

# Submission to the 2026-2029 Draft Federal Sustainable Development Strategy Consultation

Second Harvest

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## Introduction

Second Harvest is Canada's largest food rescue organization and a global thought leader on perishable food redistribution. Second Harvest and its partners rescued and redistributed 95.3 million pounds of good food with a value of over \$400M across Canada in 2025, which alone resulted in:

309 million pounds of GHGs averted from the atmosphere

65 billion litres of water saved

We are Canada's leading source of information on food waste and food security, providing critical data to governments, industry and media as they consider these issues. In 2024, Second Harvest released a five-year update to our landmark report [The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste](#). Our findings revealed a troubling trend: Canada's amount of surplus food waste is growing. Nearly half of the food in Canada is wasted. Of that, 41.7% — \$58 billion worth — is perfectly edible and could instead be eaten.

## Background

In 2015, Canada committed to the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a target to "halve per capita global food waste" by 2030. Subsequently, the government addressed reducing food loss and waste ("FLW") through development of the 2019 Food Policy for Canada and initiatives like the Food Waste Reduction Challenge and Surplus Food Rescue Program. Additional efforts include landfill diversion, methane reduction and minimizing waste within federal operations.

Despite these welcome initiatives, Canada is not on track to meet its commitment to reduce FLW by 50% by 2030. Our approach to FLW lacks a unified national framework and current efforts focus on innovation, one-time programs and voluntary actions, without consistent targets or standardized data. This leaves Canada:

- Lagging behind its G7 peers and the EU, which have adopted more integrated approaches;
- Dealing with the environmental impacts — such as the 25.7 million tonnes annually of CO<sub>2</sub> created by avoidable food waste, which is roughly equivalent to

the annual emissions of 5.6 million passenger vehicles. Avoidable food waste in Canada also has a water footprint of 13,314 million cubic metres, the equivalent of the amount of water that flows over Niagara Falls in 53.6 days; and

- Weakened in our food security efforts, which depend on access, affordability and how efficiently food is managed across the supply chain.

By considering the following observations and implementing Second Harvest's recommendations, the Draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy ("the Draft") can improve Canadians' quality of life and protect the environment by making our food system more sustainable and reducing food waste emissions at relatively low cost.

## **Observations on the Draft 2026–2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy**

When compared to the 2022-2026 SDS, the Draft modestly improves how food waste is acknowledged in federal sustainability policy by recognizing previous programs such as the Food Waste Reduction Challenge. It does not however treat food waste as a priority. It continues to subsume food waste within broad "solid waste" targets, with no dedicated objective, indicator or accountability framework.

The 2022-2026 SDS also referenced food waste goals more clearly through alignment with global SDG 12.3. As Canada finalizes the Draft, there is a clear opportunity to improve the document and make progress on sustainable agriculture, emissions reduction and waste reduction goals by:

1. Recommitting to SDG 12.3;
2. Recognizing the impact climate change has on food loss and waste in agriculture and agri-food production specifically;
3. Recognizing the high impact food waste reduction measures have on GHG emissions relative to other emissions reduction programs;
4. Addressing food waste reduction specifically as critical to circular economy efforts; and
5. Committing to coordinating with the provinces, territories and other partners on standardizing the measurement of food loss and waste as a separate category from other solid/organic waste.

## **Specific Recommendations on the Draft 2026-2029 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy**

Goal 2.2: Strengthen the Resilience and Sustainability of Canadian Agriculture

Second Harvest recommends an addition to the following draft introductory paragraph on page 25 (proposed change in yellow):

"Trade uncertainty, an aging farm population, barriers to land access, climate change, and environmental degradation all threaten the financial health of farms and food production sustainability. Shifting precipitation patterns and more frequent and intense droughts, floods, heatwaves, and wildfires all pose risks to producers. These changes can disrupt food production and distribution, drive food loss and waste, accelerate soil degradation, and create conditions enabling the growth of invasive species, pests, and diseases, which can put crops, livestock, and food safety at risk."

#### Rationale for changes to Goal 2.2:

- Climate change is increasing pre- and post-harvest losses. Extreme weather, water shortages and soil erosion hinder production and transport, causing more waste — especially for temperature-sensitive fruits like blueberries and peaches. Consumers still expect picture-perfect produce, and the market for "imperfect" foods remains limited. As a result, more crops fail to meet retailer standards and are wasted.<sup>1</sup>
- 18% of Canada's avoidable food waste occurs at the production stage. The most likely to occur and impactful causes of crops not being harvested relate to weather and climate.<sup>2</sup>

#### Goal 3.1: Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Second Harvest recommends the following addition to "Our Plans to Achieve the Target" on page 35 (proposed changes in yellow):

Implementation strategy 3.1.1.1: Develop and implement solutions to support emissions reductions in high-emissions sectors, including energy production, transportation, heavy industry, buildings, agriculture, waste (including food system waste), manufacturing, forestry, and mining, to accelerate progress toward net zero.

#### Rationale for changes to Goal 3.1:

- The food system is responsible for over one-third of human-made GHG emissions, with food waste contributing between 8-10 per cent of global emissions and 26 per cent of emissions related to the food system. In Canada, food waste accounts for 77.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with avoidable waste contributing 25.7 million tonnes.<sup>3</sup>
- Food waste reduction measures are one of the most relatively inexpensive ways to reduce GHG emissions compared to other government programs. Yet, our food system is nearly untapped in Canada's GHG emission reduction efforts.

- [Project Drawdown](#) demonstrates that reducing food waste is one of the fastest, most cost-effective, and highest-impact climate solutions available — in some assessments ranking ahead of many better-known actions such as electric vehicles, renewable energy expansion, or recycling programs.<sup>4</sup>
- [ReFED](#) estimates that investment in food waste reduction results in a four-to-one return in avoided costs across the food supply chain and reductions in GHG emissions.<sup>5</sup>
- The Canadian Climate Institute agrees that as “food waste emissions are so high, they should be a priority for all orders of governments as they consider how to reduce emissions.”<sup>6</sup>

### Goal 3.5: Reduce and Manage Waste

Second Harvest recommends changes to the following draft introductory paragraph on page 44 (proposed changes in yellow):

“Waste from industrial processes, products, and households affects land and water ecosystems, biodiversity, and human health. **When organic waste is disposed of in landfills it produces methane, which is far more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>.** In 2022, Canada generated 36.5 million tonnes of solid waste, of which 9.9 million tonnes were diverted. **Plastics, in particular,** that are not diverted end up in landfills or incinerators or are released into the environment where they can enter food webs, harm wildlife, damage habitats, and potentially affect human health. **Within Canada’s organic waste stream, food waste represents about a quarter of the waste that is landfilled — making it a significant contributor to landfill methane generation. Food waste further raises costs for businesses and consumers, worsens hunger, and wastes the land, water, energy, and labour used to produce it.** A resource-efficient circular economy reduces waste and maximizes resource value by prioritizing **recovery**, reuse, repair, remanufacturing, refurbishment, **upcycling**, and recycling. Reducing waste, preventing pollution, and investing in a circular economy means less demand for resources and less risk for our ecosystems, **environment**, and our health.”

Second Harvest recommends the following changes to “Our Plans to Achieve the Target” on page 45 (proposed changes in yellow):

“Implementation strategy 3.5.1.1: Reduce waste and marine pollution, including plastics **and food waste**, by prioritizing **recovery**, reuse, repair, **upcycling**, and recycling in cooperation with provinces and territories, industry, academia, and civil society to increase resource recovery toward a circular economy.

Implementation strategy 3.5.1.2: Support advances in waste reduction, recycling, and reuse by assessing the national waste stream **including assessment of measuring of food loss and waste as a distinct category**, researching and

creating new technologies, investing in innovation to drive market transformation, and promoting secondary markets for reclaimed, recycled, and remanufactured materials to reduce the amount of waste sent to disposal.”

### Rationale for changes to Goal 3.5:

- Canadian circular economy organizations, including Circular Economy Leadership Canada, agree that reducing and repurposing food waste is central to designing out waste, circulating resources and building more resilient food systems.<sup>7</sup> Integrating food waste into circular economy policy can also unlock economic value, reduce disposal costs, create new markets for recovered materials and improve access to food for Canadians facing food insecurity.
- Canada’s 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan identifies food waste is a significant contributor to landfill methane generation, and that food waste represents about a quarter of the waste that is landfilled.<sup>8</sup>
- Food waste reduction will help us better manage waste, but we cannot manage what we do not measure. A national, coordinated approach to measurement of FLW in Canada, developed in coordination with the provinces and territories, will allow us to track progress and demonstrate return on initiatives we invest in.
- Various government initiatives including the Food Policy Advisory Council and [Canada’s National Pathways document](#) identified measurement of FLW as a critical next step for Canada, but no progress has been made.
- A challenge to addressing FLW in Canada was previously the lack of a consistent, national measurement approach. However, CSA Group (formerly the Canadian Standards Council) recently released [CSA K100, Food loss and waste – Terminology and measurement](#), the first National Standard of Canada that gives organizations and policymakers a shared framework to define, measure, and report FLW across the food value chain.
  - CSA K100 addresses this issue by establishing common language and providing guidance on managing FLW using a principled approach to FLW destination selection to help organizations better understand where food loss occurs, how much is being lost and what can be done to reduce it.
  - By establishing shared definitions and guidance on developing a FLW measurement plan, including at which “checkpoints” to measure FLW, the standard provides guidance to help organizations:

- Identify the causes, quantities and destinations of FLW
- Measure FLW at key points across the food value chain
- Select the most suitable destination for surplus food and FLW, whether that means keeping food in the human food system through prevention and redistribution, or converting surplus food and FLW into feed or biomaterials (see CSA FLW Destination Selection Guidance, below).

#### CSA K100 – FLW Destination Selection

| Principles                                                            | Destinations                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Avoiding edible food leaving human food supply chain                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prevention of FLW through planning/minimization actions</li> <li>• food donations or redistribution</li> </ul>                |
| Transforming FLW at the highest positive env impact or economic value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• used as animal feed</li> <li>• repurposed as upcycled materials</li> </ul>                                                    |
| Avoiding loss of nutrients and energy by cycling FLW                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anaerobic digestion (digestate used as soil amendment or growing substrate)</li> <li>• composting</li> </ul>                  |
| Avoiding loss of energy by cycling FLW                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anaerobic digestion (w/o beneficial use of digestate)</li> <li>• controlled combustion of FLW (w/ energy recovery)</li> </ul> |
| Minimizing harm if no recovery option is possible                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• controlled combustion of FLW (w/o energy recovery)</li> <li>• landfill, sewer, wastewater treatment</li> </ul>                |



**This is not a rigid ranking,  
rather preferred action  
guidance**

## For More Information

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<sup>1</sup> The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste: Update – The Roadmap, Second Harvest, page 10:

<https://www.secondharvest.ca/research/avoidable-crisis-updated>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., page 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., page 10.

<sup>4</sup> Reducing Food Waste, Project Drawdown: <https://drawdown.org/programs/drawdown-labs/deep-dives/food-waste>

<sup>5</sup> Solutions for Food Waste - Prevention, Analysis, Rescue & Recycling, ReFED: <https://refed.org/food-waste/the-solutions/>

<sup>6</sup> Taking a Bite out of Food Waste Reduces Emissions and Saves Households Money, 440Megatonnes Canada: <https://440megatonnes.ca/insight/taking-a-bite-out-of-food-waste-reduces-emissions/>

<sup>7</sup> Circular Food Systems, Circular Economy Leadership Canada: <https://circulareconomyleaders.ca/projects/agrifood/>

<sup>8</sup> 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, Government of Canada, page 64:

[https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/eccc/En4-460-2022-eng.pdf)