



## Module 2: Waste-to-Resource Strategies in Agri-Food Systems

### Hands-On Activity A: Cafeteria Waste Audit

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#### Data Collection & Reflection Worksheet for Module 2 HOA A

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Members: \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** Buckets, labels, gloves, scale, clipboards, pens, trash bags, etc. (See **Instructions Worksheet** for the complete list and safety guidelines.)

#### Food Waste Log

Record the weight of food waste collected in each category. Weigh each empty bucket first (tare), then again with waste, to find the net weight of waste.

Food Category	Starting Weight (Empty Bucket)	Ending Weight (With Waste)	Net Food Waste (g or lbs)	Notes (appearance, smell, unopened items, etc.)
Entrées				
Fruits				
Vegetables				
Milk/Drinks				(Include cartons, juice boxes; note if unopened)
Other/Unopened				(Unopened packages, whole fruits, etc. that were discarded)

Add rows or additional categories as needed, depending on your school's menu (e.g. "Grains/Bread," "Desserts," etc.).

#### Student Feedback Log

Use this log to note *why* students didn't finish certain items. For each category below, list the foods that were left over and the reason the student gave. Also, note any common themes that emerge for that category. For example, under **Entrées**, you might record: "*Chicken sandwich – reason: didn't like the taste,*" "*Spaghetti – reason: too cold.*" Under **Common Themes**, you might note if many students gave the same reason (like "taste" issues or "not enough time to eat").

Food Item	Student Reason for Waste	Common Themes / Notes
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Entrées		
Fruits		
Vegetables		
Milk		

(Add other categories if needed, or attach additional pages for more entries. Aim to capture at least one reason for each type of item wasted.)

### Guiding Questions

After completing the audit, discuss and answer the following:

1. **Which food category had the highest amount of waste?** Why do you think this category had so much waste?
2. **What were the most common reasons students gave for not finishing their food?** What patterns do you notice in their feedback (e.g., taste, temperature, timing, preference)?
3. **Were any items left unopened** (for example, milk cartons, whole fruits, or packaged snacks)? What does this tell you about those items or the school's policies (think about why students took them if they didn't want them)?
4. **How could the cafeteria reduce waste for these specific items?** List at least two suggestions. Consider changes to how the food is served or scheduled (for instance, different preparation, allowing students to choose certain items, adjusting lunch timing), as well as what to do with uneaten items (such as sharing or saving them).

### Reflection and Analysis

Now take a step back and think about the bigger picture:

- **Summarize your findings:** In a short paragraph, recap what you discovered in this audit. (Which items are most wasted, how much waste was generated in total, and any surprising observations?)
- **Impacts of food waste:** Based on what you learned in this activity (and in class), what impacts does cafeteria food waste have on the **environment**, the **school budget**, and **community health**? Consider: Wasted food often ends up in landfills – what environmental issues does that cause? How does waste affect school finances (buying food that ends up uneaten)? And how might it relate to community issues like hunger or nutrition? ([sustainableamerica.org](http://sustainableamerica.org))
- **Recommendations:** If you were advising your school's nutrition director, what **two specific actions** would you recommend to reduce cafeteria food waste? Describe each recommendation and *why* you think it would help. (For example: *“Implement a share table for unopened items – this would allow uneaten packaged foods to be taken by other students who are still hungry, ensuring the food is eaten rather than trashed.”*) Use evidence from your data – and ideas from class – to support your suggestions.

### Skills You'll Use

- **Quantitative Data Collection:** Measuring and recording numerical data (food weights, item counts) accurately using scales and logs.
- **Qualitative Data Gathering:** Conducting surveys/interviews to collect insights into human behavior (reasons for waste) and noting observations.
- **Critical Analysis:** Comparing waste patterns across categories and interpreting what the data means in terms of problems (e.g. “vegetables are most wasted”) and causes (e.g. “students say taste is the issue”).
- **Solution Design:** Using a systems-thinking approach to propose changes in the food system. This involves connecting the data and reasons to practical solutions, and understanding how those solutions can create a more sustainable, circular outcome (less waste or waste repurposed).

*(Remember: in a sustainable food system, we try to keep resources in use and waste nothing if possible. This activity showed you where resources are leaking out of our school’s system. Next, you’ll be learning ways to plug those leaks – turning would-be waste back into valuable resources!)*