

At least
30%
of U.S. food
is wasted



THE MASSIVE PROBLEM OF FOOD WASTE

In the United States alone, food waste is estimated to comprise at least 30% of the total food supply.

Wegmans Food Markets

Food waste is a massive problem. The U.S. government estimates that food waste makes up 30 to 40% of the food supply.⁴⁸ It's not surprising, then, that setting zero waste targets in a grocery setting calls for bold thinking and tough action—revisiting supply chains and establishing sustainable purchasing policies, accurately forecasting demand to minimize spoilage, and sustainably managing any waste generated in operations.

In 2016, Rubicon partnered with Wegmans to start their zero waste journey at the grocery chain's Canandaigua, NY store. The pilot was a success, increasing the recycling rate at this store from 66% in January 2016 to 83% in December 2016. With the success of the pilot, Wegmans decided to expand this program; now 61 Wegmans stores are on a journey to zero waste. The program aims to cut food waste in half by 2030.⁴⁹

Throughout our partnership, we have worked with Wegmans to identify ways of repurposing, refurbishing, and recycling a variety of materials—including non-food products. For instance, we've recycled thousands of pounds of granite countertop, and found a second use for seafood containers and bakery racks. We also developed a program to recycle kitchen oil and grease, and to convert meat products into biofuels.

While each solution brings Wegmans closer to their recycling goals, we are particularly proud of the

work we've done together to reduce food waste by establishing an organics recycling program for almost all Wegmans locations, including the chain's restaurants, multiple distribution centers, and non-retail support buildings.

The food scrap recycling partnership has been successful. Between September 2018 and September 2019, for instance, Wegmans diverted approximately 30,000 tons of food scraps to compost or anaerobic digestion. Anaerobic digestion is the process in which bacteria break down organic matter without oxygen. Part of the material was eventually converted to biogas on a New York State dairy farm, creating enough electricity to power the equivalent of more than 300 homes.

The food scrap recycling program with Wegmans has also supported nine organics haulers and sixteen organics recycling facilities, strengthening the organics infrastructure across the Northeast. Rubicon has worked closely with New York-based organics recycler Natural Upcycling, using the partnership to improve the food waste recycling market in Maryland and New Jersey.

These examples demonstrate how we can reduce waste and support progress towards the circular economy by giving a second life to materials used in the ordinary course of business.