Food Waste by Sector: Retail

Loss and waste happen across the entire food system—this is a snapshot of food waste in the retail sector. All estimates come from ReFED and are based on 2023 data *(the most recent available)*. For more facts and figures, visit the ReFED Insights Engine.

1 **73.9 million tons of surplus food* were generated across the entire food system in 2023.**

2 **In the retail sector, 4.45 million tons of surplus food were generated, accounting for 5.6% of the total.**
- Of that amount, 2.6 million became food waste.
- 51.6% of food wasted in the retail sector—1.34 million tons—went to landfill.

3 **Surplus food from retail accounts for 14.5 million metric tons of CO_2e released into the atmosphere per year.**
- That's equivalent to each person in the U.S. driving to the grocery store 14 times.
- Methane emissions—which are more potent than other greenhouse gas emissions— generated from the retail sector equal 162k MT per year.

4 **Surplus food from retail was valued at $28.7 billion dollars in 2023.**
- That's equivalent to nearly 3% of retail sales.
- Food sent to landfill has the highest valuation at $8.49 million.

5 **The retail sector wasted 1.06 trillion gallons of water in 2023.**
- That's equivalent to nearly 200 showers per person in the U.S.

6 **The equivalent of 5.97 billion meals went unsold or uneaten as a result of surplus food in the retail sector in 2023.**
- The top three food types that go to waste are:
  - *Produce*: 837,000 tons
  - *Dairy & Eggs*: 339,000 tons
  - *Dry Goods*: 320,000 tons

To see solutions for retailers, visit ReFED's Solutions Database. To learn more about reducing retail food waste, visit the Retailer Recommendations page on the ReFED website.

*Surplus food is food that goes unsold or unused by a business or that goes uneaten at home—including food and inedible parts (e.g., peels, pits, bones) that are donated, fed to animals, repurposed to produce other products, composted, anaerobically digested, or otherwise wasted. ReFED bases its analysis on surplus food instead of food loss and waste in order to capture food that goes to donation, animal feed, and industrial uses, as a more holistic view of the food system.