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SOUTH AFRICAN
FOOD
LOSS & WASTE INITIATIVE

CASE STUDY

Empact Group: Building a Culture of Food Waste Reduction

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About Empact Group



Empact Group serves a diverse range of sectors, including healthcare facilities (hospitals and clinics), corporate offices and business parks, industrial and mining sites, educational institutions (schools and universities), as well as remote and specialised work sites requiring outsourced catering services.

Sector: Hospitality & Food Service

Industry: Contract Catering

Company Size: ±7,600 employees in the
Food Division

Company Mission Statement: “At Empact, we are on a journey – a journey to do our best and be the best for our people, our clients, our partners, our community, and our planet.”



Executive Summary

In contract catering, food loss and waste represent both a commercial risk and a sustainability imperative. At Empact Group, food waste was being measured, but these measurements were neither consistently understood nor were they being used to inform decision-making. Opportunities to use data to improve cost control, optimise menus and reduce environmental footprints were being lost.

In response, Empact implemented a structured food waste measurement framework, supported by a targeted Food Waste Awareness Campaign. This programme embedded practical training, clear accountability and visible leadership across operations. The outcome has been materially improved data quality, measurable reductions in food waste, stronger staff ownership, and a more mature, sustainability-led operational culture.

The programme is supported by formalised standard operating procedures, ensuring consistency, accountability and scalability across more than 300 units nationally.

The Challenge

Empact Group operates across a diverse and complex portfolio of catering environments. While food waste was recognised as an issue, its true impact on profitability, operational efficiency and environmental performance was not fully understood at site level.

Key challenges included:

- Limited understanding among teams of how food waste data informs forecasting, menu planning and cost control.
- Inconsistent waste measurement practices across sites, reducing the reliability of reported data.
- Low awareness of the environmental consequences of food waste, including unnecessary resource use and landfill impact.

As a result, opportunities to reduce food waste, protect margin and improve sustainability outcomes were not consistently realised.

The Solution

To address these challenges, Empact Group introduced an integrated food waste reduction programme that combined food waste awareness, employee training, and structured food waste measurement and reporting.

The initiative was designed to embed food waste management into daily operations and create a culture of continuous improvement across the business. Within the first 11 months of implementation, the programme delivered measurable savings of R108 000.00, equivalent to approximately 3.1% of the initial investment.

1



Awareness Raising

Food Waste Context and Behaviour Change

To address food waste as both a financial and environmental challenge, Empact Group implemented a targeted Food Waste Awareness Campaign aimed at shifting food waste from a compliance requirement to an operational priority.

The campaign focuses on:

- Building understanding of the financial and environmental impact of food waste.
- Promoting more mindful production, portioning, and consumption practices.
- Encouraging practical, site-level actions to reduce waste.

Awareness is driven through on-site engagement, visual communication materials, sharing of best practices, and continuous reinforcement across operations. The objective is to embed a culture where food waste is actively managed and reduced as part of daily decision-making.





Measuring and Reducing Food Waste

Food waste education is embedded within Impact's broader training programmes to ensure consistent understanding and capability across all sites. A dedicated food waste training video and structured learning interventions support this. All training content and programme materials were developed internally, drawing on operational expertise and supported by publicly available industry resources, including reports from the International Food Waste Coalition.

Training includes:



A mandatory Basic Food and Workplace Safety training module, reaching approximately 7,000 employees across sites. Implemented at all levels of the catering operation, the training engages everyone from leadership teams to frontline kitchen and production staff.



Targeted online sessions delivered by Regional Chefs that focus on waste categorisation, segregation, and accurate data capture.



A dedicated e-learning programme with six structured modules covering:

- Introduction to food waste
- Food waste categories
- Correct weighing procedures
- Zeroing of scales
- Practical approaches to minimising waste
- Reinforcement of key learnings

Participants are required to complete all six modules and achieve a minimum score of 80% in the final assessment to receive a certification that recognises their competence in food waste management.

Since its launch, more than 500 employees have completed the programme, with further rollout underway. The programme is overseen by the Food Sustainability Committee and delivered through a collaborative effort involving the Operations Leadership Team, Training Department, Regional Chefs, and Regional Operations Managers. These teams support implementation, build site-level capability, and maintain ongoing oversight to ensure consistency in food waste management practices, measurement, and reporting across all operations.





Implementation of a Tracking System

Over six months, Empact Group implemented a structured and standardised food waste measurement system across all units. This was followed by a further year of embedding and refinement and has resulted in consistent, accurate food waste measurement and reporting practices that can produce comparable data across operations. The rollout included investment in digital scales and dedicated food waste bins, valued at approximately R2.5 million and comprehensive internal training initiatives amounting to approximately R1.1 million.

The implemented system is underpinned by a formal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), which:

- Defines food waste categories across the full production cycle (pre-production, post-service, and plate waste).
- Provides step-by-step guidance on waste segregation, daily measurement, and record-keeping.
- Ensures data is accurate, comparable, and actionable.

Food waste separation and recording categories include:

- Production waste
- Overproduction waste
- Plate scrapings
- Food samples
- Expired food
- Used cooking oil

Weights are recorded in kilograms on an in-unit food waste tracker. The used oil is measured in litres and collected by registered waste transporters for biodiesel production.

At site level, food waste measurement is embedded into daily kitchen operations:

- Each workstation is equipped with clearly labelled food waste containers for correct separation.
- Waste is weighed daily using calibrated scales, with proper taring to ensure accuracy.
- A designated team member is responsible for capturing and verifying daily waste data.
- Waste data is recorded per category and captured into a centralised system enabling unit-level and national reporting.
- Managers review data daily and monthly to identify trends, highlight inefficiencies, and drive corrective actions.

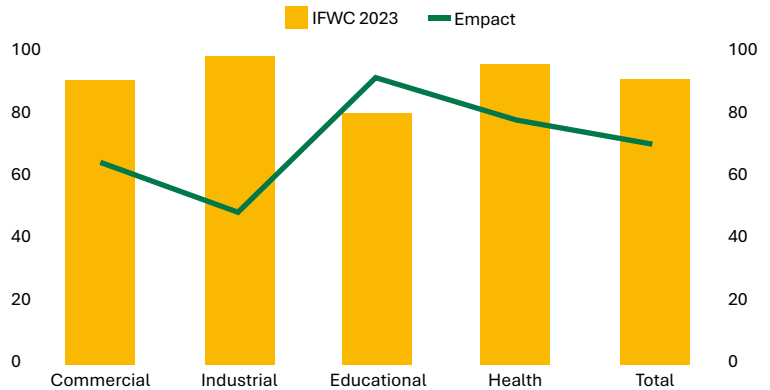
At month-end, Regional Managers review and verify food waste data before submission to Head Office for consolidation. This enables trend analysis and formal sustainability reporting.

The Results

To better understand performance and track progress against global best practice, Empact Group benchmarks its food waste against the International Food Waste Coalition (IFWC) dataset. IFWC measures food waste in grams per cover across multiple sectors.

Empact's 2025 performance demonstrates strong alignment with international benchmarks across key sectors.

**Empact vs IFWC Benchmark
(grams per cover per sector)**



This benchmarking not only validates the effectiveness of Empact's food waste programme but also provides a clear framework for identifying priority areas and driving continuous improvement.

Benchmarking Performance (REFERENCE): International Food Waste Coalition. (2024). *Food waste reduction report 2024*. International Food Waste Coalition. <https://internationalfoodwaste-coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/IFWC-Report-final.pdf>





Economic Benefits

- Reduced food waste from 11% to 9.8% of meals produced, delivering measurable cost savings and improving gross profit through decreasing overproduction. Within the first 11 months of implementation, the programme generated savings of R108 000, equating to approximately 3.1% of the initial investment.
- Improved operational efficiency and forecasting, enabling more accurate menu planning and reduced unnecessary spend.
- Stronger data-driven decision-making, supported by consistent measurement across 300+ units, improving financial control and ongoing cost management.



Environmental

- Through food waste diversion from landfill:
 - Avoided an estimated 2,085 tonnes of CO₂e emissions.
 - Prevented an estimated 28.36 tonnes of methane (CH₄) emissions.
- Prevented an estimated 1,076 million litres of embedded water loss associated with wasted food.
- Around 50% of total food waste generated is currently diverted away from landfill, reducing overall environmental impact.
- Approximately 30% of sites now divert food waste from landfill through on-site composting or partnerships with external composting providers.
- Plant-forward and plant-based menu options are promoted through the awareness campaign, highlighting their lower carbon and resource footprint. Chef-developed, plant-forward recipes have been integrated into menus, supporting improved ingredient utilisation and more sustainable food choices.
- Used cooking oil is collected by approved service providers and repurposed into biodiesel, supporting circular economy principles.



Staff & Culture Impact

- Increased staff engagement and ownership of food waste reduction has been supported by structured training and the introduction of site-level “Food Waste Warriors”, driving accountability and behaviour change.
- Enhanced skills and capabilities have equipped employees to apply practical approaches to waste prevention, forecasting, and more efficient resource use in daily operations.
- A clearer understanding of the link between operational practices, cost control, and environmental impact has strengthened a sustainability culture, with improved collaboration across site teams, regional chefs, and management.
- Although the process of separating, categorising, weighing, and recording the various food waste streams is labour-intensive, it has played an important role in creating greater awareness and understanding of food waste amongst staff.

“The Food Waste Awareness Campaign has shifted food waste from being a reporting requirement to a daily operational focus. By maintaining a year-round approach and reinforcing this through Food Waste Week and structured training, we have improved data quality, reduced waste to landfill, and strengthened ownership across our kitchens.”

—Kubendran Moodley, Managing Director: Empact Group



Lessons Learnt

In contract catering, food loss and waste represent both a commercial risk and a sustainability imperative. At Empact Group, food waste was being measured, but these measurements were neither consistently understood nor were they being used to inform decision-making. Opportunities to use data to improve cost control, optimise menus and reduce environmental footprints were being lost.

In response, Empact implemented a structured food waste measurement framework, supported by a targeted Food Waste Awareness Campaign. This programme embedded practical training, clear accountability and visible leadership across operations. The outcome has been materially improved data quality, measurable reductions in food waste, stronger staff ownership, and a more mature, sustainability-led operational culture.

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1 Awareness Raising

Initial awareness efforts had limited impact as teams did not fully connect food waste to their roles. Engagement improved when data insights and site-level champions directly linked waste to both financial and environmental impacts. This highlights that awareness-raising campaigns are most effective when they are relevant, data-driven, and reinforced on the ground.

2 Training

Translating training into sustained behaviour change was a challenge. This was overcome through practical, role-specific training supported by tools and continual accountability. The key lesson learnt is that if training is to drive lasting change, it must be ongoing and operationally relevant.

3 Measurement

A key challenge was ensuring reliable, consistent and comparable food waste data across sites. This was addressed by embedding measurement into standard operating procedures and assigning clear site-level ownership. The consequent improvement in data accuracy affirms that for measurement to be effective, it must be integrated into daily operations.

Future Outlook

- Scale food waste diversion with clients and service providers.
- Strengthen awareness campaigns through refreshed, ongoing engagement.
- Expand plant-forward menus to reduce waste and environmental impact.
- Leverage improved data to set targets and drive continuous improvement.



Evidence-based Action

This case-study forms part of the South African Food Loss and Waste Initiative (SA FLWI) to showcase the positive impact of food waste reduction across the food system. It shares how businesses are successfully making reductions in their operations and/or engaging their supply chain to do the same. These stories demonstrate the operational, commercial, and environmental benefits of taking action against food waste.

About The Consumer Goods Council of South Africa

The Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) represents the large Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector, which is one of the largest employers and contributes over 20% of the country's GDP. The CGCSA provides regulatory guidance via its Food Safety & Sustainability Initiative (FSSI). It also manages the South African Food Loss and Waste Initiative, which targets a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030.

To find out more visit <https://www.cgcsa.co.za/>



About the South African Food Loss & Waste Initiative

The South African Food Loss and Waste Initiative (SA FLWI) is an initiative of the CGCSA which aims to prevent and reduce food loss and waste by half by 2030; through the adoption of food utilisation hierarchy which prioritises improved food utilisation and food loss and waste reduction in the first instance; and secondly redistribution of edible, nutritious food for human consumption, and to enable secondary markets for surplus food; and identifying food surplus and waste management solutions that respond to a circular economy and sustainable food systems agenda. The purpose of the initiative is to respond to the current food loss and waste, and food security dilemma in South Africa.



Strategic Partnership and Funding

The SA FLWI is supported by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), an international climate action NGO that works to reduce food waste across supply chains and in the home. Globally, food waste is responsible for around 10% of all Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Reducing food waste reduces GHG emissions.

Rainier Climate provided catalytic funding to support WRAP and its partners in tackling food loss and waste through existing voluntary agreements in Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and through the creation of a new voluntary food waste agreement in Brazil.

The funding covers ongoing work with money allocated to each nation to increase the systemic Target-Measure-Act approach to prevent and reduce food waste.



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Disclaimer

The South African Food Loss and Waste Initiative (SA FLWI) is an industry-led initiative supported by the Government and other key stakeholders. It is led by the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA), which also serves as the initiative's secretariat.

The information and guidance provided by SA FLWI, including content related to food safety, food waste reduction, and food donation are intended solely for educational and informational purposes. The initiative seeks to raise awareness and promote best practices in line with national priorities and international commitments to reducing food loss and waste.