre-cooked meals.
- Use up everything bought.
- Use up/repurpose left-overs.
- Cook what needs eating – use buys, ageing fruit, veggies
- Compost and worm farms.
- Use FOGO bins.
- Feed scraps to dogs and chickens.

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<sup>8</sup> FOGO mandates and rollout, Environment Protection Agency September 2025

<sup>9</sup> The circular economy is an economic model that promotes sustainable and efficient use of resources as a way to support environmental, economic and social outcomes. It shifts away from the current linear ‘take, make, dispose’ consumption approach to one that maintains a circular flow of materials by recovering, retaining or adding to their value. Australia’s Circular Economy Framework 2024

<sup>10</sup> Conversation with a waste centre manager.

**Conclusion**

Australian households produce 30% of our national food waste. Research has identified several behaviours that can have a positive impact on this. Some householders already take action on ways supported by the research.

## Appendix 1. Top 36 Household Behaviours (OzHarvest Research 2021)

### Meal & shopping planning

1. Every three or four days, make a household meal plan
2. Before food shopping, make a list
3. Before making a shopping list, check what food is in the pantry, fridge and freezer
4. Before going shopping, eat a meal or snack (if hungry)

### Food shopping

5. Buying food from local specialty stores (greengrocers, butchers) and markets in preference to large supermarkets
6. Food shopping by online ordering and delivery services
7. Subscribing to a meal kit or recipe box service
8. Shopping for perishable foods any time household stocks run out
9. Only buying food on your shopping list
10. Only buying discounted, close-to-date food if you have a plan to use it immediately
11. Only buying bulk amounts or large quantity special offers for non-perishable food
12. Buying frozen vegetable options instead of fresh ones
13. Buying food with pre-portioned options
14. Before deciding to buy food, read packet information

### Food Storage

15. Check that refrigerator temperature is between 1- 3 degrees C and freezer temperature is below 18 degrees C
16. When unpacking after shopping, check and follow the storage instructions on food packets
17. Store food in well-sealed, clear and labelled containers in the fridge/freezer and pantry
18. Store bread in an airtight bag or bread box
19. Once a week check the date labels of food in the household fridge, freezer or pantry
20. Have a 'use it up' shelf in the fridge and/or pantry for any food (including leftovers) that needs to be eaten
21. Once a week, arrange the household fridge and pantry so that food that needs using up is visible and at the front
22. Freeze food (made or purchased) that won't be eaten within the next three to four days
23. If food at home is nearing its date label, inspect and smell it before deciding to use or dispose

### Cooking

24. Preserve perishable foods by pickling, saucing or stewing for later use
25. Once a week, make a meal that combines any food that needs using up
26. Make a stock of any food remains (bones and peels) and freeze for future use
27. Once a week, cook a meal at home from food in the freezer
28. Before cooking a meal at home, check how many household members will be eating
29. When cooking at home, make several portions to keep (in the fridge or freezer) for later
30. Involve children in meal preparation and cooking

### Eating

31. Use small plates and bowls during mealtimes at home
32. Allow more time for children to eat during mealtimes
33. Allow household members to serve themselves during mealtimes

#### Other Behaviours

34. If excess food at home cannot be frozen or preserved, share it with extended family and friends
35. Measure household food waste and set goals with household members to reduce current amounts
36. Store leftovers in sealed, clear and labelled containers in the fridge or freezer<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The List. Top 36 Household Behaviours, Halving Household Food Waste: Which Behaviours Matter? OzHarvest pp. 12 -13