

FESTIVE TIPS TO CUT FOOD WASTE

AS WE GEAR UP FOR THE SILLY SEASON, NSW ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY'S **AMANDA KANE** CONSIDERS HOW BUSINESSES MAY MAKE THE MOST OF IT WHILE MINIMISING THEIR FOOD WASTE.



Order your free food safety stickers for takeaway containers from NSW EPA's Love Food Hate Waste.



For more information about the Your Business is Food program and how you can sign up, go to lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au/business.

Christmas is a busy season for the foodservice industry with work functions and get-togethers filling up tables and challenging your normal, everyday ordering, storage and menu practices.

So, what is it that will help bring new customers your way this festive season? And how can you make sure they have the selection and choices they want while avoiding food waste?

The NSW EPA's Love Food Hate Waste program has tracked community attitudes and behaviours around food waste in NSW every three years since 2009. It shows people are increasingly concerned about food waste and the environmental impacts.

The most recent tracking survey included for the first time people's attitudes and behaviours while eating out, with the results helping to inform our new education program to help food businesses reduce food waste – Your Business is Food.

The survey results provide useful insights for any cafe and restaurant wanting to reduce business costs relating to food waste while increasing customer satisfaction. Indeed, customers were asked what they thought about venues and how they chose one over another. The results are revealing.

The friendliness of the staff and the variety and choices offered on the menu were the most popular reasons for choosing a restaurant (73 per cent and 74 per cent respectively).

You may also be surprised to learn that a restaurant's environmental credentials play a role in restaurant choice by 42 per cent of people.

The good news is the survey confirmed NSW residents really like to eat out. More than half of

NSW residents (53 per cent) eat out at least weekly.

The vast majority of people (58 per cent) claim not to waste any food while eating out, but for those that did, the most common reasons were that the portion size was too big (41 per cent overall, but increasing to 53 per cent for large country town respondents), ordering too much (20 per cent) and people watching their weight (15 per cent).

The most common items to be left on plates are carbohydrates, followed by vegetables and salad.

Love Food Hate Waste food waste expert Sarah Chen said the survey also showed that customers really like it when a restaurant helps them to avoid food waste by offering smaller portion sizes or take away containers.

"Because people don't like food waste, they appreciate it when you help them to avoid it," Chen said.

Different people are driven by different reasons for preferring not to waste food, so depending on your customer base, you can pitch your food waste avoidance efforts in different ways and they will like it.

Single people and families without children worry about wasting good food when they leave it on their plates, while families with young children worry about the waste of money.

"For the business themselves, it impacts on their bottom line, affects staff morale and it's upsetting when the food you prepared is thrown away."

Foodservice magazine is partnering with Love Food Hate Waste over 18 months as part of an ongoing campaign to support the NSW food industry to waste less food.

The Your Business is Food education program encourages

food businesses to tackle one major food waste problem area, i.e. spoilage, preparation or plate waste, by implementing two or three simple actions. It is not hard to achieve 21 per cent food waste reduction, which means more savings for your business.

The biggest likely cause of food waste among the festive season crowds is likely to be plate waste, so here are Chen's top three tips for Christmas:

• OFFER TAKE AWAY CONTAINERS

71 per cent of diners feel more favourably towards a restaurant if they offer takeaway containers, with nearly a third of people being embarrassed to actually ask for one. Free food safety stickers for take away containers are available as part of the program, advising customers how to keep food safe. Order some today.

• OFFER PORTION SIZE OPTIONS

Nearly 70 per cent of people have ordered starters as a main meal to suit their appetite and more than half of younger people wish restaurants would advise them about how big their portions are to ensure they order enough and not too much. People who eat entrée size mains are also more likely to have room for dessert.

• LEAVE OUT WHAT YOU DON'T WANT

The research shows that customers are shy to tell you what they do or don't want and value the friendliness of your staff. Simply asking customers whether there are ingredients they don't like or if they'd prefer a smaller serve avoids food being left on plates and makes people feel better. (f)