



Image from Feeding the 5000 Event in NYC

**TOOLKIT FOR**

# Food Waste-Free Events

Concerts  
Conferences

Fairs

Festivals

Sports Games

Summits



The  
**ROCKEFELLER  
FOUNDATION**

## INTRODUCTION



Image from Feeding the 5000 Event in NYC

# Why should you care about minimizing food waste at your event?

Nobody wants to waste food. Cutting waste can mean cutting costs, through lowered bottom lines, tax deductions from donations, and reduced disposal expenses. It can decrease your environmental footprint, and can help your community through partnerships with local governments, food pantries, waste management companies, and more. When you commit to fighting food waste, you not only join a rapidly expanding movement – you become a leader of it, building your brand and connecting you to staff and attendees who care about this timely and critical issue.

This toolkit lays out strategies, best practices, and secrets to success for festivals, fairs, conferences, and other events to reduce food waste. It also highlights work happening right now, both from our partners and from inspiring events and entrepreneurs beyond our network. The recommendations included here are diverse by design: you can pick and choose those aligning with your event's capacity, motivations, and core values.

The world of event planning is fast-paced and constantly evolving, and we hope this guide will be, too. New solutions and ideas are constantly emerging in the food waste world, so please send us your thoughts and engage in the conversation using the hashtag at the bottom of each page.

We'd like to thank the experts we spoke to throughout the development of this toolkit.

## ABOUT

# The Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation's mission—unchanged since 1913—is to promote the well-being of humanity throughout the world. Today, we pursue this mission through dual goals: advancing inclusive economies that expand opportunities for more broadly shared prosperity, and building resilience by helping people, communities and institutions prepare for, withstand, and emerge stronger from acute shocks and chronic stresses. To achieve these goals, we work at the intersection of four focus areas—advance health, revalue ecosystems, secure livelihoods, and transform cities—to address the root causes of emerging challenges and create systemic change. Our effort to tackle food waste in U.S. and the broader global YieldWise initiative which supports it spans all of these areas, and is guided by our belief that food is a resource which must be preserved and valued. Together with partners and grantees, The Rockefeller Foundation strives to catalyze and scale transformative innovations, create unlikely partnerships that span sectors, and take risks others cannot.

## FOOD WASTE: The Problem

# \$218 Billion

Food waste creates over  
**\$218 billion in economic losses**  
for the U.S.



**21% of fresh water**  
in the U.S. goes to producing  
food that is never eaten.



**1/5** of the municipal  
solid waste sent to landfill  
each year is food.

The 21st century has brought the world a painful paradox: one-third of the food available globally either spoils or gets thrown away, while more than a billion people are food insecure or undernourished.

This situation goes beyond injustice: food loss and waste squanders precious land and water resources, and discarded food creates harmful methane emissions as it decays in landfills.

In the developing world, losses at the farm level threaten the livelihood of farmers and the health of the population who rely on their crops. Though waste occurs farther down the farm-to-fork supply chain in more advanced economies, it is no less threatening. In the U.S. alone, the Natural Resource Defense Council estimates that 40% of food ends up in the trash, costing an average family of four around \$1,500 every year.

## FIGHTING FOOD WASTE: The Movement

The problem of wasted food may be accelerating, but so is the momentum to solve it – with an increasingly diverse global group of contributors uniting to take up the fight. Just as the drivers of food waste come from many different sectors and stakeholders, so do the ability and responsibility to address it.

In the U.S. and many other developed countries, governments are stepping up with firm commitments to address food waste. In 2016, the USDA and EPA announced a national goal to cut food waste in the U.S. in half by 2030. Similar targets have been announced by several cities, which see the importance of cutting food waste and realize its potential to create value for their residents. Businesses are publicly standing against food waste and seeking to eliminate it in their own operations and supply chains. And consumers – who cause roughly half of all food waste in the U.S. – are becoming increasingly aware of their ability to solve this problem. Wide-reaching networks and unlikely partnerships are forming as more people join the fight to shake up our broken food system and save the food. If you want more food waste resources, visit [Further with Food](#), an online platform that gathers proven solutions and innovations that reduce food waste.

## FIGHTING FOOD WASTE: The Solutions

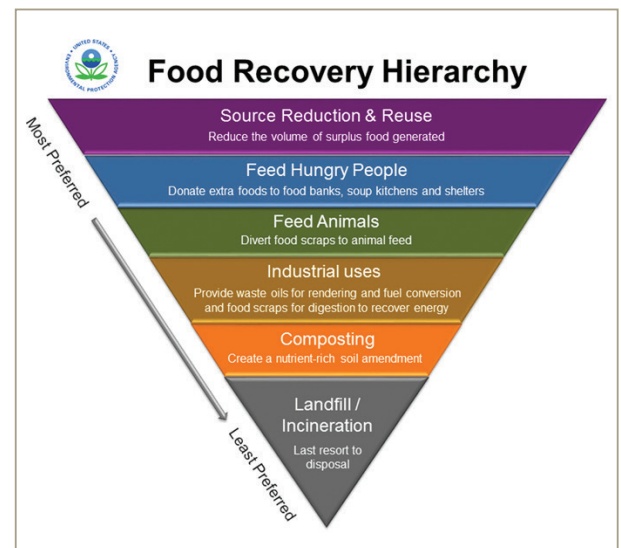
Though the scale of the problem of wasted food is significant, the good news is that there are many potential solutions. In fact, ReFED's [2016 Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste](#) identified 27 scalable solutions which together could cut U.S. food waste by 20%. As you read this, innovators and entrepreneurs across the country are developing new solutions to achieve another 30% reduction, which – when taken together – can effectively reach the national goal.

Sorting through all of these solutions can be challenging, but EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy can help prioritize them based on their environmental, social, and economic impacts.

As the Hierarchy makes clear, the best way to address food waste is to prevent it, by reducing surplus food production at its source. But prevention isn't always easy! Festivals and events, for example, must balance the need to provide sufficient food against the competing need to eliminate surplus.

If prevention isn't possible, the next priority in the Hierarchy is to connect excess food with people who need it through donation. Sometimes, though, extra food isn't appropriate for human consumption so the next best solution is to divert it to animal feed.

Farther down the hierarchy – but still productive uses – are industrial and agricultural uses like bioenergy and compost creation. Landfilling and incineration are at the bottom, and should be avoided.



# Path to Food Waste-Free Events

## Laying the Groundwork

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- 2 Learn the Rules and Connect To Vendors
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- 4 Engage Attendees and Performers

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- 4 Collecting Waste and Composting

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- 2 Share Insights
- 3 Build on Success

# Laying the Groundwork

Now that you've decided to move forward, you'll need to lay the groundwork for taking action. There are four primary objectives recommended here:

- ① Raise Awareness in Your Organization
- ② Learn the Rules and Connect To Vendors
- ③ Build Your Network
- ④ Engage Attendees and Performers

The following pages include strategies to help you accomplish these objectives, along with potential tactics, materials, and tools to deploy them. These lists are not exhaustive, and you don't need to use everything we've provided in order to succeed. Our hope is that they'll spark new creative ways to adapt these tools to your event's specific needs and values.

# 1

## OBJECTIVE

# Raise Awareness With Your Staff

### STRATEGIES

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

Prioritize zero food waste.

**Set a zero food waste goal and publicize it**, both internally and to broader audiences through your website, external communications, and social media.

**Find or hire a food waste champion.** You might already have someone knowledgeable or passionate about the cause on your team – tap them for insights and connections. Achieving zero food waste doesn't happen on its own! It needs coordination between your staff and other organizations, and it helps to designate a point person to take on this role. If you plan to create a new position, title the role carefully to attract the right person (e.g. Food Waste Reduction Manager).

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If you don't have the staff capacity or time to tackle food waste, consider training staff, seeking funding from organizations who support this goal, or looking to experts who are willing to volunteer their time.  
.....

Engage your staff.

**Blast an email to your staff** or use other communications like a desk drop or team meetings to rally your staff.

**Use our [Food Waste Toolkit for the Office](#)** to host a No Waste Week at your organization. Post [flyers with food waste statistics](#), include a waste-conscious menu in your cafeteria, and pass out food-preserving giveaways like lunchboxes or reusable containers.

**Organize staff volunteer activities**, like gleaned produce from a local farm or helping a food bank with repacking and distributing food.

**Share tools and tips** for staff to reduce food waste at home and in the office (such as [Value Food](#)).

**Hold leftover-sharing potluck** lunches.

**Change refrigerator guidelines** in the office. Rather than instructions that all food will be thrown away after 3 pm on Fridays, invite people to eat any food left!

Use your existing resources.

**Get your entire organization on the same page** with cross-department communication, especially between operations and culinary staff.

**Attach food waste to other sustainability efforts** with creative messaging (e.g. "You don't throw away bottles. Why would you throw away food?").

**Highlight your event's related sustainability priorities** and programs.

**Engage your sustainability lead** to take charge of this effort.

Tap the natural network of festivals and events like yours.

**Draw from similar events** that have committed to going zero waste by asking for advice and connecting for a working session to brainstorm ideas.

**Launch a "green events" network** or join an existing one like [Green America's Green Business Network](#).

#### **CASE STUDY: Everything is bigger in Texas – including the state fair.**

It runs for 24 days, and has \$40 million dollars of food sales from 225 points of sale and 78 concessionaires. Since its establishment in 1886, the fair has launched a host of initiatives to support the Dallas community, including providing millions in college scholarships. It wasn't always the greenest event, but momentum to take care of the environment has built among staff, vendors, and attendees over the last decade. Recently, the fair created an urban garden out of 500+ shipping pallets, and kicked off a program for concessionaires to bring surplus non-perishables to a central location on the grounds the morning after it ends. Several local charities come to pick the food up, rescuing surplus for the community while freeing state fair employees from grappling with transportation logistics. To keep revenues high, maximize guest experience and minimize waste, the fair administration reviews and approves every single menu item. Administrators can also reject foods they think won't hold up well in the Dallas weather well. They've forged a strong relationship with the Dallas Health Department – even providing them with an office on their grounds – which helps keep extra food safe for donation. The State Fair of Texas is big fun, big business, and big heart – and its efforts to save the food are making a big impact!

# 2

## OBJECTIVE

# Learn the Rules and Connect to Vendors

### STRATEGIES

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

Understand federal protections, incentives, and health codes.

**Understand federal tax incentives** for qualified businesses around food donation, including enhanced deductions.  
**Learn how the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#)** limits liability for donations made in good faith.  
**Check your state's food service health codes** at the [FDA site](#) and learn about federal regulations from the [U.S. Public Health Service Food Code](#).  
**Stay up to date** on pending policies and legislation, including the Food Donation Act of 2017, which would expand donation liability protection, and the Date Labeling Act of 2016, which would clarify date labeling.

Learn laws and procedures around waste management and hauling.

**Tap your contacts** in government and business for advice.  
**Learn about local landfill tipping fees** from resources like the [Environmental Research and Education Foundation's](#) free database.  
**Understand differences** between local public and private waste haulers.

Get to know your local food recovery organization's donation rules.

**Read up on food bank needs and regulations** to help guide your ordering and storage procedures. Some require refrigeration at a specific temperature, certain types of packaging, emphasizing non-perishable foods on your menu, etc. [Food Donation Connection](#) provides useful food safety information.  
**Pick a Plan B** for food not suitable for donation (e.g. animal feed, composting).

# 3

## OBJECTIVE Build Your Network

### STRATEGIES

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

Reach out to the community.

**Announce your event's commitment** to cutting food waste in local print and broadcast media, and invite people to connect with you.

**Host a community meal or happy hour** at a local restaurant and ask guests for their ideas.

Connect with the city or county government.

**Attend a city council meeting** to share your efforts.

**Cities around the country are working to address food waste** - check your .gov website or ask your local contacts to learn what initiatives are already underway.

**Connect with members of government** who have made food and sustainability priorities.



Image from event organized by City Harvest in partnership with IDEO in NYC

Build relationships with local partners like food banks, farms, restaurants, and waste haulers.

**Team up with a local food recovery organization, farm, or restaurant** to raise awareness, amplify your efforts, and elevate both your brands. [Feeding America's food bank locator](#) is a great place to start.

**Frame partnership with your event as a business opportunity** for local companies. Check out this [WRI report](#) on the issue.

**Understand your local food bank** needs and capacity, including transport methods for donated food.

**Engage a waste management company** to provide organics bins and promote their brand.

**Find farms** that can use food scraps as animal or compost feedstock.



Image from event organized by City Harvest in partnership with IDEO in NYC



# 4

## OBJECTIVE

# Engage Attendees and Performers

### STRATEGIES

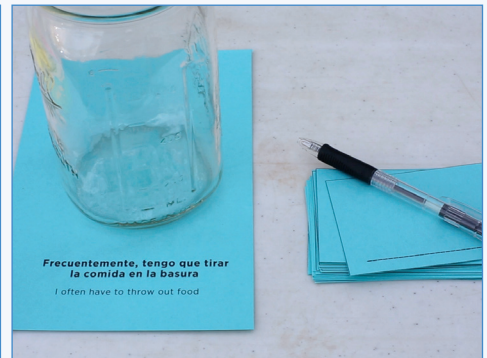
### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

Ask performers, artists, and other champions to publicize the issue of food waste and its solutions.

**Seek out artists** who are already fighting food waste or raising awareness around the cause, or see if someone new will take on the role.

**Create a food waste exhibit** and feature photos like [Aliza Eliazarov's](#) along with food waste stats and other compelling displays.

**Find filmmakers** who have covered food waste to speak at a screening, or ask them to make clips for your event.



Images from event organized by City Harvest in partnership with IDEO in NYC

Get attendees involved in your food waste reduction efforts.

**Crowdsource feedback** from previous attendees about your event's food options to help tailor the menu.

**Distribute food-saving tools**, like branded food storage containers, coolers, or cold packs.

**Publicize your efforts through a waste-cutting challenge** for attendees.

**Hold a [Feeding the 5000](#)** event.

**Raise the visual presence of food waste** with a giant scale or index to show the event's food waste as it accumulates in real-time.

**Build attention** leading up to and during the event through social media posts, partnerships with well-known organizations, email blasts, etc.

**Create a hashtag**, like #nofoodwasteat \_\_\_\_\_

# Food Waste Solutions

With the groundwork laid, you're now ready to launch. The solutions we've outlined are loosely organized around the Food Waste Hierarchy and grouped into the following categories:

- ① Budgeting, Measurement, and Kitchen Practices
- ② Sourcing and Menu-Building
- ③ Recovering Food for Donation
- ④ Collecting Waste and Composting

We've emphasized sourcing and kitchen practices in groups 1 and 2 because both can prevent food waste before it happens, making the largest positive environmental impacts and biggest financial benefit to your event. The food recovery solutions outline ways you can support your local community by rescuing surplus food for human consumption. The last group of solutions addresses what to do with surplus food you can't eliminate or donate, by redirecting it to productive uses and keeping it out of the landfill.

At the end of this guide, we share ways you can continue the momentum from your efforts by processing the data you've collected – which will inform insights to guide your next event – as well as following up with your partners and attendees and broadcasting your achievements.

# 1

## OBJECTIVE

# Budgeting, Measurement, and Kitchen Practices

### STRATEGIES

Measure your food waste.

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

**Do you have food waste data and information from prior events? If not, create a baseline** this year so you can track future progress.

**Use one of the many innovative waste-tracking software packages and apps** that fits your event's needs and budget. Consider making its creator a partner!

**Customers care about greenhouse gas and water usage reductions. Calculate the greenhouse gas emissions and water** usage from your food waste to highlight its impact, and the impact of any reductions you make. Simple tools and calculators already exist that can help with this process.



Images from the Hyatt Regency Orlando with IDEO, in collaboration with WWF

Understand your event's food budget and the impact food waste has on it.

**Understand your budget.** If you have an existing sustainability budget, designate a portion of it for fighting food waste. If not, consider creating one.

**Study previous budgets** to identify how much food was ordered. Was it too much? Not enough?

**Quantify the bottom-line impact** of throwing out food and share with your CFO and staff (e.g. "When someone throws out an uneaten ice cream cone, \$1.20 of our food budget goes in the trash").

Understand kitchen and vendor capacity.

**Understand vendor/caterer storage capabilities,** and their ability to keep surplus food safe for donation.

**Make your vendors aware** of business or branding opportunities around waste reduction.

**Ask vendors to consider cutting prices** on unsold food at the end of the day.

**Help food vendors increase their efficiency** by allowing them to pre-prepare parts of their meals, ship ingredients directly, or bring additional staff.

**Start the conversation with your vendors to ensure you're working towards the same goal.** The goal is to reduce the amount of food going to waste, but often times that means cutting down how much is ordered from food vendors.

**Learn your kitchen's storage and preservation capacity.** Do you have freezers? How large are they, and at what temperature are they kept? What kinds of packaging do you have on hand to preserve leftovers?

**Host a training event** for your staff on proper food storage, knife skills for reducing food waste, waste separation, etc.

**Create a competition** for the food tent or stand that creates the least waste.

# 2

## OBJECTIVE

# Sourcing and Menu-Building

### STRATEGIES

Get creative with sourcing and menu creation.

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

**Consider that not everyone will want every type of food** when ordering.

**Tailor your menu to attendee desires** by asking vendors which foods have sold well in previous years or at other events they've worked at.

**Research sample menus** from other events whose waste-fighting efforts inspire you.

**Source cosmetically imperfect produce** for dishes where appearance doesn't matter, like smoothies.

**Incorporate "upcycled" products and ingredients.** There are even beers and spirits brewed from would-be waste.

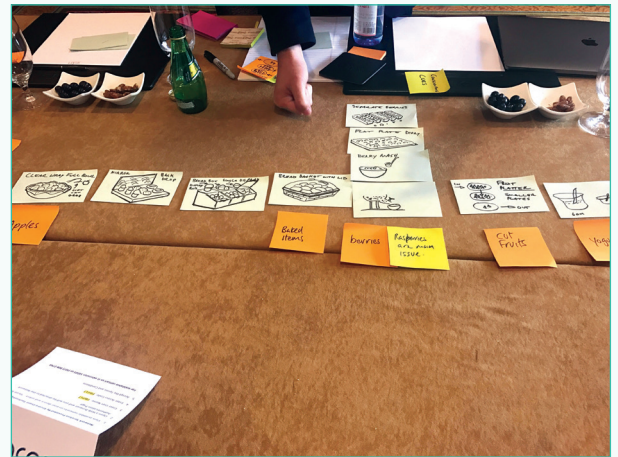
**Source parts of your menu from local farms, and encourage service providers to do the same.** This ties cutting food waste into a broader sustainability push, and can lower greenhouse gas emissions by decreasing food transport distances. This is also a way to support community farmers and producers.

**Build flexibility into your menus.** For multi-day events, consider repurposing surplus from previous days into later menus.

**Consider flexible ordering,** which allows guests to reduce waste by modifying their orders. (Just remember there may be a trade-off in slower service.)

**Plan staff meals** to utilize surplus.

Whenever possible, aim to have attendees pre-order concessions as part of ticket sales. This not only cuts food waste - it helps vendors and chefs tailor their preparation processes, and minimizes lines and crowding.



Images from the Hyatt Regency Orlando with IDEO, in collaboration with WWF

# 3

## OBJECTIVE

# Recovering Food for Donation

### STRATEGIES

Rescue as much food as possible for human consumption.

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

**Facilitate safe donation after the event** by stocking packaged and wrapped snacks, and make sure the packaging itself is sustainable.

**Create a drop-off tent** for people to donate unopened packages of food.

**Give volunteers a free event ticket** in exchange for transporting food, if your partner food recovery organization lacks capacity.

**Check your local ordinances and municipal and county services** to understand the requirements and if there are any public services that can be helpful.

If possible, partner with food recovery organizations who have the capacity to pick up and transport donated food themselves.

# 4

## OBJECTIVE

# Waste Collection

### STRATEGIES

If surplus food isn't suitable for donation, use other diversion options.

### POTENTIAL PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

**Find the best possible outlet for leftovers from food that can't be donated.** Sometimes it can be sanitized and used for animal feed, and can often be used for fertilizer and biofuels.

**Publicize how the recycled food will be used** to raise awareness and motivate people to dispose of it in the correct places.

**Include many clearly marked bins** for convenient disposal of different types of waste.

**Use compostable plates** to facilitate organics collection and cut down on waste streams.

**Use colors and branding from partner organizations** or commissioned art to make waste bins stand out.

**Add organics collection into your haulers contract,** and give them credit around the event for their role.

**Consider composting onsite** if the event owns the land.



Images from the Hyatt Regency Orlando with IDEO, in collaboration with WWF

# Follow Up

Congratulations! You've started down an important road and have become part of the growing global community fighting to reduce wasted food. Don't let your journey stop here, though. Below are some important next steps that will help you do more next year, and even more the year after that.

- **Thank your partners and guests.**
- **Tap attendees, vendors, and your broader network** for feedback on your efforts.
- **Share insights** with other events like yours.
- **Collect notes, tools, and insights** to aid in preparation for your next event.
- **Process the data you collected.** Understand your food waste measurements, whether in comparison to previous years or as a baseline for the future.
- **Review your budget** to get a picture of full cost and savings associated with your food waste reduction efforts. Use this information to make your efforts more efficient, or find a funding partner.
- **Did your event save money?** Congratulations! Publicize it to executives and employees.
- **Use digital media to share your success.** Tweet, post on Facebook, use LinkedIn, and send email blasts highlighting work.
- **Highlight progress** towards waste reduction goals for staff and the public.
- **Build on successes and learnings** as you plan for your next event.

**Don't be a stranger!** In addition to publicizing your work, please share your questions, successes, pitfalls, and lessons learned with us @RockefellerFdn.





## To learn more about food waste, check out these resources.

### Background on Food Waste:

- Further with Food: <https://furtherwithfood.org/>
- ReFED's Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste: [https://www.refed.com/downloads/ReFED\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.refed.com/downloads/ReFED_Report_2016.pdf)

### Raising Awareness with Your Staff:

- The Rockefeller Foundation's Food Waste Toolkit for the Office: <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/food-waste-toolkit-for-the-office/>
- I Value Food: <http://ivaluefood.com/>
- Green America's Green Business Network: <http://www.greenbusinessnetwork.org/about/>
- Save the Food: <https://www.savethefood.com/>

### Building Your Network:

- Feeding America's food bank locator: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank/>
- WRI Food Waste Report: [https://champs123blog.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/report\\_-\\_business-case-for-reducing-food-loss-and-waste.pdf](https://champs123blog.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/report_-_business-case-for-reducing-food-loss-and-waste.pdf)

### Learning the Rules and Connect to Vendors:

- Food waste tax incentives: [http://www.cfbnj.org/\\_assets/library/2013/02/Tax-Incentives-for-Food-Industry-2013.pdf](http://www.cfbnj.org/_assets/library/2013/02/Tax-Incentives-for-Food-Industry-2013.pdf)
- The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html?>
- FDA food codes: <https://www.fda.gov/food/guidanceregulation/retailfoodprotection/foodcode/ucm122814.htm>
- U.S. Public Health Service Food Code: <https://www.fda.gov/downloads/food/guidanceregulation/retailfoodprotection/foodcode/ucm374510.pdf>
- Food Donation Act of 2017: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/952/text>
- Date Labeling Act of 2016: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/5298/text>
- Environmental Research & Education Foundation's database: <https://erefnd.org/product/analysis-msw-landfill-tipping-fees/>
- Food Donation Connection: <http://www.foodtodonate.com/Fdcmain/FoodSafety.aspx>

### Engage Attendees:

- Creative Food Waste Exhibits: <http://alizaeliazarov.com/wastenot/>
- Feeding the 5000: <http://feedbackglobal.org/about-us/get-involved/feeding-5000-toolkit/>