

How to manage food waste in schools



A guide to help schools understand and implement the NSW Government's food waste recycling mandate, with simple steps and tips to make managing food waste easier.



Contents

What is the NSW government's FOGO mandate?	3
Starting dates for schools	4
Key steps to successfully managing food waste	5
Setting up a waste management team	6
Assessing your food waste footprint	7
Investigating food waste systems	8
Off-site management	8
On-site management	9
Setting up a food waste collection system	11
Training and learning	13
Reducing food waste	14
Funding opportunities	15
General school waste resources	15

What is the NSW government's FOGO mandate?



Australia target

Halve food waste by 2030



NSW target

Halve organic waste sent to landfill by 2030



NSW has introduced a statewide mandate for food organics and garden organics (FOGO) recycling to reduce landfill waste and emissions. Under the new rules, all households will have a FOGO collection by July 2030, while businesses and institutions that sell or handle food will be phased in from 1 July 2026. This includes schools where drink or food is prepared or sold.

The location of your school will determine what food waste system is implemented. Some areas currently have garden organics (GO) collection, some a food organics (FO) collection, some have a combined service (FOGO) while others have no service yet.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is providing grants, guidance and expert advice to support the transition. There are also rebates of up to \$50,000 for onsite equipment, like bins and storage. Access this support and find collection services in your area through the EPA's Bin Trim app.

Why is food waste such a problem?

Food waste is one of the primary waste materials sent to landfill. Most of this waste could be recycled into quality compost and used to improve soil health and support sustainable food production.

When food waste is sent to landfill it releases methane - a powerful greenhouse gas that's 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. It also takes up valuable space in our landfills and wastes all the energy, water, and resources that went into producing, transporting, and storing it. By keeping food waste out of landfill and recycling it instead, we can cut emissions, protect the environment, and make better use of our resources.

To address this, the NSW government has committed to halve organic waste sent to landfill by 2030, in line with national targets.

Starting dates for schools

The new rules only apply to schools that sell or prepare food. Your weekly general waste volumes will determine when your school needs to start separating food waste.

1 July
2026

Source separation required if weekly general waste bin capacity is 3,960 L.

1 July
2028

Source separation required if weekly general waste bin capacity is 1,980 L.

1 July
2030

Source separation required if weekly general waste bin capacity is 660 L.

Use the **FOGO business mandate calculator** to find out if your school needs to source separate.

Top Tip:

Your school could be moved to a later start date if you reduce your general waste volume. You can do this by:

- increasing recycling
- setting up bins more efficiently (e.g. do you have two 240 L bins that are only half full when emptied? Reduce to one full 240 L red bin.)

School food waste facts

Schools generate a lot of food waste so they can play a big part in the solution.

- Around 30% of the average school bin is made up of food scraps.
- More than half of landfill waste is organic, much of it avoidable or compostable.
- Australian students throw away an estimated 5 million sandwiches and 3 million pieces of fruit each year.

By reducing and recycling food waste, schools can cut emissions and make a real environmental impact.

Get ready now

You can start preparing now, even if your school isn't in the first stage or your local area doesn't have food waste recycling services. Setting up practices and systems to manage food waste now will ensure you're ready to meet the requirements in the future.

Your school's waste costs may also be reduced by recycling food and therefore reducing the amount of waste you send to landfill.



Key steps to successfully managing food waste



Assess new requirements



Talk to your waste service provider if you're not sure of your average weekly general waste volume.



Set up a waste management team



To plan your approach.



Assess your food waste footprint



Do a waste review, investigate current waste infrastructure and contract (cost and volume).



Investigate food waste processing options



Research what system/s will work best:

Off-site options – food waste collection

On-site options – small and large-scale composting systems.



Set up collection system



Follow the steps to set up an effective collection process.



Training and learning



Train people about the new system and include food waste in lesson plans.



Reduce food waste



Consider ways to minimise food waste.



Explore funding opportunities



To help with the cost of new infrastructure.



Review, monitor, adjust



Regularly collect data on food waste recycled, review bin collection system and adjust as necessary.



Communicate and celebrate



Celebrate success with the whole school community.

Setting up a waste management team

Managing food waste is a whole-of-school effort. From early research and setting up contracts to sorting waste, organising collections, monitoring progress and linking it to the curriculum, everyone has a role. Feedback from schools shows the most successful food waste programs are those driven by a dedicated team working together.

Consider the following people to include in your waste management team:

 <p>School principal/executive leadership team</p> <p>Set the vision, allocate resources, develop policy, set positive culture around waste management</p>	 <p>Finance staff</p> <p>Oversee waste contract and monitor invoices (cost savings, waste volume)</p>	 <p>Teachers and support staff</p> <p>Include food waste in lessons, help with waste reviews</p>
 <p>Facilities, grounds and cleaning staff</p> <p>Support waste separation, bin management and cleanliness</p>	 <p>Canteen/catering staff</p> <p>Help reduce food waste at the source, improve food service practices, advise and set up efficient systems</p>	 <p>Student representatives</p> <p>Drive action, lead by example, and spread awareness</p>
 <p>Council waste/sustainability representative</p> <p>Expert advice on food waste management, waste reduction programs, funding, peer learning networks</p>	 <p>Waste service provider</p> <p>Provide services and advice on contracts, sorting, collection, recycling and waste audits</p>	 <p>Parents and school community</p> <p>Support food waste efforts at home and reinforce messages with students</p>

TIP Start with a small team and grow it over time — collaboration is key

Team tasks

- ✓ Oversee food waste data gathering
- ✓ Check waste bills for weights/volumes and costs, and monitor savings
- ✓ Investigate food waste system options
- ✓ Set goals, targets and timeline for waste management program
- ✓ Identify key messages
- ✓ Identify curriculum-aligned content
- ✓ Report on progress and achievements
- ✓ Oversee adjustments to the program based on monitoring and feedback.

Assessing your food waste footprint

Doing a waste review will help assess how much and what types of food waste are currently produced. This data will help determine baseline measurements, set goals and targets and measure success. This information will help when designing a food waste reduction program for your school.

Waste reviews can be done by teachers and student groups. Your council's waste education officer or local environmental education centre can help and waste service providers can also run a waste audit if it is part of their contract.

Use the **Bin Trim self-assessment app** to work out how much waste you are generating and create an action plan.

Waste reviews are a great educational opportunity to teach students about food waste. Make sure you communicate the findings, strategies and progress to the broader school community.

There are many resources available to help plan a food waste audit including how-to videos, guides, templates and curriculum aligned lesson plans.

NSW Government Solving Organic Waste program
Sustainable Schools NSW
Rumbalara Environmental Education Centre
Kimbriki

[Doing a food waste audit video](#)
[Waste audit guides and toolkits](#)
[Detailed waste audit guide](#)
[Waste audit resources for schools](#)



Investigating food waste systems

How your school manages its food waste will depend on whether food waste recycling services are available, how much food waste is generated, location/access, space and how you will use any recycled products e.g. school garden, agricultural plot.

Off-site management refers mainly to commercial collection services.

Pros:

- All food types (including meat) can be collected.
- Commercial processors treat the food waste to meet EPA requirements for pasteurisation, destroying seeds and pathogens to produce a saleable product.
- Can take large volumes of food waste.

Cons:

- More limited learning opportunities (but still many).
- Service may not be available in the area.
- Higher cost.
- Need to procure the service and negotiate the contract.

On-site management includes composting, worm farming, animals (generally chickens) and large-scale composting systems.

Pros:

- Opportunities for increasing understanding of the circular nature of organic resources and developing practical experience and skills in organic waste management, environmental citizenship and responsibility.
- Great educational opportunities.
- Low cost (except for large scale systems).

Cons:

- Systems require more intensive management to ensure they work well.
- Not all food waste can go into a compost bin or worm farm.
- Usually only suitable for smaller quantities of food waste.

Off-site management

The main way to process food waste off-site is by arranging a food waste collection service. Start by checking with your current waste provider or council to see what services are in your area. You may need to update your contract to include food waste collections, adjust bin sizes or numbers, and set collection days.

Use data from your waste audit to work out your needs. Your contractor may be able to help. If your current provider doesn't offer food waste collections, investigate other services. With food waste removed, review your contract to see if you can use smaller general waste bins, or cut collection frequency.

TIPS for contract negotiation

- Ask if weight-based invoicing is possible – this could reduce costs if you remove heavy food waste from the general waste bin and recycle it onsite. Ensure you research different costs based on volume or weight.
- Check you will receive reports as part of your contract. Monthly reports detailing the number of general waste and food waste bins collected and waste (kg) diverted from landfill will help track your progress.
- Ask your waste service provider to include waste education visits to the school, waste audits and excursion opportunities.
- Check the notice period for changing the contract. Some service providers require notice in writing at least 90 days before the current contract expires before changes come into effect in the next contract period.

Common challenges with FOGO collection and some solutions

Challenge	Solutions
Waste volumes too low for contract	Consider working with a group of schools in your area.
Site access and location of food waste bins	Work with your waste service provider; consider an out of hours service.
Cost	Have less waste in the landfill bin; consider reducing the number of pick ups.
Smells/flies in the FOGO bin	Check frequency of collection; keep bin in the shade wherever possible.
No suitable space	Investigate smaller bins with more frequent collections.
No FOGO collection service available	Investigate on-site options.



On-site management

On-site options include:

- composting (compost bins, tumblers and heaps)
- worm farms and worm towers
- animals (normally chickens)
- large on-site systems (in-vessel).

Composting and worm farms

Commonly used products in schools include:

- 220 L compost bins (**Bunnings, Kimbriki**)
- Worm Buffet (**Kimbriki**)
- **worm tubs**
- Bokashi bin
- worm farms
- **Green Cone Solar Composter**
- Subpods (**Subpod, Compost Revolution**)
- Tumbleweed compost bins and spare parts (**Tumbleweed**).

Different products have different processing capacities and accept different types of organic waste, so you will need to research and work out the best options for your school.

For example:

System	Capacity	Limitations
Worm farm	3-4 kg per week	No meat, dairy, onions
Subpod	15 kg per week	Bread should be wet, no dairy
Bokashi bin	20 L bucket (2-week processing time)	
Green Cone Solar composters	4 kg per week	Meat and dairy OK, only produces compost tea not harvestable compost

Keys to success for on-site composting systems

(adapted from L Wiley 2023)

Have a plan	Involve people and build a team	Empower student action	Educate the whole school community	Prepare your site and select your kit	Quality control
Prepare, allocate tasks and roles. Document how the various composting systems will be maintained and the people responsible for maintaining them.	Allocate at least two hours/week of staff time to manage compost on-site, build goodwill with teachers and staff, make it part of school culture.	Train student leaders, recognise achievements, rotate roles among students.	Train the whole community on what can be composted and why, include professional development, integrate into lessons, clearly label bins and caddies.	Set up bins/worm farms in level, convenient location with shade and water access, put rodent exclusion in place.	No meat, no dairy, no carbs. Have contamination control strategies in place.

Composting and worm farming resources

NSW Department of Education program resources

Clever composting (Gardening Australia, ABC)

Setting up a school composting program: Part 2 – Common types of composting (Ecobin)

War on Waste: tips for a successful backyard worm farm to cut household waste (ABC)

A beginner's guide to worm farming (Foodwise)

Examples of large-scale systems

Soil Food

Waste Master

Closed Loop

Pulpmaster

Worm Solutions

Worms down Under

Large-scale on-site systems

On-site processing systems such as large-scale worm farms or in-vessel systems can manage a higher volume and bigger variety of food waste items.

Pros:

- Good if your school has large amounts of food waste.
- Systems are often automated and self-regulating, making maintenance and harvesting of compost easier.

Cons:

- Upfront cost can be high, but investment will be returned over time through reduced waste volume/weight collected.
- Can use large amounts of electricity - make sure to review the power use of any systems.

Some on-site composting technologies used in schools

School	Composter type
Riverview, NSW	Pulpmaster installed 2015
Moriah College, NSW	WasteMaster 1000 installed 2022 Instagram post
John Curtin College of the Arts, WA	Closed Loop 'LO-10 electronic composter The school prevented almost 2000kg of food waste from going to landfill (2019) Online case study
Palm Beach Currumbin HS, QLD	Closed Loop CL050 FB post , Radio story

The EPA sponsors Planet Ark's small scale [equipment catalogue](#), which includes many food waste processing systems.

Setting up a food waste collection system

Whichever processing approach is used, the key to success is an effective system to separate food waste from other waste sources. This includes collection, sorting, checking for contamination and transferring it to the processing point.






- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Assess bin requirements | Using your audit data work out how many bins you need, what size (bearing in mind food waste is heavy) and where they should go. |
| 2 | Make rosters | To collect, decontaminate, empty and clean food waste bins. Share responsibilities around. |
| 3 | Set up onsite systems (if relevant) | E.g. composting bins/worm farms. |
| 4 | Set up FO or FOGO bin collection service | See off-site food management section. |
| 5 | Allocate responsibilities | To make it clear who is doing what. |
| 6 | Train staff and students | To keep the stream clean, be informed about what happens to the collected food waste and the environmental benefits of food waste recycling. |
| 7 | Signage | Clearly label bins and locate in planned areas. |

The information above is adapted from the NSW Department of Education Guide to setting up food waste separation systems which has more detailed information and useful resources. **Solving Organic Waste** also has useful resources including bin signs, roster sheets, bin monitoring sheets, risk management and more.

Some approaches used by schools

- Bins in every classroom (if food is allowed)
- Bins in the school grounds
- Bins in the central eating areas
- Students collect scraps and empty them into bin – regular schedule at end of lunch or afternoon, PA announcements
- Roster system for student or teacher collection
- Only collecting in some areas of school e.g. canteen, hospitality, K-2 class
- Different small containers are used (ice-cream tubs, 30l green bins, compost caddies)
- Cleaners empty food scraps into bins 3-5 times a week

An example shopping list

Product	Image	Recommendation
7 L kitchen caddy		One per classroom (if food allowed).
8 L compostable caddy liners		To line the 7 L caddy – certified compostable to Australia Standards AS4736-2066. Talk to your waste service provider if you are using a FO service to see what they accept.
23 L organic caddy and compostable liner		An alternative for canteens if more food waste is generated.
120 L wheelie bin		One per playground area. Emptied into the food waste collection bin.
120 L clear bin liner		Most cleaners prefer a bin liner to be used. A clear bag is good for monitoring contaminants. The bag if not compostable to AS4736-2006 standard can be reused or disposed of in the red bin.



Top Tips for food waste collection success

Clear labelling	Clearly explain what can and cannot be put in the various organic waste collection containers you use i.e. for worms, for the compost, for FO collection etc. Label your containers with nationally accredited 'green' organics waste colour-coded signage.
Clear bin locations	Food waste materials are generated in specific sites around the school. Identify where you need to locate your labelled collection containers accordingly. Generate a map of this layout.
Contamination of food bins	Ensure that all staff and students are trained and have ongoing education. Allocate tasks to check and remove contamination – this is critical! Consider a reward system for students. Ensure clear signage and monitor bin locations.
Smells, flies and maggots	Empty organic bins in classrooms and playgrounds every other day. Make sure one of those days is Friday so food waste is not left over the weekend. Keep bins in the shade and the lids shut. Regularly clean compost caddies – set up a roster with roles and tasks.
Educate and communicate with staff and students	Communicate regularly on how to use the FO and FOGO bins and the reasons for food waste recycling.
Monitor, report and celebrate success	Regularly collect data on the volume and weight of organic waste materials successfully diverted from landfill and celebrate improvements.

Training and learning

Training the main people involved in the program is one of the keys to the successful rollout of a food waste program. This ensures everyone understands their roles, the process and the reasons for doing it. Running a waste management program also offers curriculum-aligned learning opportunities for students. There are many resources available including:

NSW Department of Education Solving Organic Waste

training resources for teachers and cleaners

NSW Department of Education Solving Organic Waste

teaching resources across Stages 1-6 and a food waste management module

Sustainable Schools NSW

links to primary and secondary teaching resources and student activities

Food Smart School curriculum resources

suite of teaching resources focused on food waste reduction, for Stages 1–4.

Reducing food waste

Minimising avoidable food waste is an important step in managing your overall waste footprint. It helps prevent unnecessary use of land, water and energy, reduces costs and cuts emissions.

The EPA's Love Food Hate Waste NSW Food Smart Schools program has resources to reduce food waste, including lesson plans for children in Years 1-8, aligned with the national curriculum.

Where does food waste come from in schools?

Common sources of food waste in schools are:

- student lunch leftovers
- school canteen/cafe
- catering/cooking classes
- staff rooms

Opportunities to reduce food waste

- Review school policies around food consumption and management. Examples include play first eat later; take food waste home, eating together/supervised eating.
- Reduce food waste in the canteen/café – have a food waste review to identify all sources of food waste (e.g. buying too much food, stock rotation, kitchen waste and portion sizes).
- Integrate food literacy and numeracy – see **Teaching and learning section**.
- Empower student action – decisions about their school lunch, pack their own lunch boxes.

Lunchbox Leftovers

Lunchbox Leftovers was a collaborative project, funded by the EPA and delivered by MidWaste Regional Waste Forum and BehaviourWorks Australia. This pilot project trialled three food waste reduction interventions within schools.

1. A new policy that requires students to take any leftover food home.
2. A program that promotes greater student involvement in making food for school.
3. A timetabling switch that has students play before eating at lunchtime.

Food waste outcomes

Food waste reductions were noticeable through photo audits and teacher interviews in six of the nine participating schools. This indicated a positive association with the interventions being trialled by the Lunchbox Leftovers program. Schools that participated in each of the interventions showed a reduction in food waste, with the biggest reduction coming from student involvement in making their lunches.

Love Your Lunch Schools Program

Love your Lunch Schools Program was delivered by the North East Waste Forum in 24 schools between 2019–2022. The program tackled the challenges of reducing lunchbox food and packaging waste, healthy eating, reducing school waste and food waste reduction among families. The aim was to provide students with the inspiration and skills needed to make or pack their own lunches, which has been shown through recent Australian pilot studies to reduce the amount of food left uneaten at school.

Actions promoted through the program to reduce food waste included:

- making your own lunch
- only packing as much as you can eat
- cutting up fruit to minimize waste.

Food waste outcomes

The results of the waste audits (from eight schools in Term 2, 2021 with 1,171 students) highlight an average 46% reduction in edible food waste from children's lunchboxes, with one school achieving a 93% reduction.

Funding opportunities

Many low-cost changes can be made to reduce food, but extra waste infrastructure is more expensive. Possible funding sources include:

EPA Bin Trim Equipment rebates

Council grant funding programs—many councils run annual grant funding to support local environmental or sustainability projects.

Regional waste groups—working with councils and may have funding available for regional waste education programs and waste infrastructure.

NSW non-government schools - **Capital assistance block grants**

General school waste resources

Sustainable Schools NSW website

Links for curriculum materials, waste audit tools, canteen, and school planning resources.

Rumbalara Environmental Education Centre

Provides resources for school composting, worm farming and waste audits, an online gallery and links to other waste education programs.

Kimbriki -

Includes practical tools for school composting systems, useful signage, curriculum linked activities, instructional videos.

Cool.org

Formerly Cool Australia) online directory providing educational resources to support teachers.

NSW DoE Sustainability Action Process

Lessons plans for waste and kitchen gardens.

NSW DoE Solving Organic Waste pilot

Food waste specific resources.

OzHarvest FEAST

Free waste resources as well as pay for service school programs.

Junior Landcare Education Hub

Education resources on food production and food waste management.

Case studies

Reducing food waste in schools **Ascham School**

A whole school approach to sustainability **Mumbulla School for Rudolf Steiner Education**

Diverting Organic Waste from Landfill with Subpods



Brought to you by the NSW Government through
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Email: organics.recycling@epa.nsw.gov.au

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