

The Guidebook: **National School Food Waste Reduction Challenge**

A Climate Action Collaboration by
Second Harvest & DoorNumberOne.org



Welcome to the Challenge

Nearly half of all food produced for Canadians is wasted every year, taking with it the land, water, energy and labour used to grow, transport and prepare it.

Avoidable food waste (food that's perfectly good to eat but ends up going to waste) creates 25.69 million metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually, the same as more than 250,000 flights from Toronto to Vancouver.

Addressing food waste is one of the most powerful climate actions we can take.

By participating in this challenge and taking action within your school, you'll reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save resources and make a difference in your community. This step-by-step guide will walk you through the National School Food Waste Challenge, a student and staff-led campaign designed to inspire, measure and celebrate meaningful change.

How it Works

1. Form Your Team

- Recruit a small group of student leaders (environment club, student council, etc.) who will help lead the charge within your school environment. We recommend a minimum of four student participants.
- Identify at least one staff champion to help coordinate among administrators.
- If your school has an onsite food service provider, we recommend inviting a food service provider staff member to join your group as an advisor to your campaign. It can also be helpful to invite someone from your custodial staff to join to help coordinate collection of organic material for ongoing tracking and redistribution.
- Set up regular check-ins with the team to keep the project on track.

2. Measure! Understand Where You're Starting From

- Complete the short baseline survey.
- Use our simple tracking tools (like our waste measurement template) to help you measure how much food is currently being wasted in your school. This campaign can include both post-consumer food waste (food that goes to waste after it has been given to someone to eat) and pre-consumer waste (food that has not yet been distributed to people to be eaten).
- Set a collective goal of how much food waste you aim to reduce during your campaign period.

3. Build Your Campaign

- Determine how you will aim to reduce food waste within your specific school environment
- Use our toolkit to help share and promote the campaign throughout your school. Think about the different groups you'll want to reach: students, teachers, facilities staff, administrators, parents and visitors. This might include:
 - Regular announcements about the campaign's start and end dates, facts about food waste in Canada and your school's waste-reduction goal.
 - Posters in classrooms, the cafeteria, hallways and other high-traffic areas.

- A plan for tracking food waste throughout the campaign and beyond (see the tracking spreadsheet in the toolkit.)
- Documenting your progress by recording challenges, learnings and successes as the campaign unfolds.

4. Launch Your Campaign

- Launch your food waste reduction challenge! Make a splash on launch day, with posters displayed and student announcements shared.
- Choose from these ready-made activities:
 - Food Waste Bingo
 - Storytelling posters (with QR codes for tips + videos)
 - Ugly produce reframing station
 - Daily announcements
 - Social media challenges
 - Encourage students to create their own videos or TikTok-style posts about best practices.

5. Make Community Connections

- Explore donating surplus food through the Second Harvest Food Rescue App.
 - For any questions or support with registration please contact info@secondharvest.ca
- Connect with local non-profit food programs including food banks, shelters and/or youth-serving organizations.
- Highlight your partnerships as part of your campaign.

6. Measure & Celebrate

- Use our measurement framework templates to track your progress. This measurement tool will help you understand how the volume of food waste is changing, as well as the emissions reductions your school has achieved as a result of wasting less food.
- Capture how your school runs your campaign by creating short content videos throughout.
- Create a display in your cafeteria to let everyone know about the campaign, your goals and progress.
- Share stories with us to be featured on the campaign website and photos and videos on social media using #SchoolFoodWasteChallenge. Tag @SecondHarvestCA and @doornumberonenfp.
- Celebrate achievements during lunch periods, at assemblies and other school events!



Tools in Your Toolkit

- Campaign guide (this playbook)
- Call for student involvement in committee and announcement templates
- Baseline school survey
- Step-by-step campaign checklist
- "How-To" videos (created with students)
- Waste reduction posters + Tracking sheets
- Food waste games & activities (English/French)
- Social media templates
- Case studies from other schools
- List of materials needed

Suggested Timeline for Campaign

- **Month 1:** Team sign-up and baseline survey
- **Month 2:** Launch campaign
- **Month 3:** Run campaign and keep momentum going
- **Month 4:** Share results and celebrate

Success Looks Like...

- Students taking the lead in reducing food waste
- Noticeable reductions in food waste across your school — less good food in the garbage, and more food being redirected or enjoyed
- Stronger connections with local community food programs
- Inspiring stories that can be shared nationally

Ready to Begin?

1. Confirm your school's participation by sending an email to training@secondharvest.ca with the subject line "School Food Waste Challenge."
2. Upon registration, you will be sent a link to download the toolkit.
3. Launch your team's campaign within your school environment and inspire climate action right in your own cafeteria!

TOGETHER, we can make Canadian schools a model for climate-smart food practices.