



Kai Commitment

Leading Action on Food Waste

Research and learnings to drive understanding and identify future opportunities.

Prepared by PSL | November 2025



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LEADING ACTION ON FOOD WASTE



Background

New Zealand currently lacks comprehensive data on how food businesses perceive and manage food loss and waste (FLW), which limits the ability to design effective, strategic interventions. While most attention has focused on consumer waste, systemic supply chain FLW, where the greatest potential for impact exists, remains poorly understood.

To address this gap, initial qualitative interviews with five businesses were conducted to inform the design of a quantitative research stage. The quantitative stage was designed to provide a benchmark measure that can track national progress on business FLW practices and guide targeted action.

The overarching objective of the research is to understand the attitudes, practices, and barriers of medium and large food businesses regarding FLW, in order to inform sector-wide action, innovation, and policy development.

In this survey, food waste is used as a broad term for all food that doesn't end up being sold as it was first intended, leaves the supply chain during primary production, manufacturing/processing, transport, wholesale or retail, and is instead donated, repurposed for humans, recovered for energy or nutrients, or otherwise disposed of.

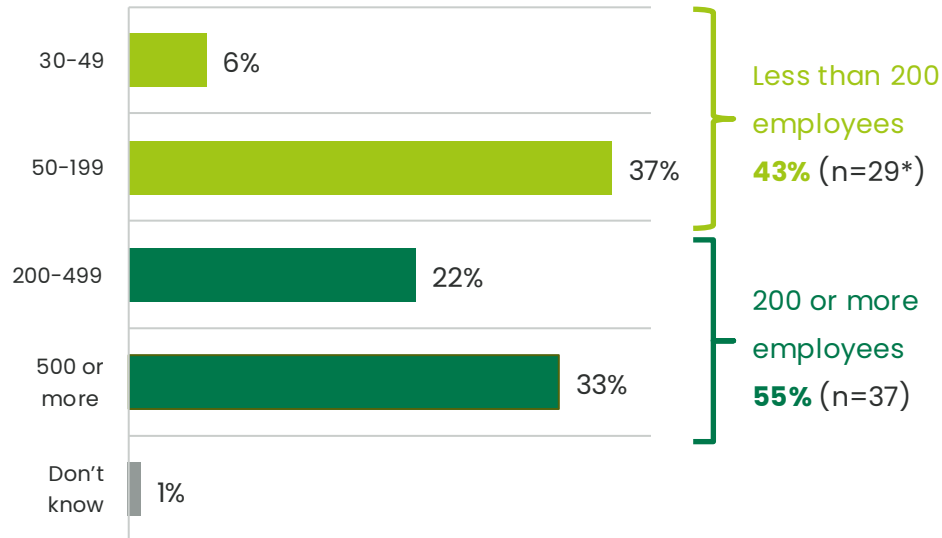
The research was carried out between 30 September and 14 November using a mix of telephone interviews and online surveys. In total, 56 businesses with over 30 employees completed the survey, with an additional 11 providing partial responses.



Survey sample

EMPLOYEE NUMBERS AND INDUSTRY

Number of employees



INDUSTRY OPERATE IN	%
Primary industry	35%
Institutional food service / retirement / hospitality	26%
Manufacturing / processing	18%
Wholesale / retail	14%
Transportation / logistics	2%
Other	5%

Q. Approximately how many people does your business employ in New Zealand (including seasonal workers)? Total: n=67, * Low base (<30)

Q. In which industry does your business operate? Total: n=57



Survey sample

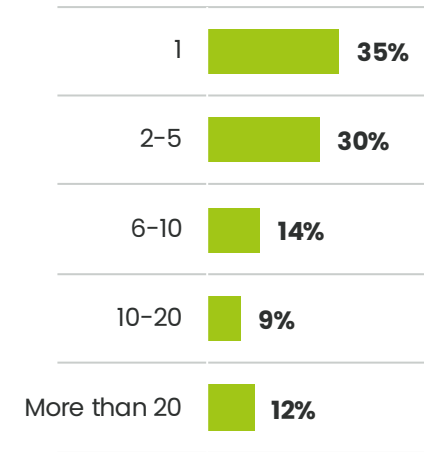
REGION & NUMBERS OF SITES

All regions were represented, with Auckland (58%) and Canterbury (37%) hosting the largest share of businesses.

On average, businesses operate in four regions, and 75% have five or fewer sites across New Zealand.

REGION	%
Northland	25%
Auckland	58%
Waikato	28%
Bay of Plenty	28%
Gisborne	19%
Hawke's Bay	25%
Taranaki	21%
Manawatu – Whanganui	23%
Wellington	28%
Wairarapa	12%
Tasman/Nelson/Marlborough	33%
West Coast	16%
Canterbury	37%
Otago	26%
Southland	19%

NUMBER OF SITES IN NEW ZEALAND



Q. What region(s) do you operate in? Total: n=57

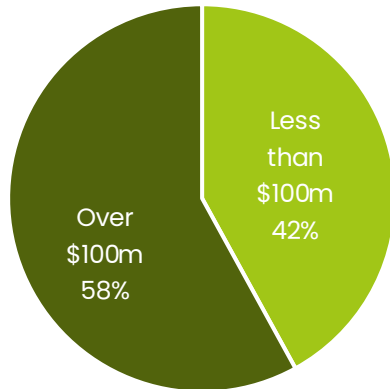
Q. How many sites do you have in New Zealand? Total: n=57



Survey sample

TURNOVER AND AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

ESTIMATED BUSINESS TURNOVER IN THE LAST FINANCIAL YEAR



Among those surveyed, sustainability is the primary area of responsibility (40%), followed by operations (19%) & C-suite roles (16%).

AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	%
Sustainability	40%
Operations	19%
C suite member	16%
Owner	7%
Supply chain	7%
Marketing	4%
Board member	2%
Data analysis	2%
Logistics	2%
Production	2%

Q. What was the turnover of your business in the last financial year?
Total: n=57

Q. What is your area of responsibility in your company?
Total: n=57





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**Executive
Summary**



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Summary of Key Insights

Businesses recognise food waste as a critical sustainability and economic issue, but confidence in current approaches is low.

Economic benefits are the strongest motivator, suggesting that framing food waste reduction as cost-saving will resonate.

While most businesses are taking action, gaps remain in data collection, global alignment, and advanced disposal practices.

Operational and resource constraints are major barriers, indicating a need for practical, scalable solutions.

Government incentives and clearer policies could significantly accelerate progress.

Collaboration is increasing but could be expanded, especially across supply chains.





Awareness, Perceptions & Prioritisation



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More work to be done

Most businesses, particularly those with 200+ employees, acknowledge they have more work to do to get food waste under control with economic considerations the key reason for prioritising food waste.

Current approach to food waste

33%

say food waste is under control

58%

say it is being addressed but more work to do

65%

of larger businesses (200+ employees) see more work ahead

Top reasons for prioritising food waste

57%

Economic considerations

16%

Social and community responsibility

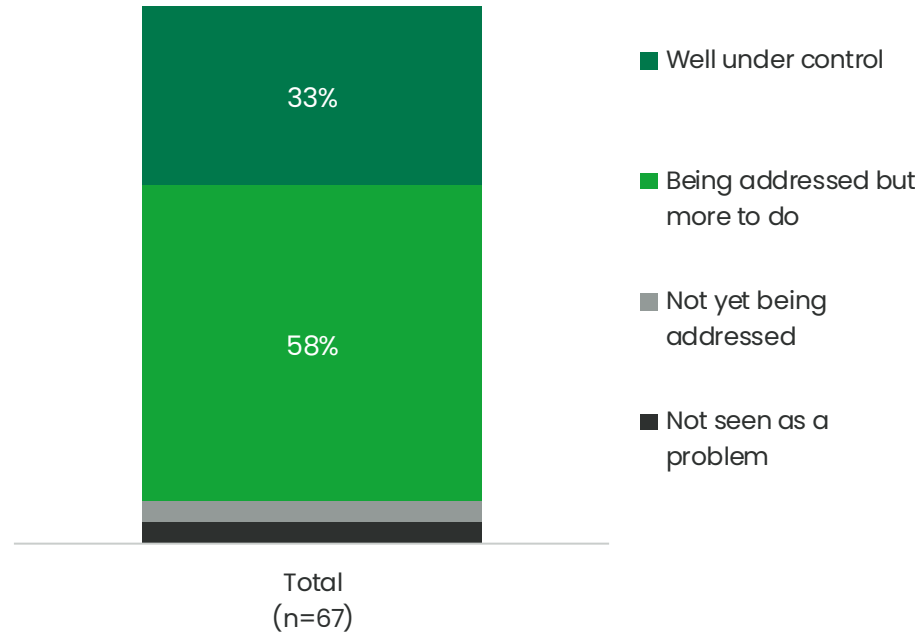
13%

Climate / environmental action



Companies current approach to food waste by size of business

Most companies acknowledge food waste is being addressed but not fully resolved, with only one-third confident their approach is well under control. Larger businesses (200+ employees) are more likely to feel there is still more work to do.



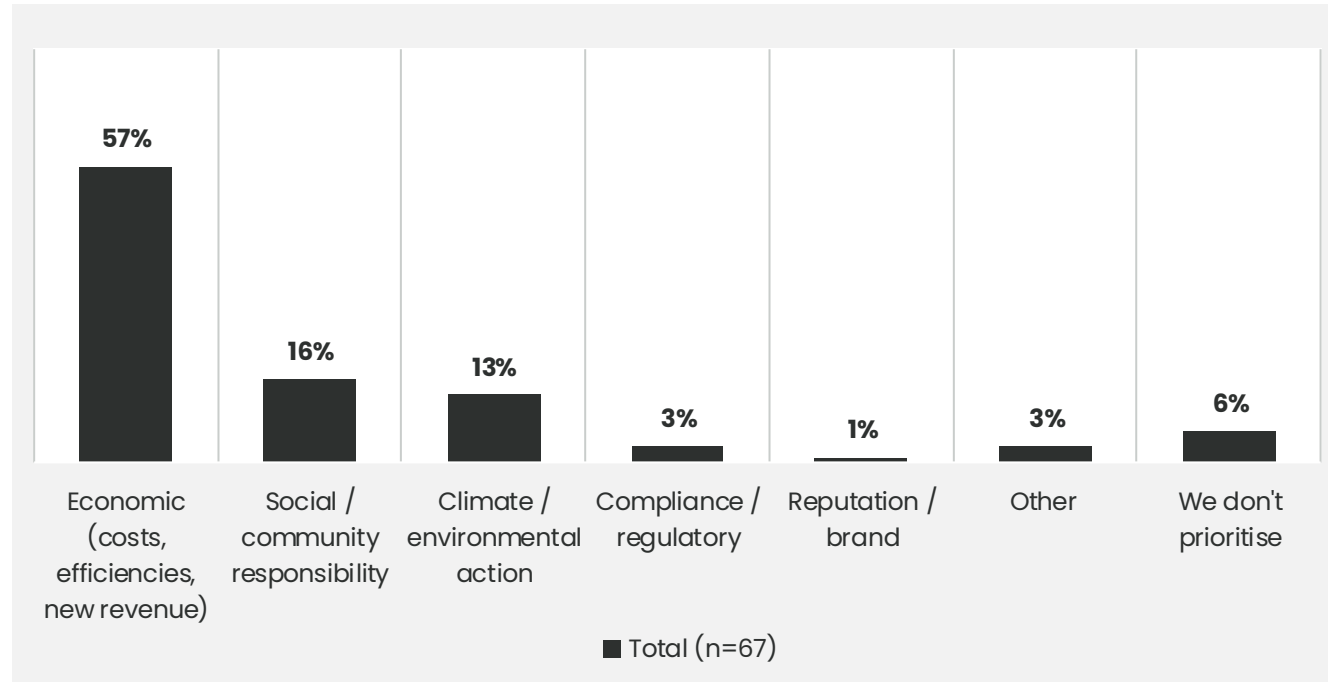
Q. How would you describe your company's current approach to food waste? By Q. Approximately how many people does your business employ in New Zealand (including seasonal workers)?



Top reason for prioritising food waste and its reduction

Economic considerations are the primary reason for prioritising food waste reduction, for **57%** of respondents.

Social & community responsibility ranks second, identified as the top reason by **16%** overall and **24%** of larger businesses.



Q. Overall, what is your organisation's top reason for prioritising food waste and its reduction?



Business priorities and understanding

Businesses prioritise food waste reduction for sustainability and cost savings, yet while willing to invest, almost half are unaware of national and global initiatives.

PRIORITY

51%

Say food waste is a top sustainability priority

BENEFITS

60%

Reduced environmental impact

56%

Cost savings

Larger businesses more likely to see benefits

UNDERSTANDING AND INVESTMENT

86%

Understand causes/impacts of food waste

71%

Willing to invest in reduction of food waste

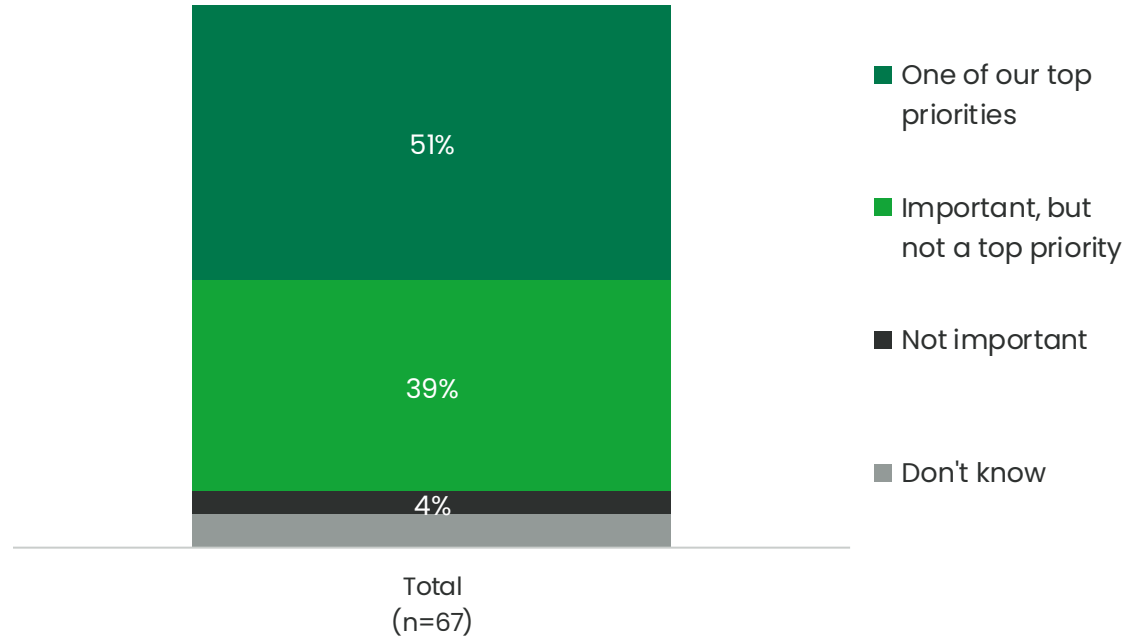
Larger businesses are more likely to understand, invest, and know global initiatives.

Smaller businesses (<200 employees) are more likely to believe customers expect action.



Importance of food waste by size of business

More than half of businesses say food waste is a top sustainability priority, while only **4%** consider it unimportant.



Q. How important is food waste compared to your other sustainability priorities? By Q. Approximately how many people does your business employ in New Zealand (including seasonal workers)?



Benefits experienced from food waste action

The most common benefits reported from taking action on food waste are lower environmental impact and cost savings, both mentioned by more than half of respondents, and at least 65% of larger businesses.

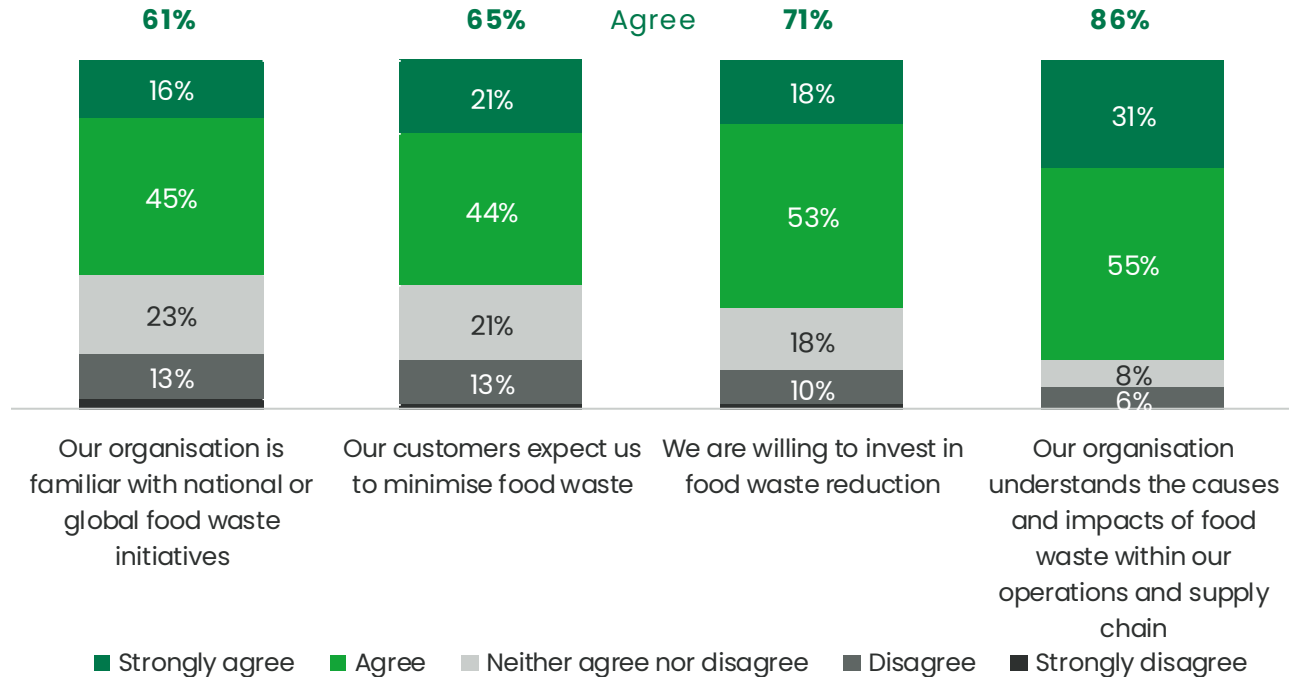


Q. What benefits has your business experienced from food waste action?
 Multiple response




Attitudes toward food waste / reduction

86% of businesses say they understand the causes and impacts of food waste, and **71%** are willing to invest in reducing it. However, fewer are familiar with global initiatives or believe customers expect them to act.



Q. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements
 Total sample: n=62





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**Measurement
and Data
Availability**



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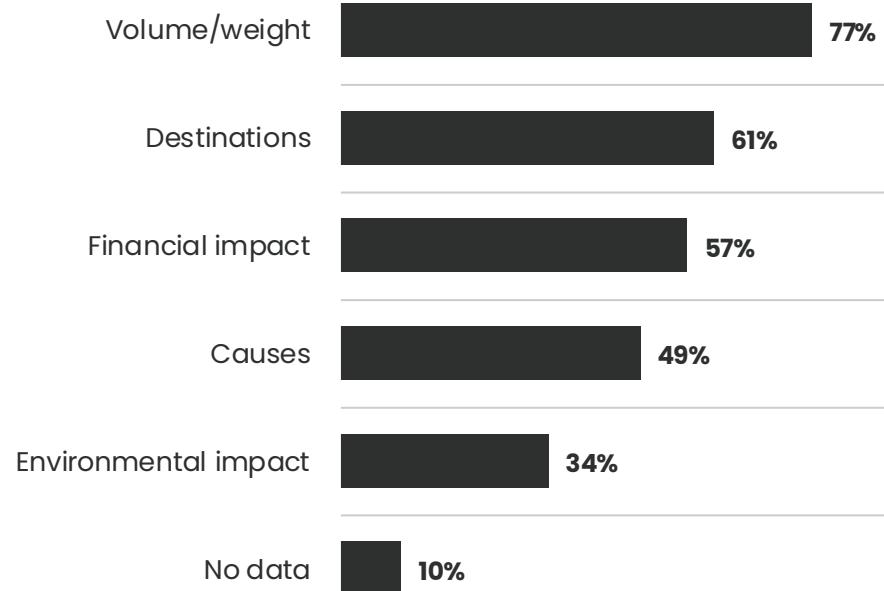
Data collected to manage food waste

Most businesses act on food waste, but data gaps, landfill reliance, and systemic causes remain, especially for businesses with less than 200 employees.

DATA COLLECTION

Most collect data on food waste volumes, destinations, and financial impact.

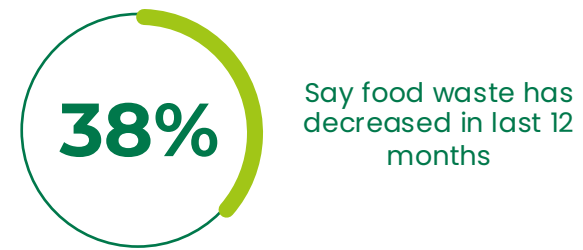
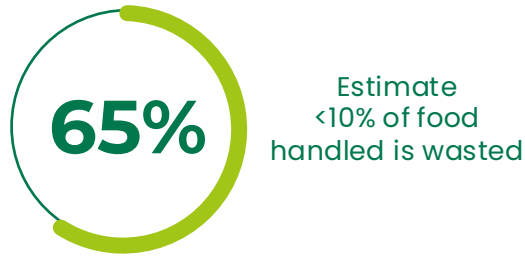
Less likely to collect environmental data, 10% collect no data.



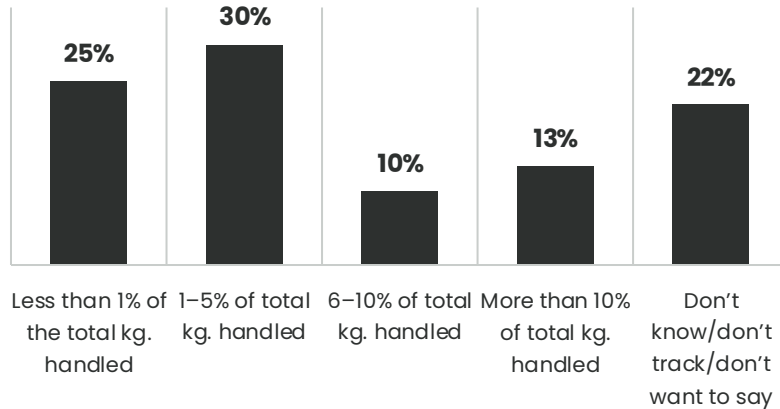
Q. What types of data do you collect that can help you manage food waste? Multiple response



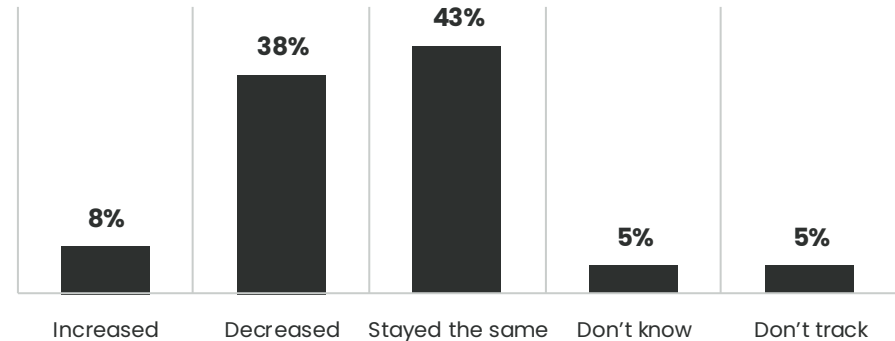
Waste levels and trends



Amount of Food Wasted Annually



Change to volume of food waste in last 12 months



Q. As a percentage of food handled in your business, roughly how much food do you estimate ends up as wasted each year?

Q. In the last 12 months do you believe your volume/weight of food waste (as a proportion of the food your business has handled) has...





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**Causes and
Waste
Destinations**



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Causes and destinations

Participants indicated there were some key causes of food waste (please note, they could select more than one cause):

KEY CAUSES OF FOOD WASTE - INTERNAL

57%

Quality/safety standards

32%

Human error

32%

Forecasting and inventory issues

KEY CAUSES OF FOOD WASTE - EXTERNAL

57%

Supply chain issues

37%

Customer / contract

22%

Inedible parts

TOP FOOD WASTE DESTINATIONS

58%

Animal feed

48%

Donations

45%

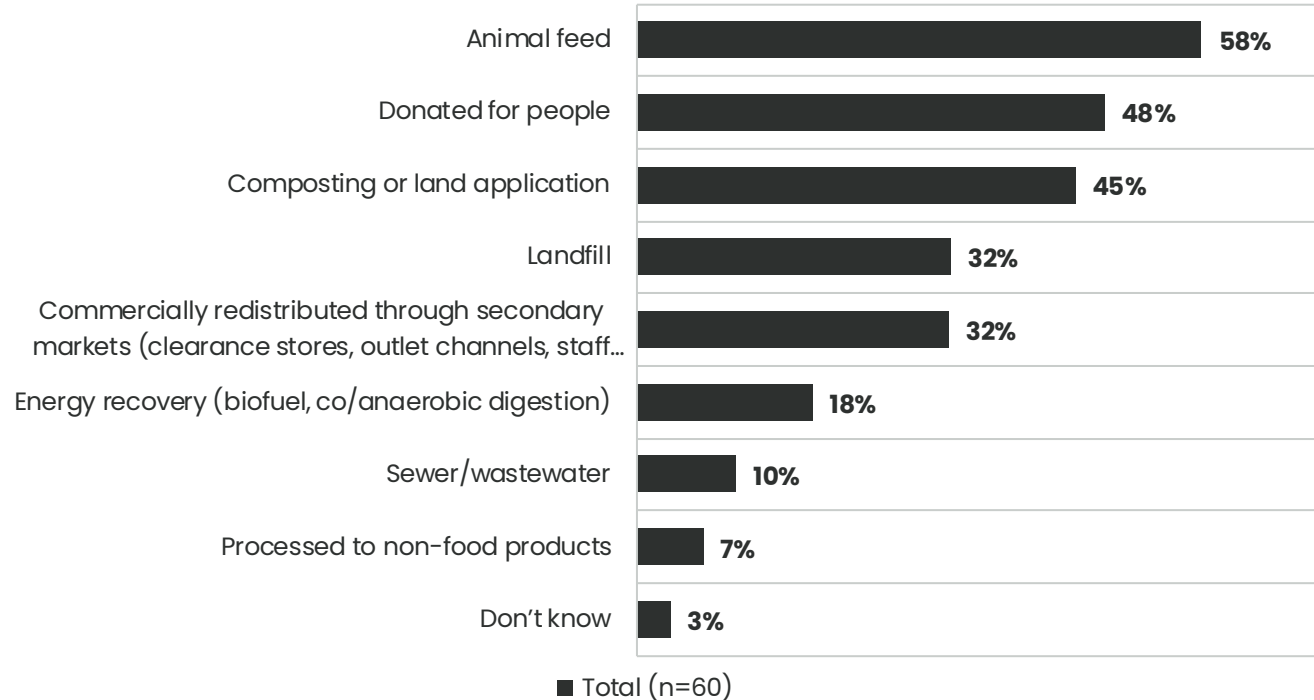
Composting

32% still send waste to **landfill** mainly due to **mixed waste** and **lack of alternatives**.



Where food waste usually goes

Food waste is mainly directed to animal feed, donations, and composting or land application, while 32% of businesses say their waste still goes to landfill, with larger businesses more likely to be in this category.

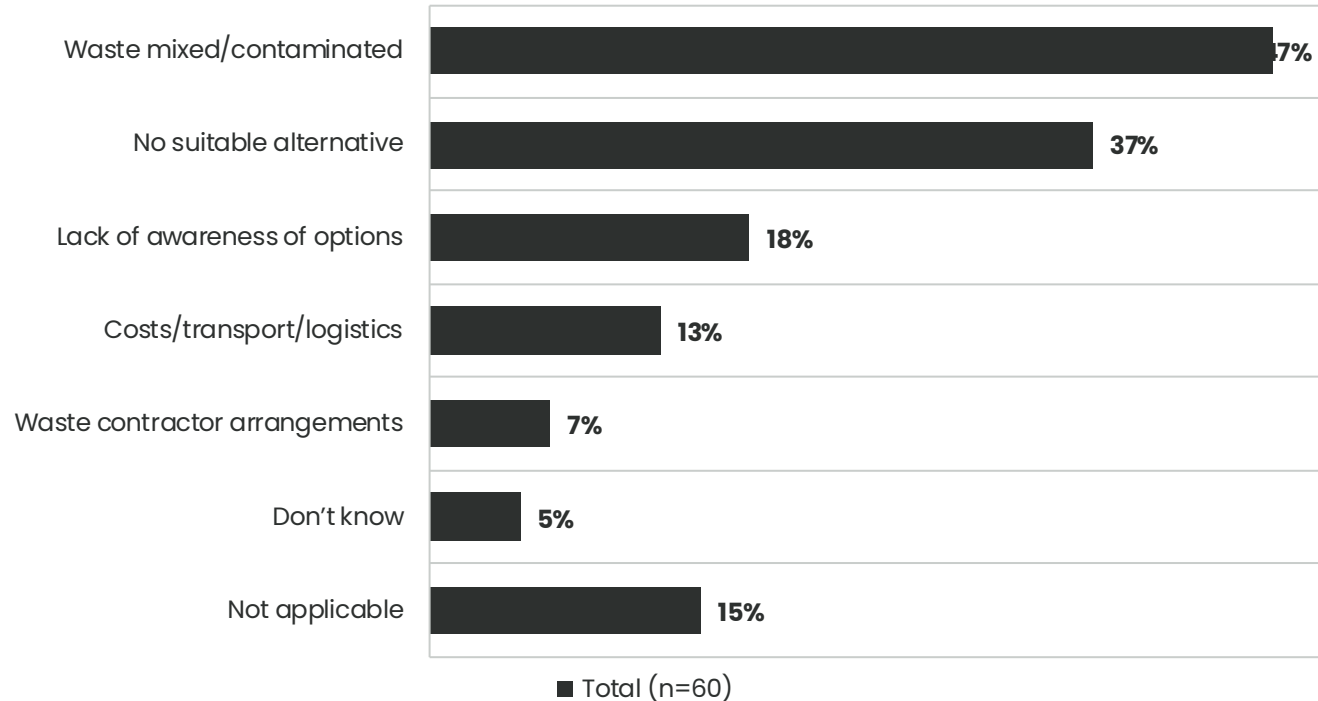


Q. In the last 12 months do you believe your volume/weight of food waste (as a proportion of the food your business has handled) has...



Main reasons food waste goes to landfills or wastewater

Nearly half of respondents say food waste ends up in landfills or wastewater because it is mixed waste or contaminated, while **37%** report a lack of suitable alternatives, a challenge more common among businesses with 200+ employees.

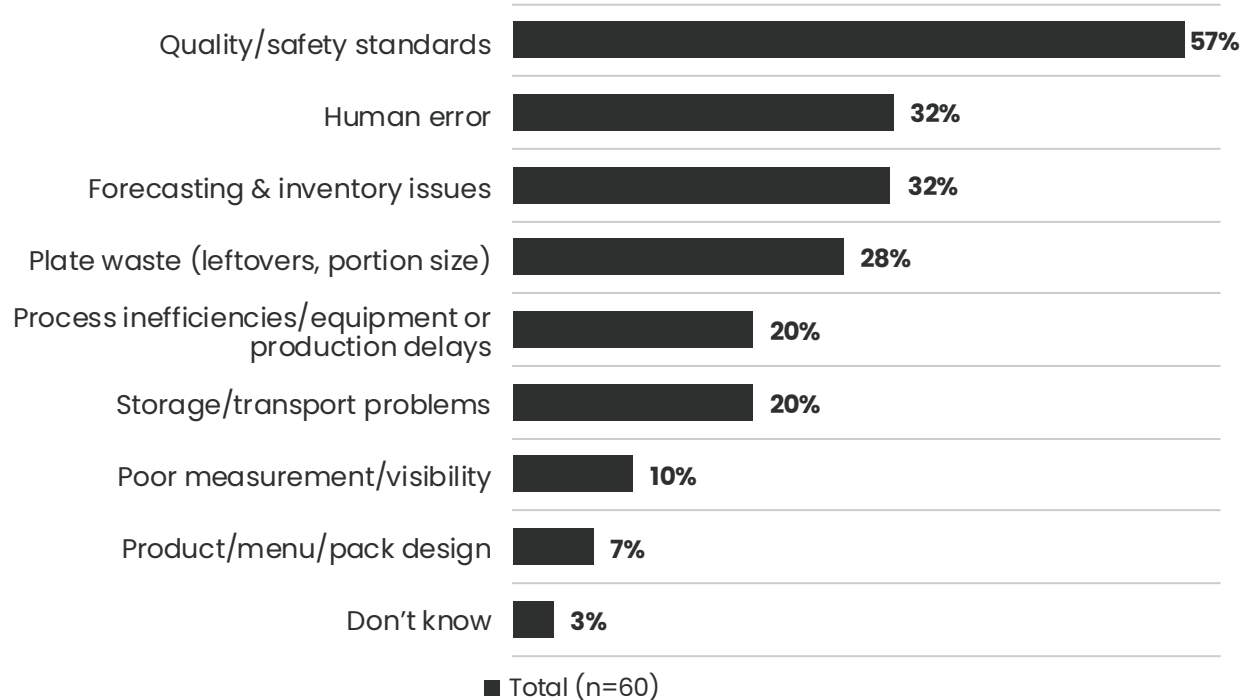


Q. What are the main reasons food waste goes to landfills or wastewater instead of other destinations?
 Multiple response



Key causes of food waste inside the business

Nearly **60%** of businesses say quality or safety standards as the main cause of food waste inside the business, while **32%** point to human error and forecasting and inventory issues is also mentioned by **32%**.

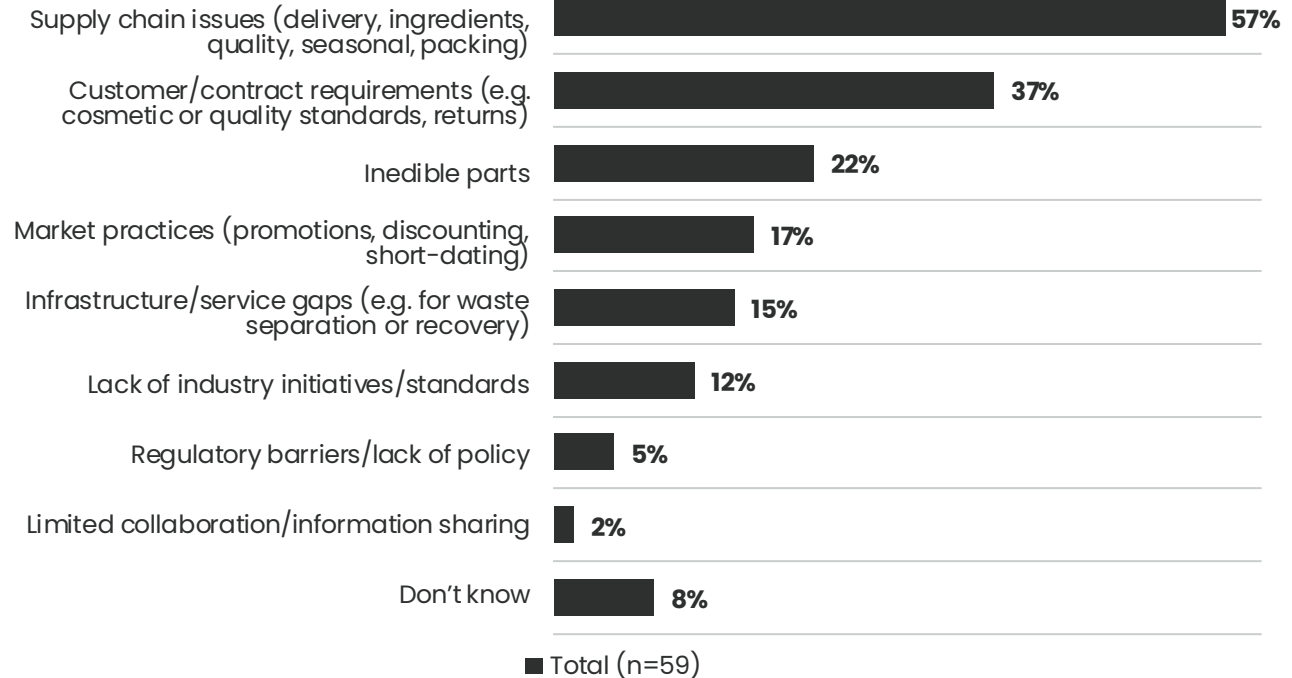


Q. Firstly, which of the following are the key causes of food waste inside your business?
 Multiple response



External causes of food waste in the business

Supply chain issues are the leading external cause of food waste for **57%** of businesses, followed by customer or contract requirements at **37%**.



Q. Now which of the following are external causes of food waste in your business?
 Multiple response



The background of the slide features several vertical oval frames containing slices of watermelon. The slices are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger composition, with some overlapping. The watermelon is cut into thick, triangular or rectangular slices, showing the bright red flesh, the green rind, and some dark seeds. The frames are set against a solid black background.

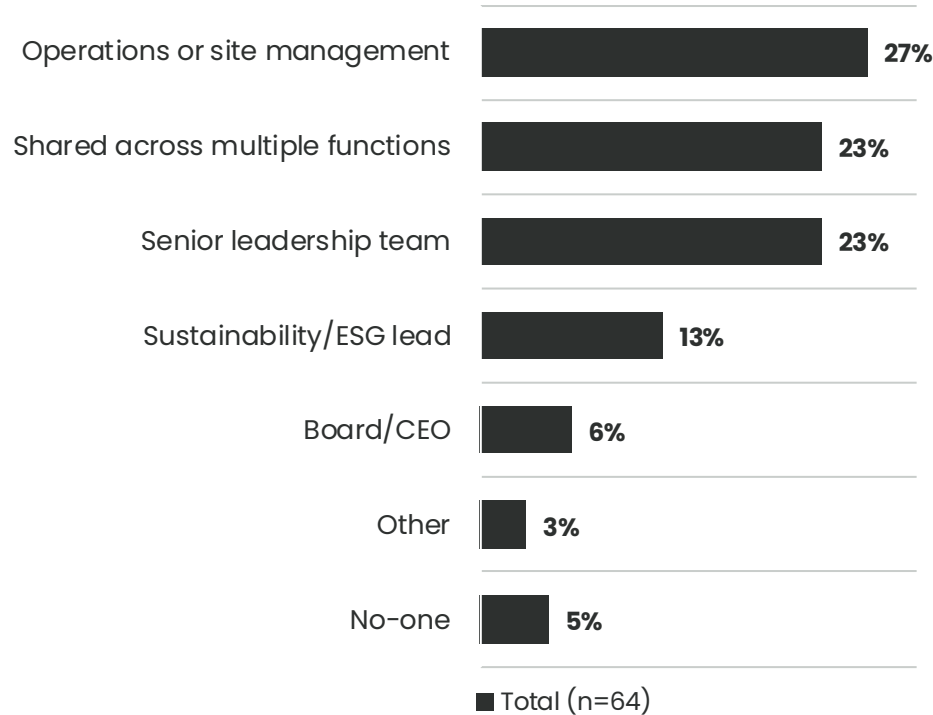
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**Current
Actions**



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Holder of primary accountability for food waste reduction



Responsibility for reducing food waste typically lies with operations or site management or is shared across multiple functions or senior leadership.

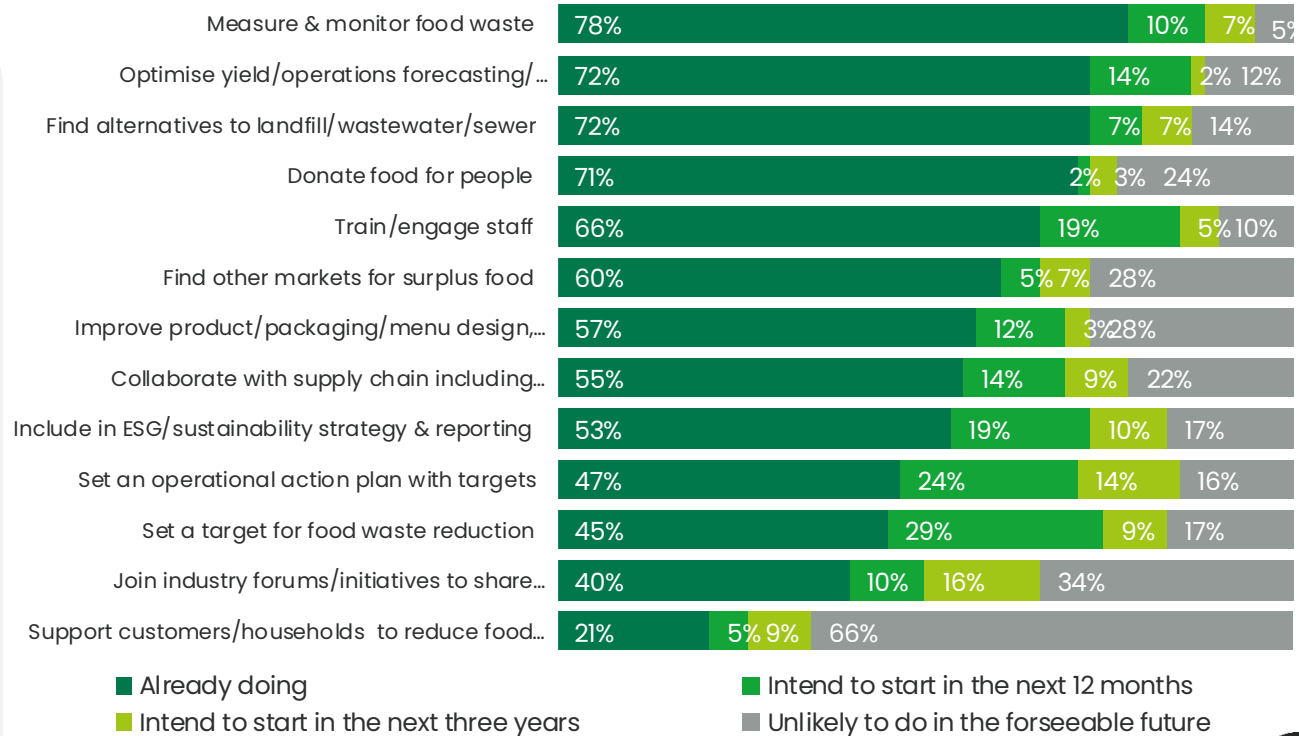
Other people with primary accountability

- Compliance Manager n=2
- Executive Chef n=2

Q. Who in your organisation has primary accountability for food waste reduction?

Current and future engagement in food waste actions

Most businesses surveyed are already taking action on food waste, with over **70%** measuring and monitoring waste, optimising processes, seeking alternatives to landfill or wastewater, and donating food for people.



Q. Are each of the following food waste-related actions something you are already doing, plan on starting in the next 12 months, plan on starting in the next few years or are unlikely to do in the foreseeable future? Total: n=58, Multiple response





Barriers, Enablers and Investment



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Barriers to food waste reduction

Businesses face operational and cost barriers to food waste reduction, yet strong government support, collaboration, and clear standards could unlock greater investment and action.

Barriers to Food Waste Reduction

48%

Operational challenges, esp. for those with 200+ employees (59%)

38%

Costs/
resources

31%

Supply chain issues

Policy Support for Food Waste Initiatives

81%

Government incentives or funding

56%

Clearer, consistent date labelling

51%

Stronger regulation in supply chain



Enablers and Motivators

Businesses face operational and cost barriers to food waste reduction, yet strong government support, collaboration, and clear standards could unlock greater investment and action.

Enablers and Motivators

59%

Government action would motivate **59%** of businesses. Customer demand influences **41%**, and industry standards or leadership examples influence **34%**.

Businesses identify government support, better capability and resources, and stronger supply chain collaboration as key enablers.

Investment and Collaboration

60%

Plan to increase investment in food waste reduction within 2 years.

In the past year:

59%

Partnered with food rescue organisations or community groups

43%

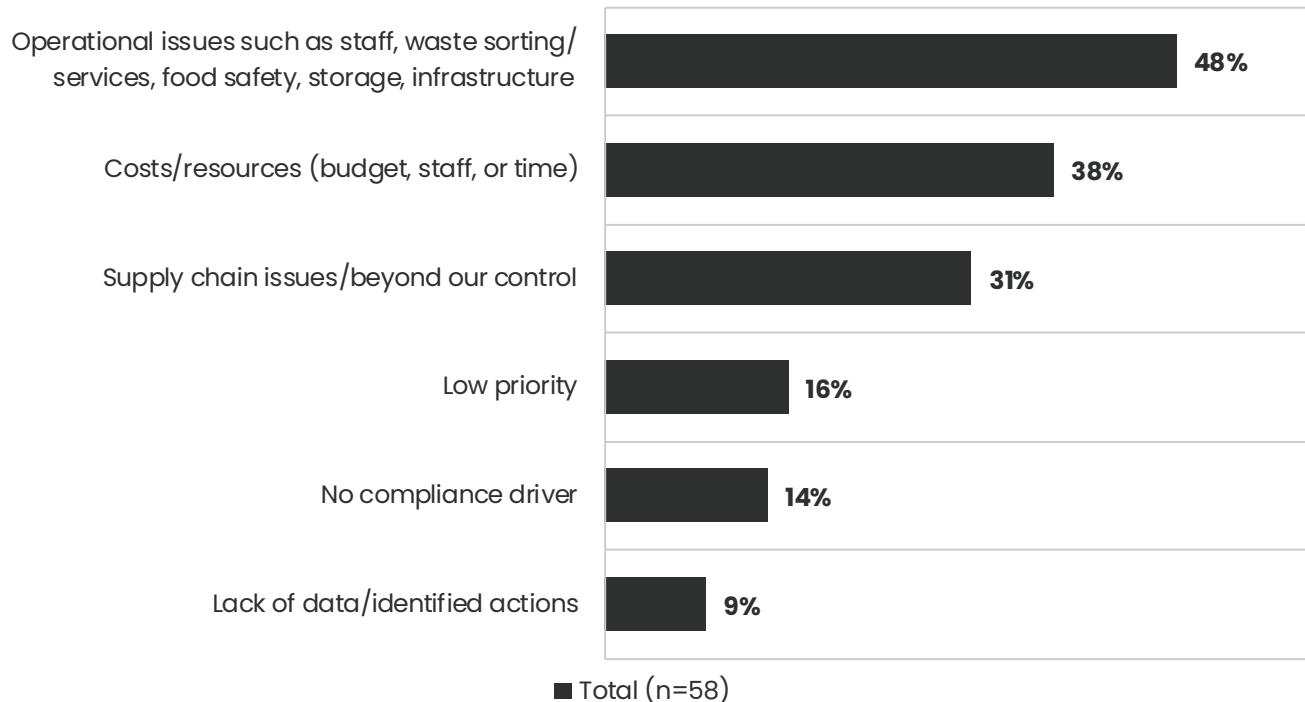
Collaborated with suppliers

Only 17% reported no collaboration, mostly businesses with <200 employees



Main reasons businesses don't have or find it hard to implement food waste practices

Operational challenges are the barrier to implementing food waste practices for 48% of businesses, particularly those with 200+ employees, while 38% point to cost and resource constraints.

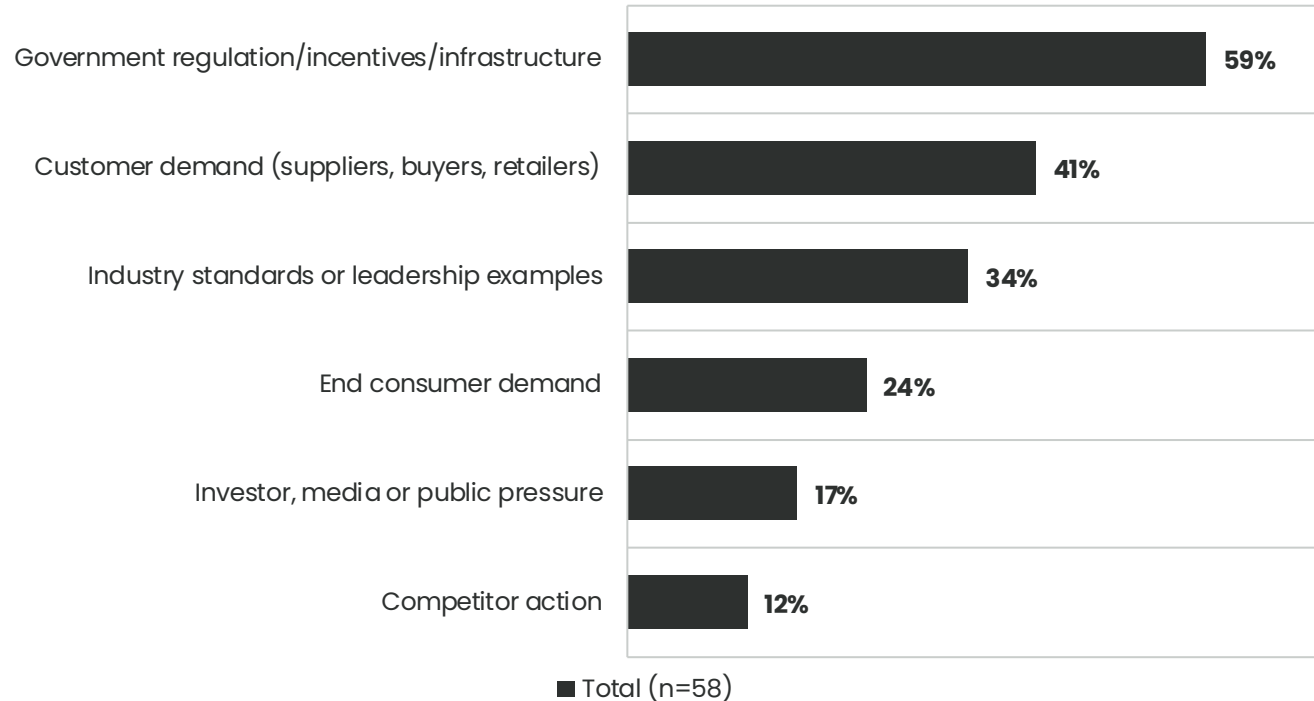


Q. What are the main reasons your business does not have, or finds it hard to implement, food waste practices? Multiple response, * Low base (< 30)



External factors that would drive your business to take action on food waste

Almost 60% say that government action would motivate them to tackle food waste, while 41% would be influenced by customer demand, and 34% by industry standards or leadership examples.

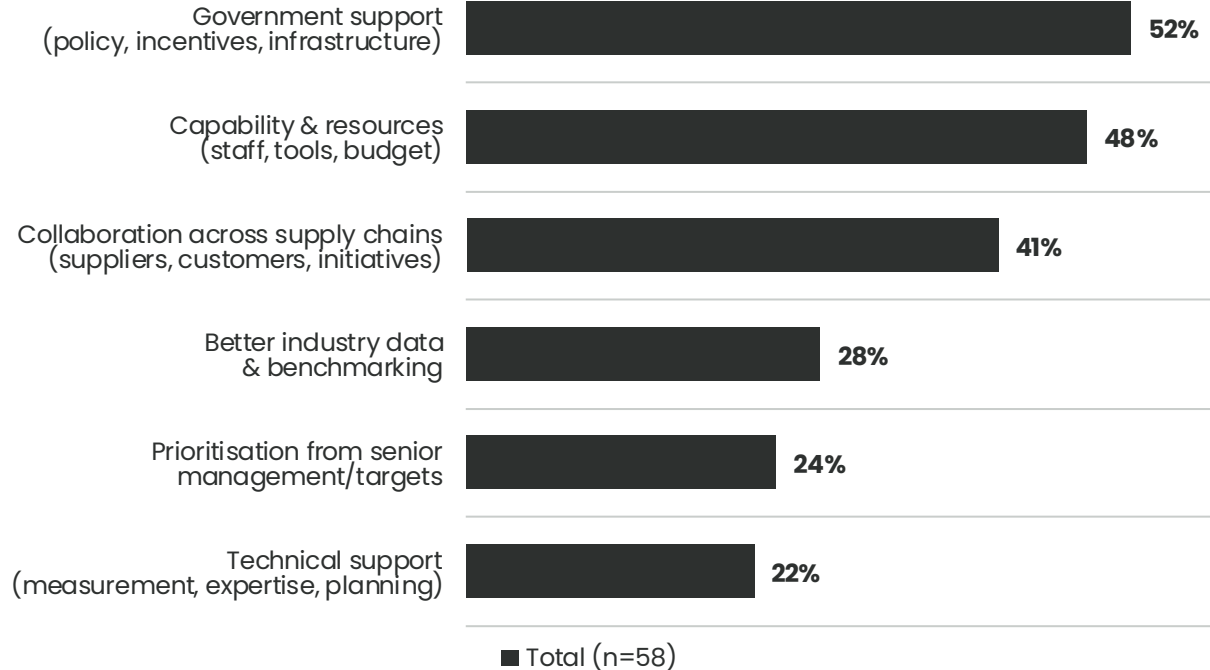


Q. Which external factors would most drive your business to take more action on food waste?
 Multiple response



Drivers for greater food waste action

Businesses see government support, improved capability and resources, and stronger supply chain collaboration as key enablers for adopting more food waste reduction practice.

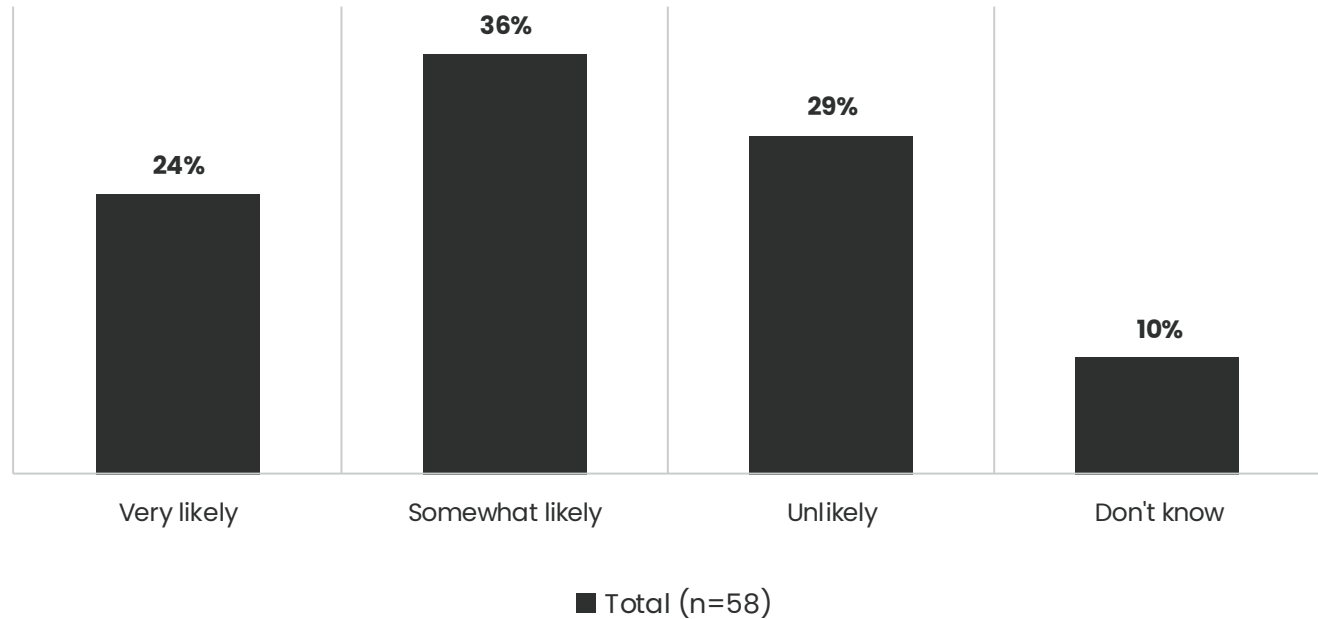


Q. What would most help your business to take up more practices to reduce food waste?
 Multiple response



Likelihood to increase investment in food waste reduction over the next 2 years

60% of businesses say they are likely to increase investment in food waste reduction over the next two years. Among larger businesses (200+ employees), 34% are very likely to invest more, compared with just 12% of businesses with <200 employees.



Q. How likely is your business to increase its investment in food waste reduction over the next 2 years?

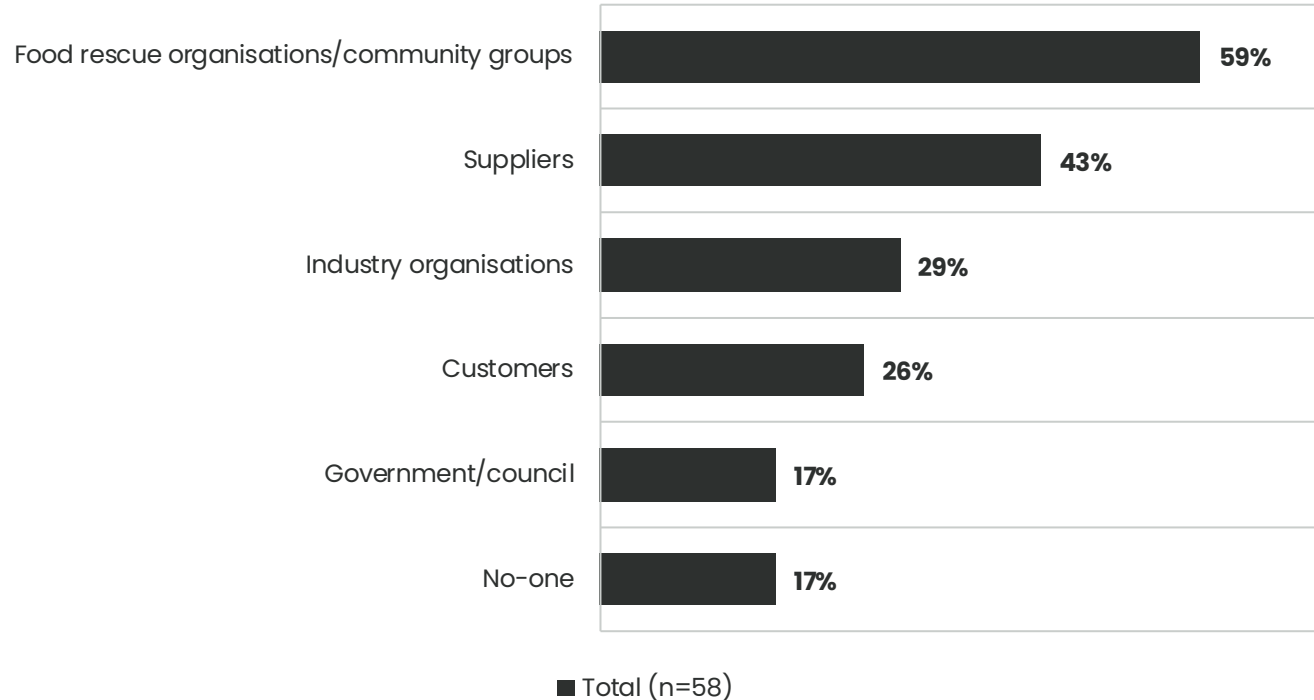




Collaboration & Policy Preferences

Food waste partnerships over the past year

In the past year, nearly 60% of businesses have partnered with food rescue organisations or community groups to reduce waste, 43% have worked with suppliers. Only 17% report no collaboration, with these businesses more likely to have <200 employees.



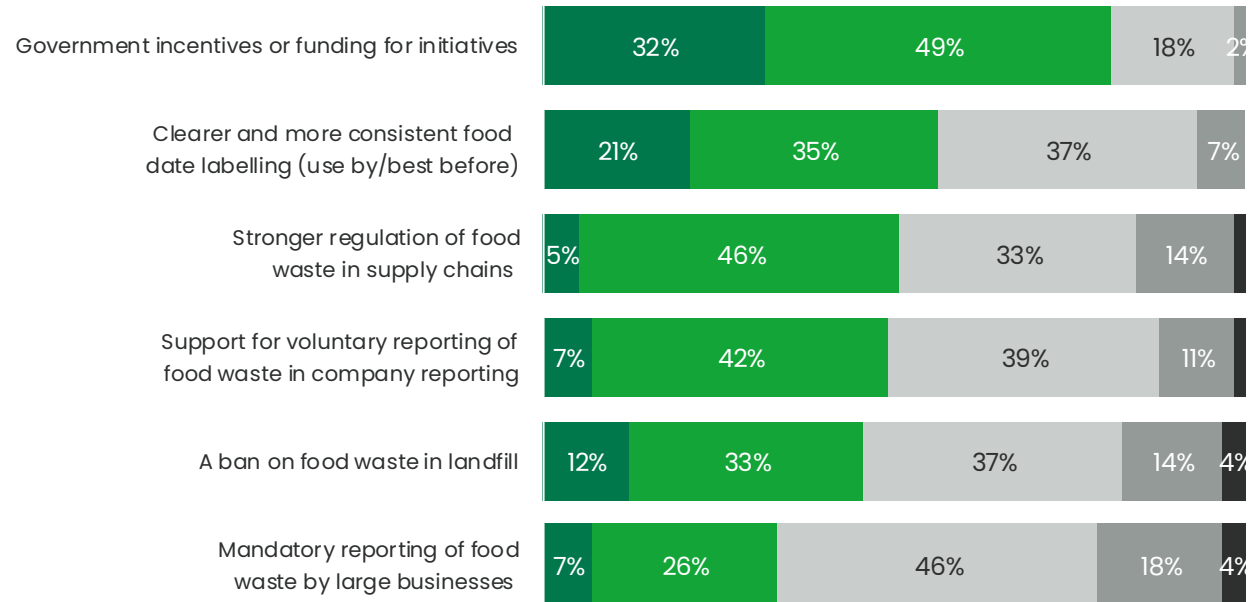
Q. In the past 12 months, has your business worked with any of the following on food waste reduction?
 Multiple response



Where businesses stand on food waste policies

Over 80% of businesses support government incentives or funding for initiatives, while 56% support policy changes for clearer and more consistent food date labelling. Mandatory reporting has the least support.

Ranked based on total support



■ Strongly support
 ■ Support
 ■ Neutral / don't mind
 ■ Oppose
 ■ Strongly oppose

Q. For each of the following possible policy changes please say whether you would support or oppose it?
 Total: n=57, multiple response

