

## METRO 2025 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

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**ISSUE:** Food Waste Reduction

### **BACKGROUND:**

Food is the largest component of the region's waste stream. Almost 18% of what we send to landfill is food that decays and creates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores are responsible for more than half that amount.

In July 2018, Metro Council adopted the Business Food Waste Policy (Ordinance No. 18-1418). Pursuant to this policy, Metro works with city and county partners to support business food waste prevention, edible food donation, and food waste composting. To support the policy, Council also directed staff to develop code and administrative rules to prohibit the disposal of business food waste effective January 2025.

The Business Food Waste Policy requires city and county governments within the region to ensure that food waste collection services are provided to food-based businesses. Originally scheduled to begin in March 2020, the requirement was delayed until March 2022 due to COVID-19. All businesses generating 250 pounds of food waste or more per week are required to participate. More than 41,000 tons of food scraps were recovered in the first two years of the program. The food scraps were composted, avoiding 493 metric tons of methane emissions.

Environment Oregon and state partners have indicated a high level of interest in two state food waste policies: large business food waste regulations and uniform date labeling for food.

### Large Business Food Waste Regulations

There is interest in replicating Metro's Business Food Waste Policy statewide. The concept under consideration envisions requiring large producers of food waste to dispose of food waste separately. This would facilitate food waste going to its highest and best use rather than the landfill. DEQ would administer the program.

### Uniform Date Labeling

Food packaging date labels such as "use by," "best before," "sell by," "enjoy by", and "expires on" are generally intended to communicate food quality, not food safety. Nevertheless, date labels exert a powerful influence on consumers and food vendors. Under federal law, date labels are almost entirely unregulated. States have filled the void with a wide variety of regulations that often fail to reflect the distinction between food safety and food quality. The extreme variations demonstrate how our current system creates confusion for consumers while not necessarily improving food safety. This ultimately results in a significant waste of wholesome food.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Support legislation that reduces food waste and prioritizes pathways of food disposal for the highest and best use.

**LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:**

California Governor Gavin Newsom signed the nation's first mandatory food date labeling reform bill at the end of September 2024. Assembly Bill 660 standardizes confusing date labels that can lead to unnecessary wasted food. The new law requires manufacturers to use the same phrase for date labels across their product.

While Oregon has looked at other methods to address food waste reductions, neither of these concepts have been considered by the Oregon Legislature before.

**OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES:**

Key parties with a high level of interest include local governments both individually and through the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) and the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC); persons and companies in the solid waste and recycling field both individually and through the Oregon Refuse and Recycling Association (ORRA) and the Association of Oregon Recyclers (AOR); the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Environment Oregon; Businesses both individually and through NorthWest Grocery Retail Association and Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association.

**IMPACT IF PROPOSED ACTION OCCURS:**

Supports the Regional Waste Plan's goals and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Could create broader markets and redundancies for a sustainable food waste system.

**RACIAL EQUITY IMPACTS**

N/A

**CLIMATE IMPACTS**

Today, an estimated one-third of all the food produced in the world goes to waste. That's equal to about 1.3 billion tons of fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, seafood, and grains that never leave the farm, get lost or spoiled during distribution, or are thrown away in hotels, grocery stores, restaurants, schools, or home kitchens. It could be enough calories to feed every undernourished person on the planet.

Wasted food isn't just a social or humanitarian concern; it's an environmental one. When we waste food, we also waste the energy and water it takes to grow, harvest, transport, and package it. And if food goes to the landfill and rots, it produces methane—a greenhouse gas even more potent than carbon dioxide. About 6%-8% of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced if we stop wasting food. In the U.S. alone, the production of lost or wasted food generates the equivalent of 32.6 million cars' worth of greenhouse gas emissions.

