



A Summary of Engagement Feedback on a Food Waste Reduction Strategy

What We Heard



Introduction



The Department of Agriculture has initiated a project focused on exploring food waste reduction on Prince Edward Island (PEI), and compiled information that could assist in addressing challenges related to food waste in the province. To better understand the food waste challenges in PEI, the department consulted food supply chain partners, community/charitable organizations, and the public to seek their insights and thoughts. The engagement process took place from March 2024 to August 2024. This report summarizes what we heard from the engagement.

Methodology

To gain a well-rounded understanding of food waste challenges, a structured, multi-phase engagement process was carried out through targeted surveys and public consultation.

Data Collection

The Department of Agriculture contracted a consulting firm to conduct engagement activities with food supply chain partners as well as community and charitable organizations to understand the challenges they face. Between March 2024 and May 2024, two surveys were distributed to a list of food supply chain partners and a list of community and charitable organizations through the consultant. Data was collected by the consultant and presented to the Department of Agriculture.

Between July 2024 and August 2024, the department conducted a public consultation to collect public perspectives and thoughts on food waste issues in PEI. The public could participate through a survey and written submissions. The survey was available in both English and French, online and in print.

Participants

One survey was sent to the members of the food supply chain through the consultant. A total of 23 responses were received, including eight responses from the retail sector, seven from the food service sector, four from the processing sector, one from the distribution sector, one from the production sector, and two from other organizations (i.e., economic development, nonprofit organization).

Another survey was sent to a list of community and charitable organizations through the consultant, and a total of 28 complete responses were received.

A total of 244 responses to the public survey were received. Of these, 230 respondents lived in PEI all year around, three respondents lived in PEI seasonally, and 11 respondents lived outside of PEI. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Public Survey Respondents

Demographic Information		Number of Responses	Percentage
Gender	Man	35	15.7%
	Woman	184	82.5%
	Non-binary	4	1.8%
	Gender not listed	0	0.0%
	Total	223	/
Age	Under 18	0	0.0%
	18-24	3	1.3%
	25-34	32	14.3%
	35-44	36	16.1%
	45-54	40	17.9%
	55-64	63	28.1%
	Above 64	50	22.3%
	Total	224	/
Disability	Yes	34	15.4%
	No	187	84.6%
	Total	221	/
Income Below Median	Yes	74	35.4%
	No	135	64.6%
	Total	209	/
Language	English	230	98.7% ¹
	French	39	16.7% ¹
	Other ²	7	3.0% ¹
	Total	276	/
Indigenous	Yes	3	1.3%
	No	221	98.7%
	Total	224	/
Newcomer	Yes	10	4.4%
	No	218	95.6%
	Total	228	/
Other Underrepre- sented Group	Yes ³	17	7.8%
	No	202	92.2%
	Total	219	/

In addition, two written submissions were received during the public engagement.

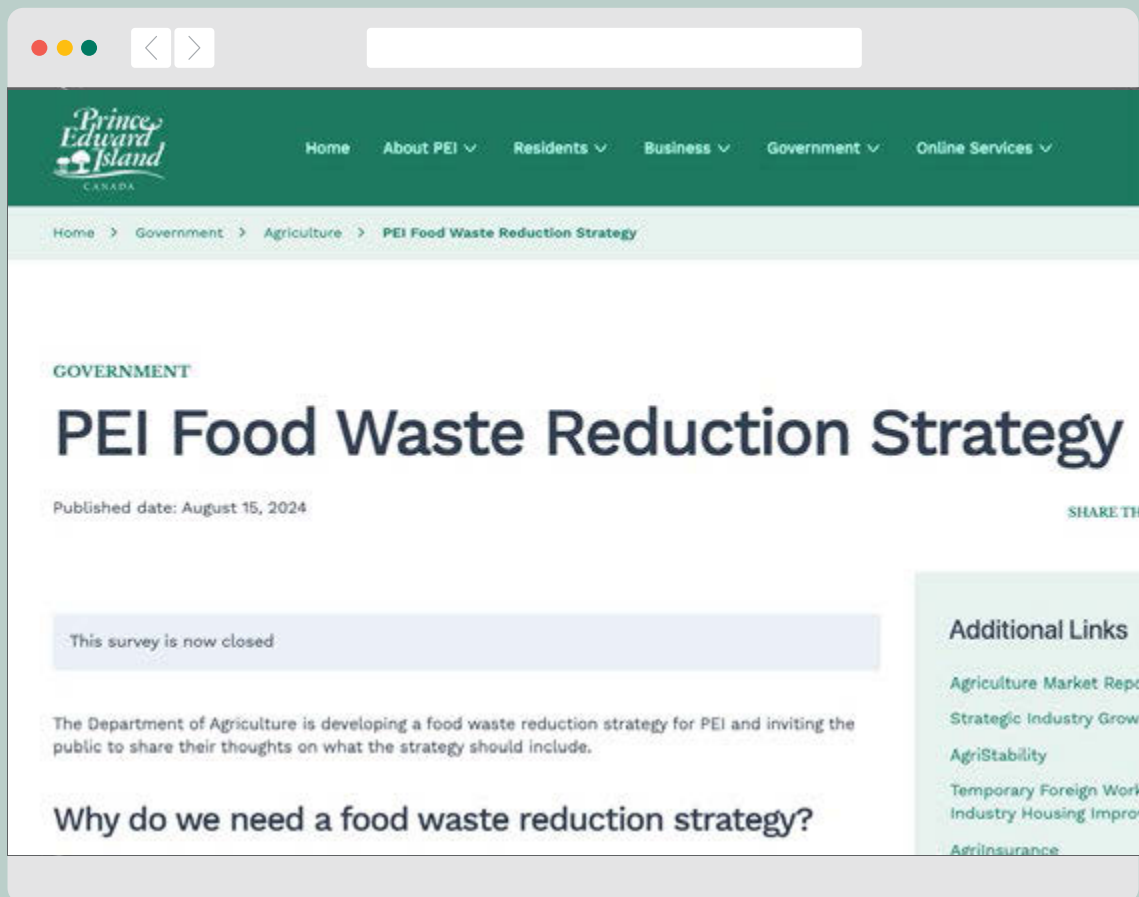
¹ Based on a total of 233 respondents who completed the survey.

² Responses include Malayalam, Spanish, Yiddish, Malgache, German, and American Sign Language.

³ Responses include Acadians, South Asian, Black, 2LGBTQ+, Seniors, and Caucasian.

Limitations

The response rates of the surveys to food supply chain partners and community and charitable organizations are relatively low. The perspectives collected from these two surveys may not be reflective of the whole sector and/or community. There might be potential gaps in the insights and perspectives. The information collected through these engagement activities will not be used as the only line of evidence.



Summary of What We Heard

Food Waste Is a Significant Concern for PEI

We heard that **many businesses, organizations, and Islanders were concerned about food waste issues in PEI**. The concerns about food waste included economic losses, food insecurity, environmental impacts, waste of time and resources, food cost, long-term effect on the economy, reputation, and health issues caused by food waste. According to the survey results, for food supply chain partners, **economic losses** were the most significant consequence of food waste, followed by food insecurity, and increased carbon emissions. Many respondents from food supply chain partners indicated that they have experienced financial losses due to food waste, including costs associated with disposal, lost revenue, potential penalties, etc. Among Islanders who participated in the public survey, the top concern about food waste was its impact on **food security for others in the province**, followed by waste of money, negative impacts on environment, food insecurity in my own household, and other factors.

It was noted that food waste occurred at multiple points along the supply chain, from production to retail. Some community and charitable organizations had to throw out food that was meant to be redistributed to people with food insecurity. While some organizations rarely had food waste, some others experienced food waste from every one or two months to more than once a week. At household level, over half of respondents reported that food waste occurred at least once per month.

Most participants, including food supply chain partners, community and charitable organizations, and the public, demonstrated a strong willingness to take actions to help reduce food waste in PEI. According to the public survey, 97.4% of respondents were interested in taking actions to reduce food waste. While many community and charitable organizations were interested in reducing food waste, some organizations indicated that reducing food waste was not their mandate or they lack the funding and human resources for food waste reduction.

Causes for Food Waste

We heard that there were a number of factors that could cause food waste.

For **food supply chain partners**, food waste was mainly caused by:

- Inefficiencies in production,
- Defects in food,
- Overproduction,
- Inefficiencies in distribution,
- Improper storage,
- Defects in packaging, and
- Other factors such as poor inventory management, short shelf life, unpredictability of weather events and market conditions, lack of labour and storage infrastructure, etc.

For **community and charitable organizations**, the main causes of food waste included:

- Past expiry date or best before date,
- Food spoilage,
- Prepared too much food,
- Food waste in schools (e.g., absence of students, students changed plans for lunch, etc.),
- Food donation that was not wanted or needed by clients, and
- Ordered meals that were not picked up.



For **households**, the causes of food waste are summarized as follows:

Preparation

- Prepared too much food
- Only needed part of a food for a recipe
- Food prepared for children and toddlers were not finished by them

Purchasing

- Bought more food than needed
- Too much of the product in packaging
- Grocery stores promote buying more for less cost
- Large portions of food served at restaurants

Storage

- Forgot about having the food at home
- Lack of capacity to preserve food
- Lack of knowledge to preserve or store food for an extended period

Food Spoilage

- Limited shelf life of fresh produce
- Poor condition of food in grocery stores (e.g., damaged, not fresh, not packaged well)

Planning

- Poor meal planning
- Unplanned restaurant meals or food delivery
- Lack of time

Date label

- Food was past its “best before” date
- Not sure about the meaning of date labels

Other

- Lack of food management or awareness among family members
- Preferring not to eat leftovers
- Seasonal surplus of food production

Challenges in Reducing Food Waste

A number of issues and challenges faced by businesses, community organizations, and households were identified.

We heard that some food supply chain partners experienced regulatory challenges that might limit their activities on food waste reduction, such as short “best before” dates on food products, especially for those that are shelf stable for a long period of time. Many retailers choose to dispose of unsold goods instead of donating them due to concerns about legal liability, lack of financial incentives, increased administrative burden, and prohibitive government policies in some jurisdictions. Community and charitable organizations also experienced challenges in redistributing food to people in need, including:

- Logistical challenges,
- Shortage of labour/volunteers,
- Regulatory hurdles,
- Financial constraints,
- Lack of community support,
- Lack of awareness among people who are in need, and
- Other challenges such as redistributing food items before they spoil and receiving donated food that is not fit for consumption/redistribution.

At the consumer level, the challenges that people faced include:

- Large portion and package size in grocery stores and restaurants,
- Short shelf life,
- Poor food quality,
- Poor meal planning,
- Lack of knowledge,
- Lack of storage capacity,
- Improper storage,
- Overpreparing,
- Overbuying,
- Date label confusion, and
- Food price.

Pathway to Reduce Food Waste

Throughout the engagement process, we heard that many Islanders—ranging from businesses and community organizations to households—are already taking meaningful steps to reduce food waste. At the same time, we also received thoughtful suggestions on additional actions that could further support these efforts.

1. Education and Awareness

A recurring theme in the feedback was the need to increase education and raise awareness about food waste across all sectors. Many respondents pointed to a general lack of knowledge around food storage, preservation techniques, meal planning, and the meaning of best-before and expiry dates. As a result, food is often discarded unnecessarily. Businesses and community organizations expressed a desire for more tools and resources to support food literacy, while also noting the importance of better communication on available services and supports. Many organizations have been adopting strategies to educate their staff and clients on measures to minimize food waste. There is an opportunity to work with these community and charitable organizations to deliver public education on topics such as food storage techniques, budgeting for groceries, best before and expiry dates, recipes, gardening, composting, and creative ways to use leftovers. Respondents suggested that these messages be delivered through a variety of tools—newsletters, printed materials, social media, webinars, workshops, and community events—to engage Islanders of all ages. Schools can also play a role by incorporating food education into curricula, helping younger generations develop lifelong habits that reduce food waste. Initiatives like food waste reduction challenges and “community food mentor” programs were mentioned as practical, community-driven solutions that could build knowledge and shift habits.



2. Policy and Regulation

Respondents also raised several policy and regulatory barriers that currently hinder food waste reduction efforts. One of the most cited concerns was that businesses often avoid donating surplus food due to fear of liability or confusion about regulations. To address this, participants called for the development of clear policies that protect and encourage food donation. Similarly, improvements in food labeling standards, particularly the distinction between best-before and expiry dates, could help consumers make better decisions and reduce premature disposal of still-edible food. Some respondents suggested that provincial guidelines or regulations should be developed to clarify expectations for how food businesses manage surplus food, including options for redistribution or composting. Incentive programs, such as tax credits or rebates for businesses that donate food or improve waste management practices, were also widely supported.

3. Collaboration and Partnerships

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of collaboration among different actors in the food system. Respondents stressed that reducing food waste is not something that any one sector can tackle alone. Instead, stronger partnerships are needed between governments, municipalities, businesses, non-profits, educational institutions, and community organizations. Respondents suggested establishing a multi-stakeholder advisory group to guide the development and implementation of the food waste reduction strategy, bringing together insights from various sectors and promoting the exchange of best practices to ensure the strategy is evidence-based and achievable. Participants pointed to successful models like the Loop Program and the Second Harvest Food Rescue which connect retailers and food producers with those in need. Expanding such programs and developing a more robust provincial food donation network could improve both waste diversion and food access. It was suggested that grocery stores and restaurants work with food banks to redistribute surplus food to reduce food waste. Gleaning initiatives that help farmers redistribute surplus or unharvested crops were also highlighted as necessary and promising opportunities. Partnerships with educational institutions like Holland College were identified as a way to build capacity, provide training, and foster innovation in food waste reduction practices.

4. Food Redistribution and Community Support

Food redistribution/donation has been a key strategy for households, businesses, and communities to reduce food waste while supporting populations with food insecurity. We



heard that community initiatives, such as food-sharing programs, community fridges, and local kitchens, play an essential role in supporting families and individuals in need. However, many charitable and community organizations noted that they are constrained by limited funding and staffing, which affects their ability to scale these efforts. Assessing community needs, strengthening food donation networks, providing operational support for community fridges, and investing in logistics and infrastructure were seen as essential steps forward. Respondents also stressed the need for community engagement and education to reduce stigma and encourage broader participation in food-sharing programs. Necessary steps are required to ensure community fridges operate safely and effectively to ensure these efforts support vulnerable populations. Establishing central hubs, such as regional food banks or food distribution centres, could streamline donation and distribution processes.

5. Support for Households

Respondents noted several practical barriers, such as limited storage space in small apartments, which can make food preservation difficult. Incentivizing the purchase of freezers, vacuum sealers, and other equipment could help families store food more effectively and reduce spoilage. Many also highlighted the need for tools to assist with meal planning and portion control, particularly for small households, which can prevent overbuying and waste. Expanding digital tools, sharing recipe ideas, and providing accessible guides to food preservation were among the solutions suggested. Community kitchens were seen as valuable spaces for both skill-building and social support, allowing people to share meals and reduce waste collectively. Increasing access to food donation locations, especially in rural communities, was also emphasized.

6. Business and Retail Solutions

The role of businesses in food waste reduction was widely acknowledged, with many respondents expressing frustration over large packaging and portion sizes. Encouraging grocery stores to offer bulk-buying options and allowing consumers to purchase smaller quantities could reduce unnecessary waste. Improving stock management practices can also reduce spoilage and ensure quality food is available for consumers. Restaurants were also encouraged to offer flexible portion sizes and improve take-out packaging to help customers preserve leftovers. Respondents recommended training for retail and hospitality staff on food waste reduction practices, including stock rotation, inventory control, and donation procedures. Improved logistics, data collection, and communication with food rescue organizations were also suggested to streamline donation processes.



7. Research, Technology, and Innovation

Respondents emphasized the need for data, innovation, and research to better understand and address food waste across the province. Many participants highlighted the lack of comprehensive tracking and reporting mechanisms, making it difficult to measure progress or identify problem areas. Investments in technology, such as mobile apps that connect users to surplus food, or tools that offer tips on storage and recipes, were recommended as accessible ways to help Islanders reduce waste in their daily lives. Further research into composting, food recycling, and creating value-added products from food by-products could unlock new economic and environmental opportunities. Respondents suggested establishing a collaborative hub featuring an inventory of successful food waste reduction policies and models. This would provide a valuable resource for policymakers, businesses, and organizations to learn from best practices, help identify gaps and opportunities, support education and awareness-raising activities, and assist in measuring the impact of food waste reduction efforts.



Conclusion

We sincerely thank all participants who participated in the consultation process. Their thoughtful input has enhanced our understanding of the complex issues related to food waste in PEI and helped highlight areas of concern and consideration. While food security remains an area of interest in many jurisdictions across the world, the feedback received in this exercise outlines the vast and wide-ranging impacts specific to PEI, which can help inform future actions.



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