# Nutrition focus cuts food waste more effectively than sustainability claims



Recent research from the University of Adelaide reveals a significant insight into consumer behaviour: individuals who prioritise nutrition tend to waste less food than those motivated by sustainability. This study, which surveyed over 1,000 Australians, uncovers a paradox in food waste behaviour, suggesting a need to fundamentally shift how policymakers and businesses approach consumer awareness regarding food waste.

The findings indicate that while sustainability-minded consumers may have good intentions, these do not always translate into actionable behaviours that effectively reduce food waste. In contrast, those driven by nutritional considerations engage in more proactive behaviours, such as meal planning and mindful shopping. The study illustrates that a dedication to health can lead to a 17.6% reduction in food waste with every incremental increase in nutritional awareness.

Researchers noted that nutrition-conscious consumers typically exhibit more deliberate purchasing habits, often buying only what they need. Their focus on health influences not only what they select but also their attitudes toward leftovers and ingredients past their use-by dates, effectively minimising unnecessary waste. Conversely, while sustainability-oriented consumers tend to prefer local and sustainably packaged products, this focus does not directly correlate with reduced food waste, primarily due to a disconnect between their values and their actions.

This research challenges the effectiveness of traditional sustainability messaging, prompting experts to advocate for a reimagined approach. The principle that “health affects oneself, and sustainability is a bonus” is presented as a way to cultivate a mindset prioritising personal well-being alongside environmental responsibility. Integrating nutritional guidance with sustainable eating habits could yield dual benefits—enhancing both personal health and reducing food waste.

Moreover, food waste is reported to account for up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, primarily attributable to households. The staggering statistic that a billion meals are discarded daily, leading to an estimated economic loss of $1 trillion, underscores the urgency of addressing food waste effectively. Despite the clear environmental benefits of cutting food waste, existing policies have shown limited effectiveness. This might stem from their predominant focus on sustainability rather than nutrition, highlighting a potential area for improvement in public guidance and campaigns.

The researchers recommend that government and advocacy programs pivot their messaging to emphasise healthy eating habits while introducing concrete strategies that align with sustainability goals. For instance, they suggest employing meal planning apps and providing educational resources that address both nutrition and the environmental impact of food management.

Ultimately, it becomes evident that minimizing food waste is an achievable goal, yet success requires more than mere intention. By prioritising nutritional awareness alongside environmental objectives, both consumers and policymakers can create a more sustainable and health-conscious society. Through enhanced meal planning, controlled purchasing, and education about food management, households can actively reduce waste while nourishing themselves, effectively turning the tide against this pressing global issue.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 3, 6, 7
3. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5
4. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5
5. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5
6. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4
7. Paragraph 4

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/food-waste-reduction-nutrition-health-benefits-sustainability/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/food-waste-reduction-nutrition-health-benefits-sustainability/> - An article discussing a study by the University of Adelaide, which found that consumers who prioritize nutrition waste less food than those focused on sustainability. The study suggests that encouraging healthy eating habits may be more effective in reducing food waste than sustainability messaging alone.
3. <https://newatlas.com/environment/food-waste-nutrition-sustainability-focus/> - A report on a University of Adelaide study comparing the effectiveness of focusing on nutrition versus sustainability in reducing food waste. The study found that nutrition-focused consumers are more likely to plan meals and avoid over-purchasing, leading to less waste.
4. <https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/seeking-nutrition-not-sustainability-reduces-food-waste/> - An article highlighting research from the University of Adelaide, which indicates that consumers conscious of their nutrition exhibit behaviors that significantly reduce food waste, more so than those driven by sustainability concerns.
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6. <https://phys.org/news/2025-04-healthy-food.html> - An article discussing a University of Adelaide study that found consumers who prioritize healthy eating tend to waste less food, suggesting that promoting healthy eating habits may be more effective in reducing food waste than sustainability messaging alone.
7. <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/newsroom/news/list/2021/07/27/making-good-from-agricultural-and-food-waste> - A report on University of Adelaide researchers identifying a 'greener' process for extracting health-promoting molecules from agricultural and food waste, which can be repurposed in products such as skincare and pharmaceuticals.