

Wasted Food

2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose: To highlight the challenges in addressing wasted food, which includes all food that goes unsold or unused by a business or that goes uneaten, including food and inedible parts that are donated, fed to animals, repurposed to produce other products, or are composted, sent to an anaerobic digester, or a landfill.

What's at Stake?

In 2022, 38% of the U.S. food supply went uneaten or unsold; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that food waste accounts for approximately 24% of the municipal solid waste sent to landfills or incinerators. In New Hampshire, mitigating wasted food at the local and state level is imperative to strengthening local farms and businesses and addressing environmental justice concerns, including air pollution, limited landfill space, soil loss, and the food waste-food insecurity dichotomy.

Composted organic matter (food) adds nutrients to the soil. Conversely, organic matter in an anaerobic environment, like a landfill, takes up space and emits methane gas (a harmful greenhouse gas) as it slowly breaks down over decades. Wasted food reduction, redistribution, diversion, and composting saves economic and environmental resources.

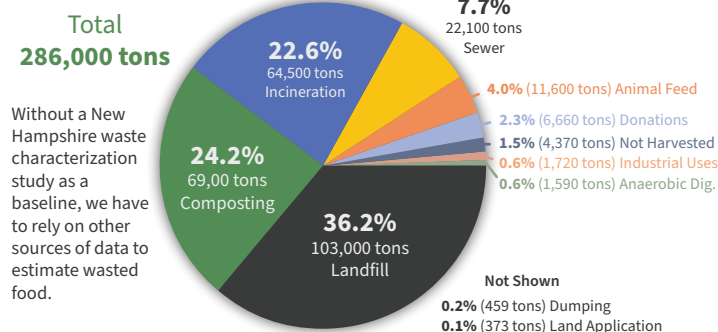
Current Conditions

New Hampshire faces a significant wasted food problem. It affects every resident, visitor, and business, as waste occurs throughout the supply chain and contributes to local environmental and economic challenges. New Hampshire still lacks comprehensive policies, infrastructure, capacity, and education to address the issue, despite significant progress in recent years.

43% of wasted food comes from households, the largest single area contributor. Simultaneously, 7.4% of New Hampshire households experience food insecurity, indicating a need for improved food access and distribution. Municipalities request support for wasted food education and technical assistance from the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and the Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRRA), but a lack of funding and capacity limit assistance. The high cost to transport and process wasted food, coupled with the negative environmental impacts of landfills, disproportionately affects residents and businesses in environmental justice areas, including the North Country and urban centers.

NHDES is engaged in New Hampshire's first statewide waste characterization study and is planning a waste generator study and infrastructure analysis. These studies will illustrate the magnitude of wasted food and prepare the state for the upcoming food waste ban for generators of 1 ton or more per week and food waste diversion grants from the NHDES Solid Waste Management Fund. The Food Waste Diversion and Composting Map by the NRRRA highlights the disproportionate access to composting across the state.

NH SURPLUS FOOD TONS BY DESTINATION, 2023



Challenges and Opportunities

CHALLENGES

- The lack of understanding about food waste reduction and date labels, the EPA's Wasted Food Scale, and per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) concerns.
- Food recovery and waste diversion programs and organizations are decentralized across the state, reducing efficacy. The burden of managing food waste is placed on individual municipalities, regardless of size or access to resources, and there is no statewide entity for the coordination of food recovery.
- There is a limited amount of low-barrier and accessible funding for education, food recovery, and waste diversion programs.
- There is a lack of infrastructure in the state, including no permitted anaerobic digesters, scattered on-site municipal composting facilities, and a lack of on-farm composting options.
- There is an absence of policies, like waste bans to guide wasted food handling for households or generators of less than 1 ton of wasted food per week.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The Solid Waste Working Group and the Zero Food Waste Coalition could serve as models for food recovery and diversion work at the state level. The Composting Association of Vermont can serve as a model for increasing on-farm composting.
- Residents and visitors have a strong desire to protect New Hampshire's natural beauty, offering an opportunity for behavior shift around how residents handle their waste.
- Collaboration between farmers and communities could both address wasted food management and support local agriculture through composting.
- Wasted food initiatives can be aligned with the Solid Waste Management Plan's goals to address environmental justice concerns.

Recommendations

- **Establish a Food Recovery and Diversion Working Group.** The working group could be created by replicating the Solid Waste Working Group's structure. The working group could increase food recovery and diversion, while reducing barriers through policies, programs, and initiatives. It could also establish practical, low-barrier funding opportunities (between \$5,000-\$50,000) to implement food recovery and food waste diversion and composting programs.
- **Expand the statewide food waste ban.** The ban expansion could incrementally include all wasted food disposal (i.e., the Massachusetts Commercial Food Material Disposal Ban and the Vermont Food Scrap Ban).
- **Invest in commercial composting and anaerobic digestion.** Invest in the development of in-state commercial composting and anaerobic digestion.
- **Replicate the Composting Association of Vermont's program on farms.** Locate, replicate, and scale the Composting Association of Vermont's program on farms in New Hampshire, including toolkits, grants, and ongoing technical assistance.

- **Launch an outreach and education program focused on wasted food awareness and prevention.** Launch an ongoing, state-led public outreach and education program focused on wasted food awareness and prevention, housed within NHDES.

SNAPSHOT: FOOD WASTE DIVERSION IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

COMMUNITIES WITH COMPOSTING &
FOOD DIVERSION RESOURCES



SOURCE: Northeast Resource Recovery Association

PERMITTED COMPOSTING FACILITIES
IN NH



SOURCE: NHDES

POUNDS GLEANED ACROSS NH
IN PAST 10 YEARS



SOURCE: NH Gleans

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For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on nhfoodalliance.org or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.