

How Small F&B Enterprises in Japan are Focusing on Sustainability

In Japan, 27.59 million tons of food waste are produced each year, according to estimates by the [Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of the Environment](#). While a good part of the food waste can be reused as feed, a staggering 6.43 million tons of edible food is thrown away, equivalent to about 51 kilograms of waste per person every year.



Source: Kyodo News

With the highest food waste per capita in Asia, the Japanese government has enacted a new law to halve such costs from 2000 levels by 2030, pushing companies to find solutions. That said, in Japan, both small and large Food & Beverage (F&B) companies are increasing their use of technology to reduce food waste and cut costs especially during the Covid-19 health crisis.

Take [Kuradashi.jp](#) for instance, an e-commerce initiative that uses online shopping to reduce food loss while also promoting solutions to other social issues. Due to the pandemic and increased demand for low-priced unsold foods, the online business is now thriving, as consumers became more cost conscious amid the lockdown.

Reduction of Food Waste by Small Businesses

In Tokyo bakeries, it is inevitable that freshly baked bread may not sell and end up becoming left over. According to the [INSP News Service](#), the mechanism of the 'night-time bakery' works to buy this leftover bread from various bakeries and sell them at night once bakeries have closed.

Given how it may be tough to know how much bread will be left over, the number of bakeries dealt with and the amount of bread bought each day varies. Hence, their challenge is to increase the number of bakery collaborations.



Source: Starbucks Japan

Separately, last year, Tokyo's Shibuya City had started a system to authenticate restaurants that are making efforts to reduce food loss, clean up the local environment, and reduce garbage. Once a restaurant is selected, they receive a "Shiburan" label with designs of "hachiko" — the famous dog that has become known as the symbol of Shibuya — which they can display at their restaurants.

Upon certification, the stores are judged on their efforts to completely use all its ingredients and leave no leftovers, thereby reducing food loss. This "Shiburan" effort helps urge restaurants, both small and large, to be more conscious about food loss and the environment.



A customer carries her shopping in her own bag as she leaves a supermarket in Tokyo on July 1, 2020.

Recent years have also seen the rise of many apps that focus on food sharing to reduce food loss. Besides the aforementioned Kuradashi, there is also a service called [Wakeari](#) where those with surplus stock can list their products at a discounted price at. Through this service platform, producers can post their product's photos along with heartfelt stories.

In fact, after learning about the waste produced in Japan, a food creator, Miica Fran, was motivated to start Bio Labo House, according to the *Japan Times*. Bio Labo House is an experimental zero-waste kitchen, running out of *aVin*, a wine shop and bar located on a cosy street in Tokyo's Meguro ward.

One of the first steps she took to reduce the waste produced, was to produce a special reusable container to avoid plastic waste, especially given how Japan is the [second-largest per-capita generator of plastic waste in the world](#) according to the U.N. Environment Programme, producing more than the entire European Union.



Source: Source International Network of Street Papers

[Tabete](#), an app that allows users to purchase meals about to be thrown out for cheap, received a message from a producer in Kyoto prefecture that he had nowhere to sell his chicken, and he feels sorry that he has to discard the chicken. According to Taichi Isaku, co-founder of [CoCooking](#), which runs Tabete, this particular producer “came to our service to see what else they can do to upsell their food and reduce their waste”.

To conclude, although food waste has long been an issue in Japan, the disruption caused by the pandemic has given consumers a glimpse into the wider food supply chain.

Inevitably, transitioning toward sustainability will undoubtedly necessitate action on the macro- and microscales.

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