

# Food Waste Avoidance Benchmark Study

At a glance – Save it

LOVE  
FOOD  
hate waste

## How we store our food can affect its freshness, appearance and shelf-life.

We store food incorrectly and waste food when we:

- do not know how to store different foods correctly
- are confused about 'use by' and 'best before' date labels
- throw away items that appear wilted or blemished
- forget about leftovers in the fridge.



We can reduce food waste by:

- storing food correctly
- checking 'use by' and 'best before' dates when purchasing
- using wilted and blemished vegetable and fruit in recipes
- ensuring leftovers are eaten the next day or frozen after cooking for an easy mid week meal.

### Background

To better understand community knowledge, attitudes and behaviours about household food waste 1,200 NSW households were surveyed as part of the *Food Waste Avoidance Benchmark Study 2009*. This study is the start of a series of analyses to monitor food waste related knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the NSW community over three years.

**At a glance – Save it** highlights findings from the social research into food storage behaviours in NSW.

### Knowing how to store different types of food, how long it will last and having a variety of storage containers is an easy way to reduce food waste

97 per cent of respondents believe they store their food correctly and poor storage does not contribute to food waste.

Respondents who did identify poor storage as the main reason for food waste said they were:

- uncertain about how to store different types of food
- lacked time to organise correct storage of food
- not using food before the 'use by' or 'best before' date
- lacked appropriate storage containers
- did not read the storage instructions on the packaging.

### Leftovers are stored for future meals but then often thrown away

Each year NSW households throw away an estimated \$694 million worth of leftovers. While most of us store leftovers in the fridge almost half are eventually thrown away. The same problem occurs when we save our leftovers in the freezer, almost a third are thrown away.

We don't use leftovers because we:

- forget about the stored food
- do not like eating leftovers
- have health concerns about consuming leftovers.

Forgetting about leftovers results in unnecessary food waste. A simple 'stocktake' of your fridge every few days and your freezer once a month is a great way to ensure that your leftovers are not wasted.



## Our understanding of 'use by' and 'best before' dates

Responses to 'use by' and 'best before' date questions	'Use By' Per cent (%) yes	'Best Before' Per cent (%) yes
Foods must be eaten or thrown away by this date	64	23
Foods are still safe to eat after this date as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished	29	70
Foods must be sold at a discount after this date	4	4
Food tastes best before this date	0	1
Other	3	2

### Many people don't understand date labels resulting in food waste

64 per cent of respondents know the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' dates. Ensuring that everyone in the house understands date labels will help to reduce food waste.

Foods that should not be consumed after a certain date for health and safety reasons, such as ready-to-eat chilled meals, must have a **'use by'** date.

A product will remain fresh and of good quality right up to the **'best before'** date, and sometimes beyond, if it is properly stored, both at home and at the supermarket.

### The way we store our food can affect its appearance and shelf life

We often waste food that has become mouldy, wilted and blemished due to age and poor storage. Our attitudes towards food at the end of its life can also impact on the amount wasted.

43 per cent of respondents indicated that they throw out fruit and vegetables that are blemished and wilted.

Almost one third of respondents do not mind what fruit and vegetables look like and try to use them anyway.

34 per cent of men compared to 29 per cent of women are more likely to indicate that they do not mind what fruit or vegetables look like.

### People are prepared to change the way they store food to avoid food waste

Saving leftovers, storing food correctly and maximising food freshness and longevity will result in less food being wasted. Already, we know that the majority of the community is confident in storing food correctly. Encouragingly, 54 per cent of the respondents are willing to use leftovers for other meals. We just need to remember to use them and not forget about them in the fridge.

### Love Food Hate Waste

To tackle household food waste, the NSW Government has developed the *Love Food Hate Waste* program. The program aims to raise awareness about the environmental and financial impacts of food waste in NSW and to reduce the amount of 'good' food being sent to landfill. By promoting easy and practical solutions for buying, cooking and storing food, *Love Food Hate Waste* will help the NSW community to reduce food waste, save money and our environment.

For more information, please visit  
**[lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au](http://lovefoodhatewaste.nsw.gov.au)**

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