

Greenwich Food Matters Challenge Case Study

In the Greenwich Food Matters Challenge, Waste Free Greenwich (WFG) and CET helped local businesses adopt a variety of food-saving measures. Participating restaurants and cafes updated their menus to repurpose or conserve ingredients, donated surplus meals, collected food scraps to be composted, and more. Food Waste Challenges invite local businesses to evaluate and optimize how food waste and surplus food are handled to make positive change. These challenges typically involve highlighting existing best practices and initiating new solutions to reduce, reuse, or divert; actions that raise overall awareness around the issue of wasted food. This is important, as nearly a quarter of Connecticut's waste stream is composed of food, which produces greenhouse gas emissions when disposed.

Waste Free Greenwich is a hub of waste reduction, reuse, and recycling information and resources. The organization saw local opportunities for waste to be reduced at the source, excess edible food to be donated, and food scraps to be composted. To propel a collective effort, WFG launched the Greenwich Food Matters Challenge. Businesses that applied to participate in the challenge received support implementing food-saving strategies over an 8-to-10-week period.

2022 Greenwich Food Matters Challenge

Timeline

MARCH

WFG conducted outreach and promoted the challenge in a variety of ways. WFG partnered with town departments including the Conservation Commission, Public Works, and the Office of the First Selectman to spread the word initially. The Greenwich Chamber of Commerce, the Old Greenwich Business Association, Food Rescue US, and local environmental nonprofits promoted the challenge. WFG posted a Q&A and a link to the application on [their website](#).



WFG shared promotional posts on their social media channels, tagging local restaurants to get their attention. WFG also created [flyers](#) that were distributed at the Town Hall and libraries.



Articles appeared in [local press](#) announcing the challenge and an informational session. Following these promotional efforts, WFG and CET hosted a [virtual informational session](#) to further motivate business participation. By the end of March, the challenge had business applicants who were ready to adopt food waste prevention, food donation, and/or food scrap composting practices that aligned with their operations and values.



MAY-JULY

For 8-10 weeks, businesses implemented or expanded food-saving measures. During this period, two additional food waste audits were conducted to measure the amount of material reduced, donated, and diverted. Participating businesses also received free publicity and marketing through the WFG Newsletter (6 personalized stories), the WFG Instagram account (683 followers), press releases, and in a display at the Town Hall. Challengers were given a window cling and poster to recognize their participation.



APRIL

CET conducted site evaluations and provided participating businesses with information and individualized recommendations for implementing and expanding food-saving measures. Following the assessment, businesses conducted a baseline food waste audit.

Waste Assistance

WFG partnered with CET to provide technical waste reduction assistance to business participants. Through a contract with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), CET was able to provide their expertise free of cost. CET visited each business for a site evaluation to identify how and when food waste is generated in front and back of house operations, observe waste system accessibility throughout each establishment, and to learn about existing food-saving measures.

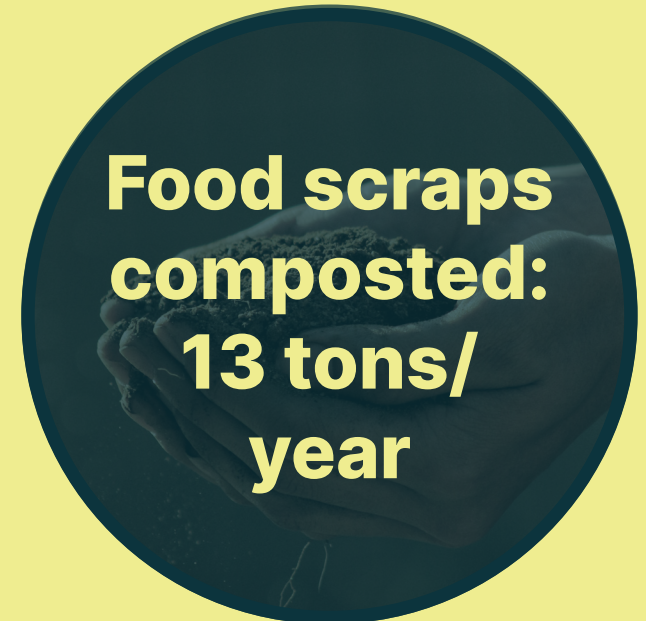
CET then created a customized set of three waste reduction strategies that followed the [EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy](#) for each business and provided support throughout the implementation process. Businesses selected which recommendations to focus on during the months of the challenge, all relating to food waste prevention, food rescue, and food scrap recycling. These strategies, which targeted both pre- and post-consumer food waste, were implemented, tracked, and reported on over the course of 8-10 weeks with support from WFG and CET.

For the challenge, WFG also promoted [food donation](#) and composting service providers that businesses could partner with. [Pyoor](#), a composting service booking site, along with [Blue Earth Compost](#) and [Curbside Compost](#), two organics haulers, assisted businesses pursuing food scrap composting. [Food Rescue US Fairfield County](#) partnered with businesses on food donation programs.



Food Matters Challenge Takeaways & Benefits

Collectively, the participants diverted tons of food waste from disposal, reducing the carbon footprint of their town. Through food donation efforts, businesses directed meals to food-insecure community members. Reducing food waste at the source through intentional purchasing, portioning, upcycling, and markdowns had positive effects on both operations and waste. Here is what the business' impact would be over a year-long period:



The collective efforts to reduce food waste in the community in turn have created a stronger infrastructure for Greenwich businesses and individuals to divert even more food waste moving forward.

The challenge participants created positive social and environmental change in Greenwich. As such, the businesses were recognized by the Office of the First Selectman in Greenwich, spotlighted in Waste Free Greenwich newsletters, lauded in local media outlets, and provided with a Food Matters Challenge window cling.

All businesses carried out their challenge recommendations with the intent to utilize the waste reduction practices long-term, and many participants have plans to expand them.

Participating Businesses

Many businesses participated in the challenge: Little Pub, Nit Noi Provisions, Ruby and Bella's, Something Natural, and Upper Crust Bagel Company. Greenwich Cheese Company also participated and is still in the process of pulling together their metrics. The participants had already taken steps to reduce waste but were motivated to participate in the challenge because it presented an opportunity to contribute to community-wide waste reduction and sustainability, provide food to insecure neighbors, re-evaluate current operations, and save on food purchasing and disposal costs.



Little Pub

This cozy tavern with American comfort food minimizes food waste through ingredient repurposing, menu planning, intentionally portioning offerings, and more. The restaurant was donating surplus meals through Food Rescue US before the challenge began and has continued to do so. **According to Doug, Little Pub's owner, participating in the challenge "opened our eyes to problems that we have since been able to fix, and CET's assistance was tremendously valuable."** Throughout the course of the challenge, the restaurant halved the portion size of their French fries side, reducing plate-scraping waste by 2.5 tons per year overall. Inspired by this success, Little Pub rolled **"improvements out across all five locations after Greenwich being the test bed, because we found so much value in what we implemented during the Greenwich Food Matters Challenge"**. Implementing these smaller fry portions across all locations decreased the quantity of fries purchased and served by 15%. Little Pub reduces waste across its locations in other ways, including sending excess food and beverage items to their other locations. And a fun fact: the honey that creates their delicious honey mustard sauce and hot honey chicken is harvested from beehives the restaurants maintain.

Nit Noi Provisions

At Nit Noi—a crafter of Thai soups, dumplings, noodles, and more—sustainability is built into the culture and operations. The restaurant uses local and organic ingredients and has long been repurposing vegetable and meat scraps in their broths and dumplings. A public-facing pantry within the restaurant sells meal components that often arise in surplus, such as cases of broth, to customers. With broth-freezing and other waste prevention techniques already in place, Nit Noi's call to the challenge was the prospect of implementing a composting program for unusable food scraps, which they worked with Curbside Compost to accomplish. Through this partnership, the restaurant is **diverting around a ton of food waste per year (an impressively low amount that reflects Nit Noi's source reduction practices)**.



“Our experience with CET & the Greenwich Food Matters Challenge was beneficial for the team to see what our values are. When you are implementing a new system, it's great having a third party come in to show why it's important. Our sustainability efforts are important to us, and any way we can increase our efforts while educating our staff & the public is valuable to Nit Noi.”

- Owner of Nit Noi



Ruby and Bella's

Ruby and Bella's, the newest establishment participating in the challenge, is an elegant lunch café located within Saksworks that serves seasonal American culinary creations. Since they opened, the café has repurposed ingredients, using scraps of gem lettuce leaves for sandwiches and turning discarded pieces of salmon into sliders and skewers. The establishment also orders ingredients daily to maximize freshness. During the challenge, Ruby and Bella's focused on waste tracking to identify opportunities to reduce food waste at the source, leading them to continue ingredient repurposing and meal planning. **Through these efforts, they successfully reduced their food waste by an average of 20 pounds per day (equating to a reduction of nearly 3 tons of food waste per year).** Looking forward, they are exploring the idea of implementing food waste tracking software and working with a composting service to divert pre- and post-consumer food waste from disposal.



RUBY & BELLA'S
VEGGIE WRAP
Zucchini, Squash, Eggplant,
Roasted peppers, Hummus, Basil Pesto,
Rocket arugula, Balsamic dressing
\$9.95



Something Natural

Something Natural, an all-organic sandwich shop offering famous house-made Portuguese bread, sandwiches, and cookies, operates on a foundation of sustainability. The shop crafts all meals from scratch and repurposes homemade bread for croutons and their Turkey Terrific sandwiches. Something Natural used the challenge as an opportunity to expand these food repurposing practices and implement a food scraps collection program with Curbside Compost. Through the established composting partnership, **they now divert 0.25 tons of food waste per week from disposal.** Before the challenge began, they were consistently donating to Food Rescue US, and **donated 240 pounds of food over the challenge period.**



"The challenge was really great on so many levels. First, it educated us on how to better reuse and recycle the food waste we previously hadn't thought about. Second, it introduced us to people around town that are like-minded and making efforts to better protect our precious planet, and we feel building a network is critical to changing behaviors on a larger scale. It also seemed to trickle down in unexpected ways - customers are choosing to skip the bag or utensils if they don't need them! And the most important part of the challenge was the realization that with just a small amount of education and accountability, we can make big changes. Removing as much as we can from the waste stream is critical to protecting the planet for future generations!"

- Pam Ryan, Manager of Something Natural



Upper Crust Bagel Company

Family-owned Upper Crust Bagel Company is known for its fresh bagels that are baked daily. Prior to the challenge, the bagel shop tracked inventory and adjusted their ordering based on purchasing patterns, made sides such as pickles and coleslaw optional for customers, and used pineapple skins to make flavored water. During the challenge, Upper Crust zeroed in on their surplus, donating bagels to Food Rescue US and composting their inedible food scraps. Robert, the owner of Upper Crust, remarked, "The Greenwich Food Matters Challenge made us look at aspects of our business that we previously did not spend much time on, like food waste, trash/recycling, and food donations. These three areas we are now focusing on have had a positive result financially on the business as well as a 'feel good' mentality on the overall business." Throughout the challenge, the shop donated 260 pounds of bagels (over 1,000 bagels) and composted around 60 pounds of food scraps. Based on their food waste tracking data, Upper Crust decreased their weekly average of food waste by 200 pounds over the course of the challenge—a lot of bagels saved!





Greenwich Cheese Company

This purveyor of fine, artisanal cheeses and charcuterie board ingredients sources their products from local cheesemakers and wraps their cheeses in a biodegradable paper that preserves freshness. To prevent waste, [Greenwich Cheese Company](#) marks down the price of unusually-shaped cuts of cheese for customers. Items that may go stale, such as leftover bread, are upcycled into new creations like crostini.

Whether your business has food waste to reduce, surplus meals to donate, or food scraps to compost, CET can help establish a program in line with your needs and operations.

**Contact us at (888) 410-3827 or
ReduceWasteCT@cetonline.org to get started!**