



Spotlight

Measuring Business Food Waste: Learnings from Stramash Outdoor Nursery

February 2025



Stramash Outdoor Nursery in Fort William partnered with the Highland Good Food Partnership to assess and reduce their food waste. Taking part in Zero Waste Scotland's One-Month Food Waste Challenge, they measured waste, analysed patterns, and made adjustments. However, the process revealed unexpected barriers, highlighting the complexities of food waste reduction in early years settings. This spotlight looks at the lessons learned and the ongoing need for practical, long-term solutions.

The collaboration with the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP) emerged after a joint Highland Community Waste Partnership event at Lochaber Chamber of Commerce. At this event, businesses explored different sustainability initiatives, including food waste reduction. Stramash expressed interest in assessing their food waste more closely, leading to their participation in the One-Month Food Waste Challenge.

While they already had a separate food waste collection in place, they still identified food waste as an area of concern. Being part of the Eco Schools program, they wanted to understand how much waste was being generated, why it was happening, and whether they could make meaningful reductions.



At a Glance

The food waste tracking initiative began in July 2024, running through to January 2025. With support from Zero Waste Scotland, the nursery used industrial scales to measure their food waste, making the process more efficient.

Each day, after lunchtime, Stramash staff and children weighed the leftover food, integrating the activity as a learning experience about waste and sustainability. The first few weeks focused on establishing a baseline measurement, helping to identify trends and key sources of waste. Based on these findings, adjustments were trialled over the following months, with ongoing measurements to assess their impact. The final round of data collection in January 2025 provided a clearer picture of whether changes had been effective and what challenges remained.

This hands-on approach not only provided valuable data but also helped engage the children in understanding food waste and its impact.

Key Learnings

Despite efforts to reduce waste, the second round of measuring showed an increase in estimated annual food waste costs (£901 to £1,176) and total waste projections for the year (1.1 to 1.32 tonnes). However, by the third round of measuring, there was a slight improvement, with average food waste per plate decreasing from 212g to 190g. It should be noted that there were some inconsistencies in data collection, such as missing days and variations in recorded child attendance, which made it difficult to track exact trends over time.

	Food waste Measured	Food waste Annual projection	Cost Annual projection
July (baseline)	212 grams/ cover	1.1 tonnes	£901
Sep	212 grams/ cover	1.32 tonnes	£1,176
Jan	190 grams/ cover	1.41 tonnes	£1,253

What Worked & What Didn't?

Adjustments like recording children's preferences, serving smaller portions, and offering leftovers to later pickups helped refine lunch service. Caterers also reduced soup portions, and a compost bin was used for fruit and veg scraps.

However, a key challenge remained—the reliance on external catering orders. With no freezer or cold storage, meals had to be used the same day, and fluctuating child attendance meant orders were often too high. Soup and pasta, in particular, were frequently wasted due to oversupply and storage constraints.

What Did We Learn?

Food waste in an outdoor nursery setting is hard to address, especially when dependent on fixed catering orders. The inability to adjust portions daily to reflect attendance changes, combined with storage limitations, led to unavoidable waste.

While some interventions showed promise, further refinements are needed. The slight reduction in waste per plate in the third round suggests that small changes, like adjusting portion sizes and menu variety, can have an impact. More flexible ordering, better tracking of attendance, and potential investment in cold storage could help further reduce waste in the future.

The difficulty in significantly reducing waste also underscores the importance of making food waste measurement an ongoing part of business operations, rather than a one-time fix. Regular tracking allows for continuous adjustments and long-term improvements. Improved data tracking will also be essential for accurately measuring progress and identifying sustainable solutions.

Looking Ahead

Although HGFP won't be able to continue supporting Stramash going forward, they will have access to additional support from Zero Waste Scotland. Given the challenges faced, we recommend that Stramash continues measuring food waste regularly and shares their findings with other nursery locations across the Highlands, as many will likely experience similar struggles.

One promising development is the discussion around investing in an in-vessel composter. While not a direct solution to food waste, this would reduce reliance on external waste collection services and further embed circular economy principles into the children's learning. By continuing to measure, adapt, and collaborate, Stramash can build on this work and contribute to broader waste reduction efforts in early years settings.

Also see:

[Business food waste - Knoydart](#)

[Engaging hospitality businesses - challenges and learning.](#)

The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund, and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

Learn more here: www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/