Turning Food Waste into Opportunity: A Destination-Led Collaboration Story

Royal Djurgården / Kungliga Djurgården, Sweden
Kungl. Djurgårdens Intressenter/Royal Djurgården Society
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Visitor Experience & Destination Management

Summary of Good Practice Story
Royal Djurgården, Stockholm's National City Park destination welcoming over 15 million visitors annually through a 60-member business association, identified food waste as a persistent challenge across its restaurants — one every business wanted to fix, but few had begun to systematically measure, since revealing inefficiencies felt risky to expose alone. With funding from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the European Regional Development Fund, the destination partnered with food-waste measurement experts Generation Waste to run a shared, non-competitive measurement programme across more than 20 interested restaurants, discovering that dishwashers and serving staff — not just kitchen managers — held crucial insight into recurring waste patterns, which led to practical changes like age-based children's portions and redesigned buffet services. Restaurants that measured consistently cut food waste by an average of 36%, saving 1.30 SEK per plate served, celebrated through a "Waste Not Breakfast" using rescued ingredients and shared publicly via a "Food Heroes Together" guide for visitors. The core lesson: destinations cannot mandate change in independent businesses, but they can enable it — building trust and a shared sense of purpose lets a community of otherwise-competing businesses share data and accelerate progress none could achieve alone.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context

Royal Djurgården is one of Scandinavia's leading visitor destinations, welcoming more than 15 million visitors annually. The destination is home to museums, attractions, restaurants, parks and cultural institutions within the world's first National City Park in central Stockholm.

What makes Royal Djurgården distinctive is not only its setting, but its model. Through Royal Djurgården Society (Swedish: Kungliga Djurgårdens Intressenter), in practice all 60 independent organizations working within the tourism sector join forces as members to advance a shared vision of sustainable destination development — earning the destination the Green Destinations Platinum Award in 2022 and 2024.

Collaboration is the cornerstone of our work. Progress is driven not by authority, but by trust, shared goals, and collective commitment. Together with a dedicated sustainability group of managers from across the destination, we have shaped four focus areas tied to the UN's SDGs from the ground up. It is this constellation, and the culture of shared learning it has built, that would prove essential in tackling one of the hospitality sector's most complex challenges: food waste.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed

Food waste had been identified as a pressing challenge facing Royal Djurgården's restaurants. As a central priority within the focus area "A Sustainable Food Culture," it repeatedly surfaced in assessments and action plans — yet finding effective ways to reduce it in practice remained difficult.

The challenge was not a lack of ambition, no restaurant wants to waste food. But measuring it requires time, resources and a willingness to reveal inefficiencies you might not want to expose. While most recognized the importance of the issue, few had begun systematic measuring.

We realized that food waste is both a sustainability and a business issue. All restaurants wanted to tackle it, but few had started, making clear that a joint initiative was needed to lower the threshold.

Our sustainability work had already demonstrated the power of collective action. This raised an important question: could food waste be tackled more effectively as a shared destination challenge than as an individual business responsibility?

One of our restaurants had done it successfully: Junibacken. Could they help inspire others? Could we find a shared platform for measuring that would work for all? When we received support from Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth and the European Regional Development Fund, we got the opportunity to find out whether a destination-wide approach could accelerate change.

The Vision: What you set out to do

Our goal was not simply to reduce food waste, but to prove that an entire destination can learn, act and improve together.

Our ambition was to create a destination-wide learning process where restaurants and food businesses could measure, understand and address food waste together. By making it easier to take the first steps, sharing knowledge openly and learning from one another's experiences, participants could accelerate progress that would have been difficult to achieve alone.

We recognized that every organisation starts from a different position. Some participants were ready to measure immediately. Others needed knowledge, inspiration or practical support before taking the first step.

Our vision was therefore built on collaboration rather than competition. By creating a trusted environment where businesses could share both successes and challenges, we aimed to transform food waste from an invisible problem into a shared responsibility.

The Journey: How change happened

The project brought together restaurants from across the destination and we partnered with Generation Waste, one of Sweden’s leading experts in food waste measurement.

The process quickly became about more than collecting data.

Restaurants began measuring food waste, analysing patterns and identifying opportunities for improvement. Participants discovered that food waste often emerged from complex interactions between purchasing, forecasting, kitchen operations, serving practices and guest behaviour.

Valuable insights was that reducing food waste required engagement far beyond the kitchen management team. Employees throughout the operation suddenly became key contributors to improvement. Dishwashers, who were often the first to see what returned from guests' plates, provided crucial information about recurring waste patterns. Staff serving food began sharing observations about portion sizes and guest preferences, leading to practical changes, such as offering different portion sizes for children depending on age. Food waste measurement created new conversations across departments and helped restaurants understand that every employee had valuable knowledge to contribute.

Regular meetings created opportunities to exchange experiences and learn from one another. Businesses shared statistics, discussed obstacles and celebrated progress. Some participants embraced measurement from the start and worked extensively with the tools. Others faced operational challenges but remained engaged through discussions and knowledge sharing. Every participant contributed to the collective learning process.

Keeping the Momentum

Like many collaborative projects, participation levels varied over time. While initial enthusiasm was high, maintaining engagement required continuous effort. Two factors proved particularly important:
First, participants were regularly reminded that they were part of a collective effort. The value of the project depended on everyones contribution, as the shared results allowed businesses to benchmark performance, identify trends and learn from one another. Without individual contributions, the collective learning would be weaker.
Second, visible progress and shared experiences helped sustain motivation. Participants could see how their efforts translated into measurable reductions in food waste, cost savings and practical improvements. Successes were celebrated together, including a luxurious “Waste Not Breakfast” where all participating were invited to taste creative dishes prepared from ingredients that might otherwise have been discarded. Hosted by some of Sweden’s most renowned chefs, the breakfast transformed the project’s results into a positive and inspiring experience, demonstrating that reducing waste can also create new value, creativity and enjoyment.

The project demonstrated that long-term engagement requires both accountability and inspiration: a clear expectation to contribute, combined with tangible evidence that the effort makes a difference. Over time, a community of practice emerged around one of the destination’s most complex sustainability challenges.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
More than 20 restaurants expressed interest, and a significant group remained actively engaged throughout the project. Among those measuring consistently, food waste was reduced by an average of 36 percent, saving 1.30 SEK on every plate served. At a time of rising food prices, reducing waste not only benefits the environment, it makes strong business sense.

The most important result extended beyond the numbers. Food waste and resource efficiency are now natural parts of conversations about sustainability and business performance. The ability to visualize waste in measurable terms helped translate ambitions into practical decisions.

Several participants implemented operational changes that would likely not have happened without the support of the network. For example, two of the destination's largest restaurants redesigned their bread and salad service after identifying buffets as a major source of waste, resulting in both reduced waste and improved business performance.

The project also changed how restaurants addressed food waste internally. Food waste was no longer a kitchen issue alone. Measurement created awareness, but more importantly, it led to shared engagement across chefs, serving staff, dishwashers and management. Together, teams identified solutions and implemented changes, such as adjusting portion sizes and adapting food presentation, significantly reducing waste while improving the guest experience.

The knowledge is now also shared with visitors through the guide "Food Heroes Together", offering practical tips, recipes and inspiration for reducing food waste at home.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn
One of the most important lessons was that destinations cannot mandate change; but they can enable it. As a destination management organization, Royal Djurgården Society has no authority over individual businesses. Progress depended entirely on creating trust, building relationships and fostering a shared sense of purpose.

Another lesson was that measurement creates
awareness. Many participants believed they understood their food waste before the project began. Reliable data provided a different perspective and created a foundation for meaningful action and dialogue.

The project also demonstrated that organizations move at different speeds. Some participants achieved substantial reductions quickly. Others took important first steps towards understanding and addressing the issue. Both outcomes represent valuable progress.

For destinations seeking similar results, the advice is simple: focus first on building a community around the challenge. When organizations feel they are a part of something larger than themselves, knowledge sharing and behavioural change become possible. The hardest part is getting started; once the community is in place, progress can accelerate far beyond what any organization could achieve alone.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The project's impact continues beyond the formal period, as restaurants have embedded food waste measurement into daily operations and insights continue to be shared across Stockholm. What began on Djurgården has inspired similar efforts elsewhere, with businesses and networks following suit.

Perhaps most importantly, it strengthened a culture of collaboration where "competitors" shared data, experiences and solutions, proving that sustainability challenges are best solved together. This gave participants the confidence to challenge established practices and accelerate change.

The impact also extends beyond participating restaurants. Through the "Food Heroes Together" booklet, chefs share knowledge and practical tips that help visitors reduce food waste at home.

The legacy continues through Generation Waste, where our learnings are used as a model for other destinations. A starter package with new tools and support has lowered barriers for new participants across Sweden.

Together, this has created a scalable model that demonstrates how destinations can drive change through collaboration, learning and shared responsibility—and inspire others to do the same.

Awards or Certifications
Royal Djurgården winner of 2025 Place Brand Impact Story Awards:
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2025/05/15/royal-djurgarden-winner-of-2025-place-brand-impact-story-awards/

Royal Djurgården once again receiving the Green Destination Platinum Award
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2024/11/14/royal-djurgarden-once-again-receiving-the-green-destination-platinum-award/

Web Articles
Djurgården: A Testbed for Sustainable Food Culture:
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2025/10/07/djugarden-a-testbed-for-sustainable-food-culture/

Waste Not, Want Not!: https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2025/03/19/waste-not-want-not/

Inspirational stories of working with food waste reduction:
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2025/05/14/inspirational-stories-of-working-with-food-waste-reduction/

Circular and Resource-Efficient – A Path Towards Common Goals:
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/2024/01/31/circular-and-resource-efficient-a-path-towards-common-goals/

Other Relevant Links
Our sustainability site:
https://sustainable.royaldjurgarden.se/en/home-en/

Quotes or Testimonials
Alexander Holmqvist Winge, Food & Beverage Manager, Junibacken

"Food waste became everyone's responsibility, not just the kitchen's. Even our dishwashers became key contributors, helping us understand what was being thrown away and why. It created new conversations, stronger teamwork and better decisions. My advice to others is simple: just dare to try—and have fun with it."

Petra Walther, Manager, Vrak Mackverket

"The goal isn't perfect numbers. The goal is to understand reality and improve together. Creating a trusting, no-shame environment helped us stay motivated and focus on long-term change."