U.S Food Waste Commitment Landscape

MARCH 2026

Executive Summary

Nearly three-quarters of major U.S. food companies acknowledge food waste as an issue in their public reporting. Yet fewer than one in three have set a quantitative target to reduce it.

This inaugural landscape examines public food waste commitments across 75 parent companies with significant U.S. operations, spanning Retail, Foodservice Contractors, Quick-Service Restaurants (QSR), and Manufacturing/CPG. Using publicly available disclosures as of February 2026, ReFED coded each company into one of four tiers reflecting increasing commitment maturity: no mention of food waste, acknowledgment without a measurable target, diversion-based goals including food waste, and quantitative reduction targets.

Total Industry Commitments by Tier

Tier 1: 26.7% (20/75) do not specifically reference food waste in public reporting.

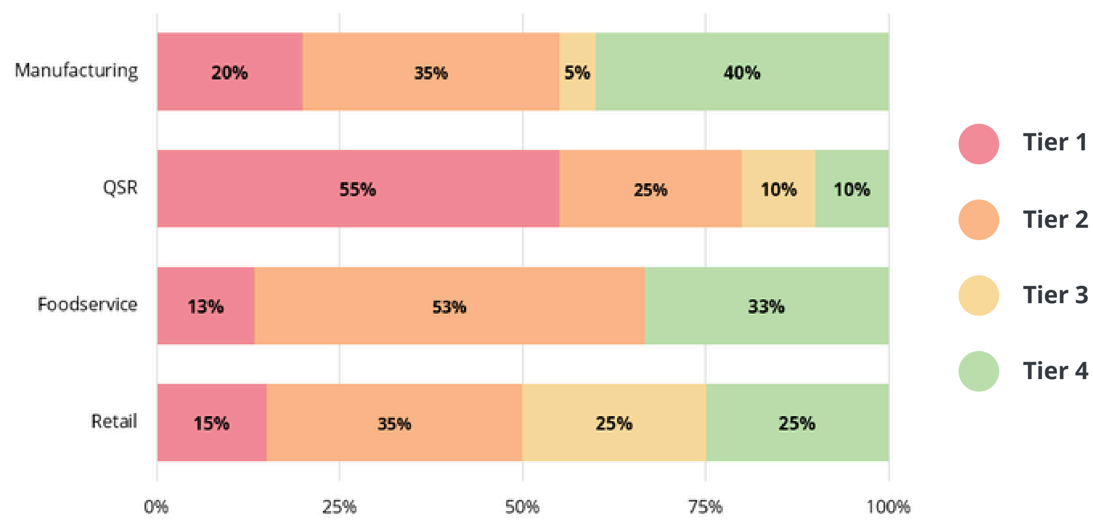
Tier 2: 36.0% (27/75) mention food waste but do not have established targets.

Tier 3: 10.7% (8/75) have diversion-based goals.

Tier 4: 26.7% (20/75) have quantitative food waste reduction targets.

Companies were categorized into four tiers reflecting increasing levels of commitment maturity. See the Appendix for full details on Scope & Methodology and the Commitment Criteria Framework.

Chart 1 | Food Waste Commitments by Sector



Findings suggest a gap between acknowledgement and commitment to reducing food waste. Across the full sample, 55 of 75 companies (73%) (Chart 1) reference food waste as a distinct issue in their public reporting. Measurable targets are far less common. Twenty-eight companies (37%) disclose a measurable target of any kind, and only 20 (27%) disclose a quantitative reduction target. The plurality of the sample, 27 companies (36%), sits in the middle: they acknowledge food waste and describe initiatives but have not disclosed a metric or timeframe.

Sector differences are pronounced. Manufacturing/CPG leads on reduction targets: 40% of companies in the sample disclose a target, and their disclosures more frequently include a baseline year, metric, and target date. QSR shows the highest percentage (55%) of companies that do not reference food waste at all in reviewed public materials. Retail shows broad acknowledgment (85%) but splits evenly between diversion-based and reduction-based targets. Foodservice contractors[1] acknowledge food waste at high rates (86%) while disclosing measurable targets at lower ones (33%).

[1] Foodservice contractors are external companies hired to manage and operate dining services at institutional, governmental, commercial, or industrial locations.

The Case for Tracking Corporate Food Waste Commitments

Food waste is one of the most tractable levers in the U.S. food system. It accounts for a material share of landfill volume, greenhouse gas emissions, and economic loss across production, distribution, and consumption. Corporate actors control or influence the majority of food system-related environmental and economic impacts, and their commitments shape societal progress toward sustainable food system outcomes.

Despite this opportunity, food waste reporting frameworks and disclosures often lack clarity and consistency. The absence of standardized reporting allows companies to describe their commitments and progress toward food waste reduction in different ways, making comparisons across sectors difficult.

This report is a first step toward food waste reporting clarity. ReFED constructed a four-tier, standardized framework, applied it to 75 companies[2] with significant market presence across four sectors, and produced what is, to our knowledge, the first cross-sector landscape of publicly disclosed food waste commitments among major U.S. food companies. By establishing a repeatable baseline that tracks disclosure maturity over time, we hope to see businesses moving beyond recognizing food waste to setting measurable targets and taking prioritized actions to reduce their food waste generated.

This landscape is limited to what companies disclose publicly. It does not evaluate operational performance, infer internal programs, or verify reported data. Within that scope, the clearest opportunity is for the 36% of companies that acknowledge food waste but fall short of making commitments to bolster their efforts with measurable, time-bound outcomes. ReFED intends to update this baseline annually as disclosures evolve.

Findings

Across the food industry, acknowledging food waste in public commitments is common, but committing to food waste reduction in a meaningful way is not. Our research shows that 73% of companies reference food waste in public reporting, but only 27% disclose a quantitative reduction target. The majority of food businesses sit in the middle: 36% acknowledge food waste and have diversion or donation initiatives but have not set a measurable goal.

The gap between acknowledgment and commitment is not uniform across sectors. Before we outline sector-specific commitment trends, it's important to identify two factors that drive commitment maturity:

- **Sector-specific factors** include how a company generates and handles food, how much visibility it has into its own waste streams, and where it sits in the supply chain. Each defines a sector's foundational relationship to food waste and likely influences how far its companies go in formalizing reduction commitments.
- **Company-specific factors** include region-specific regulations, how a company prioritizes food waste relative to broader sustainability goals, what financial and operational resources it can direct toward measurement, and broader technology capabilities that enable measurement. A sector can have favorable conditions for commitment adoption, but these factors likely explain differences between companies.

[2] See the Sector Profiles section for more information on the companies included.

Chart 2 | Food Waste Commitments and Subcategories by Sector

Sector	Retail	Foodservice	QSR	Manufacturing	All Sector
Food Waste Not Mentioned	**15% (3/20)**	**13% (2/15)**	**55% (11/20)**	**20% (4/20)**	**27% (20/75)**
Food Waste in Public Reporting	**35% (7/20)**	**53% (8/15)**	**25% (5/20)**	**35% (7/20)**	**36% (27/75)**
Donation Program	71% (5/7)	50% (4/8)	60% (3/5)	86% (6/7)	67% (18/27)
Diversion Program	71% (5/7)	75% (6/8)	0% (0/5)	71% (5/7)	59% (16/27)
Diversion-Based Goals	**25% (5/20)**	**0% (0/15)**	**10% (2/20)**	**5% (1/20)**	**11% (8/75)**
Zero-Waste-to-Landfill Target	60% (3/5)	0% (0/0)	0% (0/2)	100% (1/1)	50% (4/8)
Other Diversion Goal	40% (2/5)	0% (0/0)	100% (2/2)	0% (0/1)	50% (4/8)
Donation Program	100% (5/5)	0% (0/0)	100% (2/2)	0% (0/1)	88% (7/8)
Quantitative Reduction Target	**25% (5/20)**	**33% (5/15)**	**10% (2/20)**	**40% (8/20)**	**27% (20/75)**

Sector Trends

Manufacturing showed the highest concentration of mature, quantitative waste reduction targets at 40% (Chart 2). Eighty percent of manufacturers in our analysis acknowledged food waste as a distinct topic, with 5% setting diversion-based goals and 35% having no measurable targets. Of those without a measurable target, 86% had donation programs, and 71% had a diversion program.

Foodservice had the greatest proportion of companies that acknowledged food waste at 86%, including 33% setting quantitative reduction targets. Of the 53% without measurable targets, 50% had donation programs, and 75% had a diversion program.

The retail sector was fairly evenly distributed across all tiers, with 85% in tiers two through four. Fifty percent of companies had measurable targets, 25% with diversion-based goals and 25% with quantitative reduction targets. Of the 35% who did not have measurable targets, 71% had donation and diversion programs.

QSR lagged behind the industry with only 45% of companies acknowledging food waste as a distinct topic; 20% had measurable goals, 10% with diversion-based goals and 10% with quantitative reduction targets, and 25% did not have measurable targets. Of those, 60% had donation programs.

Opportunities

Quantitative food waste reduction targets represent the strongest and most effective approach to addressing food waste, because they prioritize preventing waste generation. (Diversion-based goals address surplus food only after it could be used for its highest and best purpose.) Preventing waste at its source delivers the greatest environmental benefits and minimizes downstream disposal impacts. For a business, prevention offers the greatest net benefit, as reducing wasted food improves operational efficiency and strengthens margins.

A key difference between diversion-based goals and quantitative reduction targets is the type of measurement they require. Diversion goals focus on tracking where surplus food is sent, while reduction targets require companies to measure the causes of waste generation. Identifying these drivers would allow businesses—such as retailers, who have the highest concentration of diversion-based goals—to address inefficiencies and implement prevention strategies.

Making this shift in measurement is a critical step in moving from Tier 3 to Tier 4 commitments.

Similarly, evolving measurement technologies in the foodservice and QSR sectors are making it easier for operators to track waste generation and identify reduction opportunities. For QSR in particular, standardized menu offerings can further support the implementation of forecasting and inventory management tools.

Manufacturers are also well positioned to adopt quantitative targets, as a large portion of surplus often occurs within controlled production environments. This increases the feasibility of implementing targeted interventions such as line optimization and byproduct utilization. Together these trends indicate that many companies across the food system already have the operational foundations needed to advance toward more ambitious, prevention-focused food waste commitments.

ReFED Business Services

Featuring custom analytics, capacity building, and advisory services, ReFED's Business Services offerings give businesses the insights and analysis they need to create and execute effective food waste reduction strategies. Drawing on our extensive experience across the food industry, we deliver specialized support and recommendations paired with sector-specific insights and best practices.

Learn more at refed.org/our-work/business-services.

Recommendations & Looking Ahead

The findings of this landscape analysis point to a clear opportunity to elevate the ambition and consistency of food waste commitments across the U.S. food system. For companies, moving beyond diversion toward prevention-focused, quantitative reduction targets represents the next stage of commitment maturity. Establishing time-bound goals with defined baselines and transparent reporting practices would strengthen credibility and better align corporate action with global best practices.

There are opportunities for companies to strengthen their food waste commitments and public reporting, with the first step being measuring food waste within their business today. Looking ahead in the year, ReFED will publish guidelines on measurement methodology to help companies better track their food waste, as well as a maturity assessment for food businesses to compare their internal processes against industry-leading practices.

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Learn more about ReFED's Business Services program and resources for food businesses by contacting David Ly.

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Appendix

Scope & Methodology

The analysis covers 75 companies with operations in the U.S., distributed across four sectors: Retail, Foodservice, QSR, and Manufacturing/CPG. Companies were selected based on factors such as revenue and national footprint to provide a cross-sector analysis of organizations with significant market presence. Due to the concentrated nature of the foodservice industry, only 15 companies were included in analysis compared to 20 companies in all other sectors.

The most recent publicly available sustainability or ESG reporting (2024 or 2025) was reviewed for each company, supplemented by information from corporate websites, annual reports, and public statements where relevant. Some companies included in analysis may have internal-only food waste commitments which would not be reflected in this report. Analysis focuses specifically on parent-company-level commitments. In cases where companies operate globally, global commitments were included if it appeared that U.S. operations were also considered under the goal.

Each company was evaluated using a standardized Commitment Criteria Framework designed to ensure consistent comparison across sectors. The framework assessed whether food waste is explicitly mentioned, the existence and type of target, and whether they focus on diversion or reduction. This structured approach allows for a transparent and comparable view of commitment maturity across the industry.

See our Commitment Criteria Framework on the following page.

Sector Profiles

Retail

The scope of this research includes both national and regional grocery retailers which make up 72.6% of the U.S. grocery retail market share (Chain Store Guides).

Foodservice

The scope of this research focuses on foodservice contractors and based on the market share data available, the companies included represent at least 86.7% of the market (IBISWorld).

QSR (Fast Food and Fast Casual)

The scope of this research includes a subset of quick-service restaurants, specifically fast food and fast casual. The companies included accounted for 55.4% of total fast food and fast casual U.S. sales in 2024 (Technomic).

Manufacturing

The scope of this research includes a targeted set of leading manufacturers and producers selected based on their scale and influence in food departments with the greatest contribution to unsold food based on publicly available information.

Commitment Criteria Framework

Companies were categorized into four tiers reflecting increasing levels of commitment maturity. Tiers are mutually exclusive and represent the highest level of commitment identified in public reporting. Some tiers include subcategories, such as donation programs (e.g., food rescue or redistribution partnerships) and/or diversion programs (e.g., composting, anaerobic digestion, or landfill diversion efforts), providing further analysis into what topics are being discussed by food businesses.

Tier 1	Food Waste Not Mentioned	**Companies that do not explicitly reference food waste, food loss, or surplus food in their most recent reporting.** May address broader environmental impacts, but food waste is not identified as a distinct issue.
Tier 2	Food Waste in Public Reporting	**Companies that acknowledge food waste and describe initiatives to prevent, rescue, and/or recycle surplus food and do not have established measurable targets.** Subcategories include: a donation program and/or a diversion program.
Tier 3	Diversion-Based Goals	**Companies with diversion-based commitments, including zero-waste-to-landfill goals, landfill diversion rate targets, or percentage of facilities diverting waste.** Commitments generally address how waste is managed rather than reduced. Subcategories include: specific type of diversion commitment and a donation program.
Tier 4	Quantitative Reduction Target	**Companies with the most advanced level of commitment: quantitative food waste reduction targets.** Commitments typically include a defined baseline year, a percentage reduction goal, and a target year. Companies with these targets often also report diversion and donation initiatives; therefore, additional subcategories were not applied.