

# Turning waste into value

A recommended blueprint for  
food waste transformation

# Introduction

Food waste is no longer just a cost to be managed. It's an opportunity to create business and societal value, drive innovation, and build long-term resilience across the food system.

As companies active in consumer goods and retail, CGF members have the opportunity to individually move beyond reduction and recycling improvements and embrace a circular growth approach, where nutritional benefits are fully valorized, waste is designed out of the value chain and new value is generated across the full lifecycle.

In tackling the food-waste crisis, prevention remains the most impactful strategy, as avoiding waste before it occurs strengthens profitability, supports farmer livelihoods, and keeps food and its nutrients in use at their highest value.

Independent of the methods chosen, the real transformation depends on enabling action. This includes engaging with stakeholders and encouraging circularity as a core design principle to remove waste and enable value creation at every stage.

Although the challenges ahead are significant, it's important to recognize that important progress has already been made on these goals. The opportunity now is to build on that momentum. With their experience, CGF members can support more consistent, scalable impact.

We encourage retailers and manufacturers, along with all other trading partners in the end-to-end food value chain, to prioritize the hot spots where further action is needed, identify gaps and opportunities in their food waste road maps, and design, measure, communicate, and scale owned initiatives to support progress across the value chain.



**Sharon Bligh**

Director of Health and Sustainability, The Consumer Goods Forum

## Food waste: Addressing an urgent and growing global issue

Food waste poses a massive environmental, social, and economic challenge. Roughly one-third of all food produced, around 1.3 billion tonnes, is wasted each year, resulting in an estimated global economic loss of about USD 940 billion.

The climate impact is equally staggering, with food waste generating roughly 3.3 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually. Put another way, if food waste were a country, it would rank as the world's third-largest emitter after China and the United States.

Perhaps most distressing: All of this waste occurs while one in nine people around the world faces hunger each day.

Source: [The Consumer Goods Forum](#)

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Each year, the world loses 1.3 billion tons of food—nearly one-third of everything we produce. A challenge of this scale makes one thing clear: incremental, isolated action is no longer enough. Through the Food Waste Coalition, we're uniting leaders across the value chain to prevent waste at the source and turn what remains into new value.

**Charlie Angelakos,**

Vice President External Affairs and Sustainability,  
McCain Foods



# Recommended blueprint for action

Inspiring action on food waste is the primary mission of The Consumer Goods Forum's [Food Waste Coalition](#). Its steering committee, comprising global retailers and manufacturers, worked with industry and domain experts from Capgemini to build this blueprint. Its ambition goes beyond simply reducing or recycling waste, but to help prevent waste at the source and transform what remains into new value.

In this paper, we present our recommended Food Waste Transformation Blueprint, a practical and actionable playbook that highlights key areas where food waste can be designed out of the system through circular principles, data and technology innovation, and collaboration among all food system stakeholders, including consumers.

We invite you to join us as we explore how our industry can help transform food waste from an unintended consequence into an avenue of profitability and growth, a stronger and more sustainable food system, and a more responsible future for our industry.

## Our food waste blueprint: Fighting waste on two fronts

	<h3>Prevention</h3> <p>Eliminating food waste through design by breaking patterns of overproduction, inefficiencies, expectations of abundance, and rigid perceptions of perfection.</p>
	<h3>Valorization</h3> <p>Turning waste into value by reimagining it for new uses, such as upcycled products and alternative models of consumption.</p>

# Our findings, our focus

Our Coalition's Food Waste Transformation Blueprint is the result of desktop research, expert interviews, and working sessions conducted January – September 2025. Through this process, our team worked to identify the root causes of food waste across the value chain, as well as identify industry best practices to help prevent or overcome these.

Our work has revealed that while food waste occurs at many points across the value chain, every point matters. In this paper, we chose to highlight four key “food waste hot spots”—specific areas within the value chain where action should be focused as both urgently needed and most feasible to achieve. By examining both high-level patterns and the detailed processes beneath them, we pinpoint the practical and actionable recommended practices that can meaningfully reduce waste end-to-end. While not addressed in this paper to maintain a targeted scope, the Coalition has also recognised the importance of working on upstream losses and collaborated with the WWF on the Global Farm Loss Tool (GFLT) to standardize on-farm loss measurement and progress tracking.

It's important to note that while tackling food waste would be most effective with collaboration, there is significant opportunity for individual organizations to help accelerate action. When looking at the latest data from the coalition reporting it demonstrated both the societal and business urgency to take action, whether taken independently or with partners, and offers the opportunity for significant value creation.

With this paper, we outline where the greatest opportunities lie, how to drive meaningful change, and the value that comes from acting decisively. Over time, the goal of our Coalition is helping individual organizations, integrate, and scale initiatives that deliver lasting impact. For now, our focus is on building momentum to set transformation in motion and accelerate progress.

Our path to circularity		
 <b>Shared responsibility</b>	 <b>Structural shifts</b>	 <b>Strong collaboration</b>

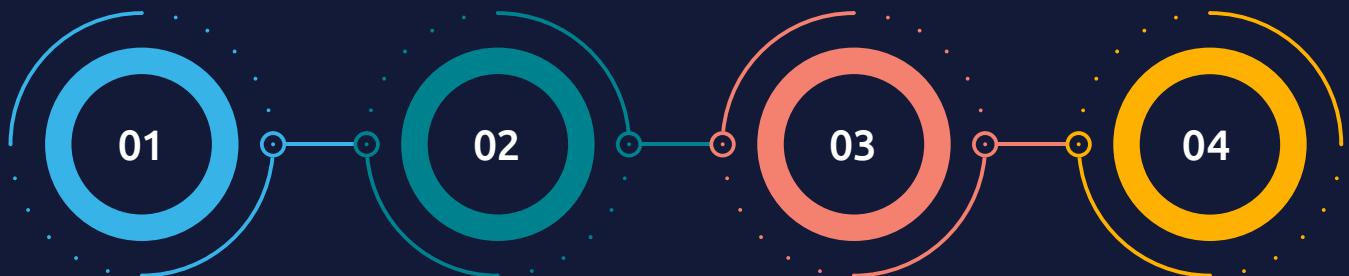
# Exploring four priority industry hot spots and how to solve them

Manufacturing,  
processing,  
and packaging

Downstream  
distribution  
and storage

Wholesale  
and retail

Food  
service and  
household  
consumption



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Helping consumers reduce household food waste starts with making it simple, practical, and rewarding. Brands have a real opportunity to turn expertise into everyday tips that make a difference. For example, Bel Group uses its iconic brands to inspire consumers to see leftovers as a creative resource, sharing simple recipes and tips to turn surplus food into delicious meals.

**Annabelle Souchon**

Group CSR Manager, Bel,  
Co-chair CGF Food Waste  
Coalition of Action



# Deep dive: Hot spot 1

## Processing and manufacturing

Through the research we have conducted we identified that food waste in processing and manufacturing is driven by both systemic and company-specific factors. At a macro level, low **financial incentives for valorization** make disposal cheaper than repurposing biproducts with limited market value, **while volatility in demand and supply across markets** creates uncertainty, forcing reliance on overproduction buffers. Industry-established practices such as **excessive product assortments** and **rigid cosmetic standards** further amplify waste by fragmenting production and increasing rejection rates. At the company level, **operational inefficiencies**—such as yield loss, technical failures, and quality-control issues—generate significant waste during processing. These challenges are compounded by **gaps in forecasting and planning**, as well as incomplete waste-related KPIs that prioritize cost and yield optimization over food-waste performance.

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Retailers and brands need to rethink food waste not as a liability, but as a catalyst for business-driven innovation. Through the work of the CGF Food Waste Coalition we hope to inspire action among members and lay the foundation for wide-scale change across the industry.

**Christine Heffernan,**

Chief Communications and Sustainability Officer, Tesco



# Where does food waste occur in manufacturing processes – and how can we change it?

## Production planning & scheduling

- **Inefficient scheduling** causing idle time and spoilage.
- **Frequent changeovers** cause product loss during cleaning & setup.
- Decisions based on outdated forecasts instead of **live demand signals**.

## Quality control & assurance

- **Strict cosmetic and spec standards** rejecting edible products.
- **Delays in QC** holding inventory too long, causing spoilage.
- **Delays in release decisions** leading to unnecessary hold times.

## Inventory & storage

- **Poor rotation** and lack of **proactive expiry tracking**.
- **Limited cold storage capacity** causing temperature breaches.
- Failure to **monitor real-time conditions**.

## Raw material sourcing

- **Over-purchasing** raw materials (during low-price periods or to hedge against demand/supply variability) that spoil before use.
- **Poor quality checks** leading to rejection of entire lots.
- Materials **ordered far in advance** risk expiring before use.

## Processing & manufacturing

- **Line inefficiencies** and **changeovers** generating excess waste.
- **Ingredient losses** during cleaning, purging, and recipe adjustments.
- Issues not detected early enough due to **lack of real-time monitoring** leading to large-scale waste.

## Packaging & labelling

- **Mislabeling** (e.g., wrong dates) leading to recalls and blanket disposal.
- **Fragile or non-resealable packaging** causing damage and waste.

## Solutioning thought starters

All CGF members engaged in our research confirmed that they are taking action on their own to reduce their operational food loss and waste and significant progress has been made. To address waste driven by rigid quality standards, inaccurate forecasting, and limited upcycling pathways, manufacturers should review their individual operations, technology, and incentives around resource efficiency.

This means strengthening in-line quality processes, using AI-powered demand forecasting, and embedding waste-reduction targets and re-use strategies into core business priorities to reframe by-products as value-adds. Some proposed steps are:

### Data & technology

Collect demand-trigger data and use AI to forecast future demand with greater accuracy.

### Business priorities

Benchmark against peers' public practices to identify a recommended "good" baseline and best practices.



### Operations

- Improve quality control processes.
- Embed waste reduction targets in daily operations.
- Implement revalorization initiatives across the manufacturing value chain.

## Benefit levers



Revenue opportunities



Cost savings



Enhanced brand reputation



Strengthen employee engagement and productivity

## Deep dive: Hot spot 2

### Downstream distribution and storage

Through our research, we've uncovered the root causes of food waste at the retail and distribution level—a mix of systemic and company-specific challenges. At a macro level, fragmented standards and **inconsistent protocols across suppliers, distributors, and retailers** create confusion in quality checks. This means perfectly good products can be wrongly rejected, while subpar items slip through unnoticed. Add to that **rigid replenishment models and limited real-time inventory visibility**, and the result is shelves stocked with perishables that expire before they're sold. **Infrastructure gaps** make matters worse: outdated cold-chain systems and inflexible storage networks struggle to keep pace with dynamic demand and temperature requirements, leading to spoilage during handoffs. At the company level, the picture is equally complex—misaligned receiving processes, poor inventory turnover, and inadequate monitoring of cold-chain performance all contribute to waste. And because KPIs often prioritize cost and speed over waste reduction, incentives for improved food-waste performance remains low, allowing these issues to persist.

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Food loss is not an inevitable cost of doing business—it's a solvable, system-wide challenge. Through the CGF Food Waste Coalition, we are proving that eliminating waste is not only possible, but a powerful catalyst for innovation and value creation.

**Chris Franke**

Senior Manager of Global Sustainability, Walmart,  
Co-chair CGF Food Waste Coalition of Action

### Solutioning thought starters

To combat waste caused in distribution and storage, organizations should modernize monitoring and decision-making across the distribution network. This requires deploying real-time freshness and location technologies, redesigning storage and logistics for flexibility, and prioritizing waste-reduction KPIs alongside efficiency to ensure products remain viable through every step of the supply chain. Some proposed steps are:



### Data & technology

- Use IoT sensors, AI, blockchain, and cloud platforms to track freshness, location, and condition data, enabling predictive analytics and real-time freshness visibility.



### Business priorities

- Redesign distribution centers for storage flexibility to handle surplus and perishables efficiently.
- Include food waste reduction metrics.



### Operations

- Implement real-time cold chain monitoring and recommended pallet handling protocols, supported by staff training, to maintain product integrity during transit.

## Is it time to rethink rewards?



Including new metrics like cold-chain temperature adherence and handling protocols, in addition to traditional KPIs like delivery times and fuel efficiency, can help incentivize waste reduction.

## Benefit levers



Reduced waste costs



Faster issue resolution



Optimized handling and routing



Lower insurance and claim costs



Fewer compliance risks

## Deep dive: Hot spot 3

### Wholesale and retail

Waste here is again driven by both industry-wide practices and organization-specific decisions. Across the broader retail landscape, norms like **volume-based promotions** for products nearing expiration encourage overbuying, leaving shelves and households with goods that have little time left. The expectation of **'always-on-shelf' availability** pushes excessive stocking, while strict presentation standards and cosmetic requirements lead to unnecessary discards of perfectly edible items over minor visual flaws. **Shelf-life rules** add another layer of waste by forcing early removal of products that are still safe to consume. Moreover, redistribution faces structural barriers: **donation and revalorization often remain impractical** due to high costs and complex logistics.

At the business level, gaps in **waste categorization and lack of granular** data make analysis and external reporting unreliable, while performance metrics tend to favor sales and availability over waste reduction. Together, these factors create a cycle where operational choices and industry norms reinforce each other, amplifying waste across the retail environment.



# Where does food waste occur in retail processes – and how can we change it?



## Solutioning thought starters

To address waste caused by poor demand forecasting, strict quality standards, and a culture of overabundance, retailers are encouraged to shift toward smarter inventory intelligence and more flexible product lifecycle practices. This means digitizing freshness and markdown workflows, collaborating across the value chain to redirect surplus food, and equipping store teams to revalue and rechannel products rather than discard them.

**Some proposed steps are:**



### Data & technology

- Digitize data labels to automate markdowns, waste categorization, early spoilage alerts, and recalls.



### Collaboration & industry action

- Collaborate with other members of the supply chain to collect and redirect food for donation and revalorization, sharing logistics and effort costs.
- Discuss a proposed grade for aesthetically imperfect but edible produce in traditional grading systems.



### Operations

- Train store employees on food waste handling, including updated guides on donation, recycling, and markdown procedures.
- Revalorize food in-store.

## What else can waste be?

A brown banana isn't trash—it's banana bread.

A nicked potato isn't waste—it's breakfast hash.

An overcooked chip isn't lost—it's extra crisp.

When retailers get creative, waste becomes revenue.

[CGF Sustainable Kitchen](#)

## Benefit levers



Improved operational efficiency



Additional revenue sources



Higher product sell-through



Cost effective redistribution



Enhanced brand reputation and compliance



# Taking food and ingredient upcycling “from niche to norm”

The **Upcycling Community by Foodvalley** is an international platform that brings together a range of stakeholders, including food manufacturers, retailers, food-service companies, start-ups, technology providers, and research institutes, with the goal of accelerating the transition toward valorizing side streams into high-quality food and ingredients.

One of the greatest challenges in moving upcycled food from niche to mainstream is market adoption. To overcome this, Foodvalley’s **UPcycled4Food** initiative translates the ambitions and needs of retailers and food-service companies into actionable recommended product reformulation strategies based on upcycled ingredients. These strategies are supported by independently verified impact assessments, ensuring transparency and credibility in the value of upcycled food and ingredients.

Launched by Foodvalley in 2022, UPcycled4Food offers a structured, phased recommended approach for individual companies to shift from a supply-driven “push” model to a demand-driven “pull” model, making upcycled food and ingredients a natural choice for the market.



To learn more, visit [Upcycled4Food](#).

## Deep dive: Hot spot 4

# Food service and household consumption

Our analysis reveals several behavioral and practical drivers of household food waste. Many stem from everyday habits: **poor meal planning, limited cooking skills, and a lack of time or inspiration** often lead to unused ingredients piling up at home. **Concerns about scarcity** can **prompt over-purchasing**, increasing the risk of spoilage. **Confusion around date labels** frequently results in perfectly good food being thrown away prematurely.

**Health trends and specialized diets** add another layer—people buy niche ingredients with good intentions but fail to use them before they expire. Together, these factors drive planning gaps, misinformation, and lifestyle choices combine to drive significant waste in the home.

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**Understanding consumers through their relationship with food waste can help change their behaviors, making it easy, rewarding, and reducing food waste**



### The convenience seeker

**Profile:** 18–35 years old, urban, tech-savvy, busy or inexperienced in cooking.

**Behaviour:** Prioritises convenience, often orders on impulse; stocked ingredients lack cooking confidence or storage know-how.

**Waste Drivers:** Fresh produce spoils due to neglect; poor storage and lack of leftover use lead to additional waste.



### The time pressed family planner

**Profile:** 30–45 years old, family-focused, health-conscious.

**Behaviour:** Bulk shops to save time but forgets what's already at home; plans meals around bulk, intermittent time and energy to cook.

**Waste Drivers:** Duplicate purchases, mismatched items that don't form complete meals, and aspirational shopping result in unused ingredients and spoilage.



### The bargain hunter

**Profile:** 25–60 years old, price-sensitive, loves promotions.

**Behaviour:** Buys large quantities during discounts without considering shelf life or storage space.

**Waste Drivers:** Overstocking and short-dated deals lead to expired goods before consumption.



### The over cautious discarding

**Profile:** 20–60 years old, risk-averse, family-oriented.

**Behaviour:** Discards food early due to fear of illness or confusion over date labels.

**Waste Drivers:** Perfectly edible food thrown away prematurely.

## Solutioning thought starters

To reduce waste driven by confusion, overbuying, and lack of meal planning, brands must empower consumers with clearer information and smarter tools. This includes rethinking packaging as an educational touchpoint to improve awareness of how to reduce and prevent waste at home, more strategic use of volume-based promotions, and using data-driven insights to guide consumption habits—helping shoppers buy, store, and use food more consciously without compromising on accessibility or value. Some proposed steps are:



### Product and packaging

- Clear, understandable labelling.
- Brief, clear storage instructions on pack.
- QR codes on packaging that offer recipe ideas and additional storage and preservation tips.



### Business priorities

- Use AI to provide personal assistance in buying, storing, and cooking of food.



### Data and technology

- Use customer shopping data to provide alerts in advance of product expiration.
- Develop tools to measure the impact of consumer behavior change interventions.



Enhanced Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)



Enhanced brand trust



Improved insights



Lower returns



Reputation advantage



# Fast-track your food waste strategy

## Find out how your food waste strategy is keeping pace

The Food Waste Coalition created a simple recommended gap assessment tool that helps companies benchmark their food waste maturity across ten critical dimensions—from forecasting and inventory management to packaging, donations, and individual supplier engagement.

By comparing your roadmap against recommended best practices, you can identify blind spots such as outdated cold chain protocols, lack of real-time data tracking, or missed opportunities in revalorization and circularity.

Whether you're just starting out or trying to scale, this tool offers actionable insights to help accelerate progress.

Download the assessment now to uncover gap and strengthen your strategy.

[Retail maturity assessment](#)

[Manufacturing maturity assessment](#)



# Our Food Waste Transformation Blueprint: Sparking inspiration and driving action

Based on our research, the Coalition has developed a playbook of recommended best practices to reduce food waste. It organizes key proposed actions into three maturity stages, each with practical steps. To bring these to life, we highlight proven initiatives from members—currently averaging 6.90 kg of waste per ton of food handled—showing clear pathways for progress. This playbook aims to inspire, support adoption, and help drive action on the critical hot spots identified earlier.



# Level 1. Setting brilliant basics

As a first step, all organizations must prioritize food waste and loss as part of their sustainability efforts. Foundational tasks include creating a strong business case, securing leadership buy-in, training teams, and applying supply chain insights and circular economy principles. These capabilities will help organizations not only improve their own sustainability profile but also provide the building blocks to help tackle food waste at the macro level.

1

**Galvanize business and leadership support:** Consider business value and incentives with food waste goals to drive organizational alignment.

- **Knowledge sharing:** Kraft Heinz conducts Champions Week, an annual event where factories share their own recommended best practices and propose new projects that improve sustainability and efficiency.
- **Inspiring innovation:** [Kroger's Zero Waste Innovation Fund](#) finances scalable, outside solutions from non-profits and entrepreneurs to reduce waste and improve food security.

2

**Embrace circular economy principles:** Innovative reuse and upcycling strategies eliminate food waste and maximize value.

- **Bel** uses a dedicated machine to remove the wax from discarded Mini Babybel portions, so the cheese inside can be reused in other processed cheese recipes instead of being thrown away.
- **Tesco** converts suitable food products that are not sold or donated into pet food and animal feed.
- **Unilever** is exploring ways to repurpose co-products and unavoidable waste streams, including transforming cocoa husks into a sustainable paper-based packaging material for its chocolate products.

# 3

**Set data foundations:** Leverage data-driven tools and methodologies to go beyond compliance to generate strategic insights.

- **McCain** is piloting data methodologies to measure and quantify in-field losses and develop tools that can support real-time decision-making and targeted interventions.
- **Nestlé** conducted a comprehensive milk loss and waste mapping exercise across 30 countries to monitor and target reductions during transportation to factories and quality rejection. Their resulting Milk Loss Mapping with FLW Standard reduced milk losses by over one-third between 2017 and 2018, avoiding the emission of 27,000 tonnes of CO2.



# Level 2. From waste to value

More advanced organizations can repurpose waste into new revenue streams, whether through upcycling into new products, converting waste, or launching imperfect product lines and “best-before” campaigns. Technology and innovation, such as AI-enabled predictive modeling and dynamic pricing tools, play a key role in scaling these models.

1

**Unlock new revenue streams:** Explore innovative revenue streams that incentivize and enable food waste reduction.

- **Kellanova** is packaging darker or slightly burnt cheese crisps separately and selling them as “extra crispy” — turning a perceived defect into a premium product.
- During production line changeovers, **Kerry** is bottling and selling different flavors of leftover juice as limited “mixed fruit” blends.

2

**Innovate through technology:** Use technology to improve food preservation, tracking, upcycling, and consumer education.

- **Dynamic pricing:** Adjust product prices based on shelf life to reduce waste and maximize sell-through.
- **2D barcodes:** Improve expiry tracking and enable product-level traceability.
- **Scanning and predictive modelling:** Support better food preservation and upcycling.
- **AI and IoT sensors for tracking:** Walmart is deploying use of millions of ambient Internet of Things battery-free sensors to capture signals about temperature, location, humidity, and dwell time of its merchandise. These signals are linked

with advanced artificial intelligence systems, enabling Walmart to dramatically improve supply chain efficiency, inventory accuracy, and cold chain compliance.

- **Kerry** uses advanced predictive modelling to optimize product reformulation and extend shelf life in meat and bakery products.
- **Nestlé** piloted an AI tool to provide real-time monitoring and insights on ingredients and products that become surplus. The initial trial resulted in an 87% reduction in edible food waste at one UK factory and aims to save up to 700 tonnes of quality surplus food, preventing up to 1,400 tonnes of CO2 and saving up to £14 million.

# 3

**Activate the brand:** Showcase commitment to reducing food waste to build a conscious and responsible brand image.

- **Embracing “imperfect” produce:** Loblaw has expanded its range of no name® Naturally Imperfect™ products, a discounted line of fruits and vegetables that, while smaller in size or slightly misshapen, still taste as great as regular priced produce varieties.
- **Making waste relatable:** Carrefour is translating food waste data into emotional narratives (e.g., “meals saved” or “kilometers of baguettes wasted”) to drive staff engagement, training impact, and campaign resonance.



# Level 3. Tackling the tail

For mature organizations that have achieved substantial reductions, the final hurdle is addressing the long tail of hard-to-tackle commodities—where volumes are low, business cases are weak, and collaboration is helpful. These efforts often hinge on cross-value chain partnerships and consumer education to help drive transformation at scale.

1

**Going together vs going alone:** Utilize the power of collaboration to collectively identify and address food waste challenges.

- **TESCO**, whose CEO co-sponsors the CGF Food Waste Coalition, uses its global scale to advance public reporting and full supply-chain engagement. By promoting recommended standards such as the FLW Protocol, Tesco strengthens transparency, improves risk management, and helps partners build stronger investment cases for scaled adoption.
- **Bel** is partnering across the chain — with 3PLs, manufacturers, retailers, and food banks — to optimize logistics for redistributing unsellable but edible food.

2

**Reach economies of scale:** Scale up food waste initiatives to ensure time and cost expense is not prohibitive.

- **#TooGoodToWaste**
- CGF Food Waste Coalition members, including Tesco, MAF Retail, Migros Ticaret, Kerry, and Walmart, launched a global education campaign to inspire consumer behavior change and reduce household food waste. Working with major retailers and manufacturers, the campaign creates a shared message at scale to reduce household waste, which in turn reduces consumer returns, enhances brand trust, and lowers volatility risk for the entire supply chain.

# 3

**Inspire and support consumer behavior change:** Encourage behavior change and help consumers reduce household food waste.

- Encourage customers to set weekly “use-up days” to finish existing food.
- Use purchase data to offer personalized recipe content and offers that can reduce food waste at home.
- Use technology to create up-to-date inventories and suggest personalized recipes and offers
- **Kroger’s Chefbot** is a visual AI tool on social media that suggests recipes based on ingredients a user photographs, helping consumers use food they already have at home.



# The blueprint for action: Becoming architects of change

Our Coalition's recommended food waste blueprint represents a starting point for our industry. However, we recognize that meaningful progress will require every organization to go further—challenging assumptions, re-engineering systems, and embracing bold innovation to build a more resilient and responsible food system.

The work ahead will not be easy, but we have literal billions of reasons why we must act. We invite you to take the next step with us—helping drive the change that will strengthen your business, support your communities, and protect our planet.

Contact The Consumer Goods Forum team for more details:

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