

Recycling Updates

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Special Edition

DNR Unveils Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has released a Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation report that provides key details about Wisconsin's existing food waste generation and management.



The report includes recommendations for individuals, businesses and government agencies to reduce food waste going to landfills as part of a statewide goal to reduce per-capita food waste disposal in landfills by 50% by 2030, compared to 2020 levels.

Key findings of the study include:

- The vast majority (88%) of the food waste going to Wisconsin landfills is from residential and food service sources, with residential contributing the largest share at 47%.
- Infrastructure for hauling food waste to destinations other than landfills (such as composting and anaerobic digestion facilities) will have to expand significantly to achieve the statewide food waste reduction goal.
- Of the 286 facilities licensed for composting in Wisconsin, just 30 (10%) are approved to accept food waste. Of the 122 anaerobic digestion facilities currently operating in Wisconsin, just 37 (30%) currently accept food waste.
- To expand food donation, food rescue and food waste processing infrastructure, education, technical support and funding will be needed. Regulatory and policy reform may also be necessary.

This study was funded through a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant the DNR received in 2023 to evaluate Wisconsin's food waste landscape, develop a statewide food waste reduction plan, and provide technical assistance to businesses. These activities under this Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) grant support Wisconsin's commitment to waste reduction and responsible use of resources.

The DNR contracted with HDR, Inc., to perform the study, which gathered data from surveys and listening sessions with stakeholders, including food rescue organizations, local

governments, food waste processing and waste haulers. The study also included a review of data provided by the DNR, the U.S. EPA Excess Food Opportunities Map, the ReFED Insights Engine and other state-specific information.

The impetus for this grant-funded work was DNR's 2020-2021 Statewide Waste Characterization Study, which found that wasted food and food scraps made up 20% of trash going to Wisconsin landfills — the largest single category. This amounts to an estimated 854,000 tons annually, or 294 pounds per person, in Wisconsin during the study period. More than three-quarters of this food could have been consumed by people. When food goes in the trash, so do resources, time and money.

The DNR will host a webinar via Microsoft Teams on Feb. 3 from noon to 1 p.m., presenting an overview of the food waste study. Anyone interested in attending the webinar can register using the [Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation Results Webinar registration link](#). To read the Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation and the Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation Executive Summary, follow the links below.

- [Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation](#)
- [Wisconsin Food Waste Evaluation Executive Summary](#)

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