Event Catering Food Waste Reduction Guideline

FOOD SAVING EVENT

Event catering forms part of the HORECA[1] sector with a unique supply chain where the final client (the eating guest) is typically not in the position of ordering catering services. This is because the "paying client" is usually a company or organisation running the event. This is a unique situation, which may lead to the paradox of "oversupply by virtual needs", which may ultimately result in food waste.

This guide created by the "Food Value Forum" aims to provide practical advice in the planning and execution phases of event organisation. With the help of the guide, the amount of extra food and therefore food waste can be reduced.

Drawing on our experiences of running "Food Saving Events", we are aiming to develop a new "normative" approach, which, we hope, will be widely implemented in Hungary, as well as in other countries.

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[1] Horeca is the sector of the food service industry that consists of establishments which prepare and serve food and beverages

1. Planning and preparation

The aim of reducing food waste should be included in the preliminary project plans. A team member, who will be responsible for this area, should be nominated.

If needed, for example in the case the event is taking place for the first time and/or it is a larger event, it is strongly recommended to involve an outside adviser in the process.

Choosing partners

When recruiting partners for the event, especially those who are going to be responsible for catering and communication, it is important to explain your aim of reducing food waste, and to ask for the co-operation of the partner before deciding who to work with.

The above aim is important even when choosing the event's venue, particularly if the venue has an exclusive catering supplier (or multiple suppliers). In these situations, it is recommended to choose venue and suppliers together.

Pricing and planning

As the price plan for the catering of an event is non-linear, instead of a price per capita pricing model a fixed "base price" and an additional price per capita calculation is recommended. This will avoid conflicts of interest between the customer and the supplier.

When choosing the format, the aim and the venue, etc. of the event, it is vital to take food waste into consideration. (e.g. a "finger food" type of catering served on trays can create considerably less waste in comparison with a self-serve buffet, where significantly less plate-waste is produced).

During the planning, it is worth examining not only the content of the menu from this perspective, but also elements such as the preparation, serving, measurement, and the treatment of leftovers.

Who are we cooking for?

Before planning the catering, it is worth sharing as much information with the suppliers as possible regarding the guests attending the event (including age, gender ratio, nationality, and religion for instance). If possible (for example on their application/registration form), it is recommended to ask guests about any special dietary requirements too (e.g. vegetarian, allergies, etc).

Do not overestimate the number of guests. Although some may decide to attend at the last minute, the natural drop-out should be considered as well. If any historic data is available from past events, for example the number of registrations vs those who attended, then this can potentially be used during the event planning.

Before the deadline given by the suppliers for the last modification, it is highly recommended to send out a final enquiry form to the attendees, in order to filter out those who can no longer attend. This means that extra waste due to no-shows can be avoided.

Menu and technology

If possible, avoiding a menu with a wide range of options can help reduce food waste. Incorporating a 'buffer' into expected numbers increases the risk of food waste and also reduces the chance of being able to offer the leftovers to charities,. This is especially true for smaller events of less than 1000 attendees.

While planning the menu it is recommended to avoid perishable food (such as dishes including raw fish or raw eggs), especially during the summer. If they are still served, it is recommended to prepare amounts that are definitely going to be consumed during the event, since the rescuing possibilities for these products (or possibilities for their later consumption) is fairly limited.

When designing the menu, it is also important to keep an eye on the possibility of re-use (or donation) of the leftovers in terms of packaging. It is important to consider and aim for those food types which are easy to re-package. For example, when the food is served in small cups it is very difficult to re- package for later consumption.

Where it is hard to predict numbers for an event (for example in the case of outside events), planning ahead with the catering partner can minimise food waste in the worst case scenario (for example preserving freshly made dishes through the use of Cook&Chill[2] technology).

Weather forecasts should be regularly checked before the event, and, if necessary, the menu modified in consideration of the conditions.

The greatest advantage of Cook&Chill technology is that the spare food remains in a chilled state in the transport chain, and can therefore easily be donated or saved for later consumption. This method is recommended whenever the technology is available. Equally, where food is used for decoration, an easily consumable form is recommended(e.g. vegetable sculptures should be avoided).

Saving the leftovers

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[2] Cook&Chill refers to a process where the food is cooled down to a safe temperature after preparation and heated on-demand, continuously during the food service

Incorporating how leftovers can be used into the planning process is highly recommended The possibilities include:

- ✓ Meals for the staff
- ✓ Offering the leftovers to the guests/staff members
- ✓ Donating the leftovers

For the above, it is important to arrange the communication beforehand (on-site communication and/or "emergency" communication with the partner who takes the supplies away, with suitable contacts). The logistics should also be prearranged (packaging materials, staff, thermo-boxes, time etc).

The food which is not suitable for human consumption can be used as animal feed and/or for composting or biofuel production. It is also important to find partners in these industries before the event.

2. Execution

Preparation and serving

Whenever possible, replacing self-service with service by staff members is highly recommended. This is because food that comes in direct contact with the consumers is, considering food safety regulations, qualified as unsafe, and cannot be donated, even if it remains on the buffet table.

If a buffet is being held, serving the smallest possible amount of food at once and providing a continuous supply during the event is recommended. During larger events it is a good idea to reduce the food quantity and the size of the serving surface after the larger demand at the beginning of the service has subsided (for example by reducing the number of serving tables, or placing halving inserts to the dishes).

It is highly recommended to use small plates for serving the food, especially for the main course. This could possibly encourage the guests to put less on their plates.

When plate service is used, preparing two different amounts of food/ portion sizes from which the guests can choose is recommended.

When the dish consists of different foods, it is recommended to use the smallest possible amounts. This will allow the guests to taste as much food as possible while avoiding leftovers.

It is important to pay attention to how you store the food which has not yet been served (keeping it warm or freezing it, etc).

Involving the guests

Before the event, it is useful to inform the guests about the importance of reducing food waste and how they can be involved in the process. It is important for the guests to understand and agree on this aim, so that they become partners in reaching it. They will also understand that food waste reduction means a cost saving for the organisers (a similar example is towels in hotels, which guests do not always ask to be changed every day).

The main aim of involving the guests is to reduce the amount of plated leftovers. In order to achieve this it is important to encourage them to only ask for the amount of food they will definitely be able to consume (e.g. by displaying informative materials on the serving/buffet tables).

When considering drinks, we also need to provide the guests with the opportunity to ask for a smaller amount. Drinks count as food in this case, therefore awareness raising around waste should also be focused here.

3. Measurement and evaluation

After the event, it is important to measure the amount of food and drink which was not consumed the guests, taking separately:

- ✓ dishes that can still be consumed- if these are used by the catering partner or donated by the organisers, this does not count as real waste
- ✓ dishes which cannot still be consumed (counting food and drink separately, if possible)

Measuring provides valuable information for lessening the amount of food waste. For further comparison, it is worth collecting and storing archived data from past events in one place.

During the evaluation of the event, it is best practice to compare the results to previous events which will allow you to make calculations for increasing further effectivity.

When the event was a success in terms of food waste reduction, it is a good idea to communicate this to the participants as well – they have also taken part in this achievement.

4. Extra possibilities

In cases where the organisers are more willing (for example when the event is connected to waste reduction) it is possible to risk not ordering any extra food, alternatively for any "emergency" extra food to be that which can always be saved (e.g. packaged biscuits). Highlighting that some of the elements of the menu may

run out during the meal can also be a part of this. In these cases, communication to the guests is even more important.

Choosing a "flexible menu" option means that the catering partner is able to use food or fresh products that are available to them or their suppliers at the time of the event (for example from the preparation of a previous event), that would otherwise end up as waste. A flexible menu does not necessarily mean a compromise in quality, only that some parts of the dishes may change, keeping the original aim (e. g. vegetarian dishes cannot be replaced by meat).

During the event it is also possible to use the "doggy bag" solution, where the leftovers are packaged for further consumption by the guests. To be able to use this method, it is important to prepare the packing materials beforehand, and the time and place for carrying out the packing should also be taken into consideration. Of course, food safety regulations need to be met, therefore food that easily expires cannot be recovered this way. Apart from the ingredients the food contains, food safety and therefore the option of creating a "doggy bag" is also influenced by the circumstances of the event (e.g. temperature, will the guests leave immediately after the event or will they take part in other programs? etc).

5. Using the Food Saving Event logo

Events that are organised according to this guide can gain extra attention by using a logo during the communication of the event. English and Hungarian versions of the logo are available in the appendix of this document.

The logo can be used with the following restrictions:

1. The event must be registered if the organiser is going to use and follow this food waste reduction guide during the event organisation.

   It is possible to register via this link:
   https://goo.gl/forms/Ax7NYqvYSHDISQX22

2. The logo must be used in the communications of the event (it is not obligatory to use this on every single communication material, but it is important to inform the guests about food saving during the event, and beforehand).

3. Measuring food waste during catering (with the contribution of the supplier) and forwarding the results to the respective database of the Food Value Forum. It is important to note that uploaded data from single events will not be published, the values will only be used in an aggregated form.

6. Closing words

We hope that this guide provides a useful and actionable set of ideas and recommendations. Please help us to grow and improve by sharing your results and experiences, and any further recommendations that would contribute to this document.

Contact e-mail: forum@elelmiszerbank.hu

This guideline was prepared under the umbrella of the "Food Value – Hungarian Forum for Decreasing Food Losses and Food Waste" (www.azelelmiszerertek.hu) with the coordination of the Hungarian Food Bank Association (www.elelmiszerbank.hu), and the support of the EU REFRESH project (www.eu-refresh.org). In the preparations, our partners were HORECA Marketing Klub (www.horecamarketing.hu), BCSDH (www.bcsdh.hu), the HORECA working group of the "Wasteless" project (www.maradeknelkul.hu).

Appendix I – Food Saving Event quick checklist

To do/to be decided:

- ✓ Registering on the database of Food Saving Events
- ✓ Choosing cooperative suppliers
- ✓ Providing detailed information to the catering suppliers
- ✓ Using a flexible menu offer, optimised to the number of guests
- ✓ Last-minute check of the number of attendees and informing the suppliers
- ✓ Plan for saving the waste
- ✓ Economic servings and sizes
- ✓ Involving and informing consumers, use of logo
- ✓ Measurement, evaluation, sending of data

Tasks for your catering suppliers (it is worth communicating this when asking for an offer):

- ✓ Providing and serving a menu that fits the requirements of a Food Saving Event
- ✓ Possibility to accommodate changes in the number of attendees up to 48 hours before the event
- ✓ Providing a plan for recovery and saving of the leftovers
- ✓ Measurement, and providing information using the form given in Appendix II in this guide

Appendix II – Monitoring sheet template

(For the database of Food Value Forum. Data submitted to the forum will not be published individually, only in an aggregated form)

Organizer (name of the company):

Name of contact person:

E-mail address of contact person:

Phone number of contact person:

Title of the event:

Event date:

Catering supplier (name of the company):

Data collected during the event

		Food (kg)	Beverages (l)
A	Amount prepared for the event		
	Amount of food surplus/waste according to the form of usage/disposal		
B	Amount of food and drinks that can be used for later events (unpacked and/or possible to re-use)		
C	Food and drinks not consumed by the guests but used for human consumption (e.g. meals for the staff, doggy bag, donation, etc.)		
D	Surplus/waste forwarded to animal feed (e.g. zoos, animal shelters)		
E	Waste forwarded for composting/renewable energy utilisation (e.g. bio ethanol, bio gas)		
F	Amount forwarded for waste disposal (E.g.: protein production, communal waste)		
G	Other: (please specify)		
	Food and waste consumed according to the aim (calculated value)		
H	Amount of food consumed by guests of the event (formula: H = A-B-C-D-E-F-G)		

Other comments (experience, questions, concerns/problems, recommendations, feedback from the attendees)

Please submit the completed form within 15 days of the end of the event to: forum@elelmiszerbank.hu

Appendix III – Food Saving Event logos

Hungarian:

English:

If the logo is needed in the form of a vector image, please contact us: forum@elelmiszerbank.hu