A 2018 report has revealed that for every $1 caterers invest in programmes to reduce food waste, they save more than $6 on average in operating costs.

It was collated by Champions 12.3 – a coalition dedicated to halving per capita global food waste by 2030 – and examined financial cost and benefit data for 86 catering sites across six countries.

Within one year of implementing food waste reduction programmes, they had reduced food waste by 36% on average and 64% had already recouped their investment.

Financial outlays included staff training and purchasing cloud-based monitoring systems, which are made up of a digital scale and connected tablet and allow staff to quickly identify the type of food thrown away and at what stage.

Returns came from reducing purchasing costs by buying less food, increasing revenue by repurposing ingredients that would previously have been thrown away and reducing waste management costs.

The report outlined five simple steps any caterer can take to achieve similar results:

**Measure**

You can't manage what isn't measured. In the case of food waste, it's essential for caterers to understand not only how much food is being wasted, but what sort of food and at what stage, so they know where to prioritise their efforts.

By using waste monitoring technology, which allows staff members to weigh and easily classify different types of food waste, the team at IKEA Eindhoven's cafe discovered two of their biggest sources of waste were soup and the salad buffet. In a year, they managed to cut food waste by 45%, saving €100,000 – or 48,000 meals – in food costs.

**Engage staff**

According to caterers interviewed by Champions 12.3, staff engagement was a key variable that determined the success of a food waste reduction programme.

The Sustainable Restaurant Association in the UK advises that incentivising staff with competitions, awards and targets is an effective way to do this.
One system that can help is LeanPath’s food waste monitoring system. Its instant win features randomly reward kitchen staff for participating with small tokens like a $5 gift cards and a staff ‘leaderboard’ encourages friendly competition.

Training is also key and BaxterStorey’s award-winning ‘Green Flash’ training programme is an excellent example. It consists of a broad suite of 20- to 30-minute, interactive peer-led training sessions each focusing on a specific aspect of food waste.

Start small and get creative

Pilot projects were found to be an effective way to test food waste reduction programmes before rolling them out on a large scale.

Sodexo, for example, learned many lessons during its two-month pilot of LeanPath’s waste monitoring technology at three of its UK and Ireland sites.

Reducing overproduction

According to Winnow data collected from over 450 sites in 25 countries, over 60% of food waste by weight is thrown away because chefs who are afraid of running out of food prepare more than their customers can eat.

To minimise overproduction, the company advises switching from bulk production to smaller batches, revising order quantities regularly and preparing daily production estimates in order to reduce overproduction.

Similarly, the main pieces of advice that came from Champion 12.3’s analysis were to produce smaller quantities of menu items that are consistently under-consumed and be more diligent about forecasting each service’s potential head count.

Re-purpose excess food

While there are excellent forecasting systems on the market that can predict top sellers on the menu and customer demand, caterers also need to have a Plan B in place to safely repurpose the food that results from overproduction.

For example, rather than sending peels, seeds, skin and bones straight to the bin, they can be used to make soup, stocks, generating value.

At Selfridges, the team makes marmalade from orange skins from the juice bar, while UK caterer Bartlett Mitchell recycles leftovers into everything from potato jam, to herb stalk pesto.

Leftovers from overproduction can also be donated to charities, which distribute them to people in need. And while this doesn’t impact the business’s bottom line, Champions 12.3 interviewees indicated that it can increase employee participation in a food waste reduction strategy.

RATIONAL’s contribution

Investing in the right cooking appliances can also contribute enormously to reducing the energy and resource footprint of a catering kitchen.

Indeed, a project commissioned by Zurich University of Applied Sciences found that by switching from conventional cooking technology to RATIONAL SelfCookingCenter® and VarioCookingCenter® appliances, kitchens could reduce electricity consumption by 35% and water consumption by 53%.
By using these systems, kitchens can also save on raw ingredients – weight loss when searing 10kg of pork cutlets was reduced from 40% with a tilting pan to 34% with the VarioCookingCenter. In addition, the Finishing functionality ensures that meals don’t lose quality, texture, nutrients or colour before being served.

A clear approach to staff engagement is key.

RATIONAL also actively supports United Against Waste. Together with its members, the association develops practical solutions that demonstrate that reducing food waste is both feasible and saves money.

Find out more: catering2019.com