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International Union of Arab Master Chefs

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Restaurant Food Waste: From Prep Loss to Plate Returns

Official article information

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Article code –	**Protection number** –

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Reference
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What preparation losses, unsold production and plate returns can reveal, and why comparisons need a consistent measurement scope.

What the total conceals

A restaurant’s total weight describes the scale. Separating preparation losses, production surplus and plate returns can help locate where to investigate.

Similar weights, different questions

Heavy trimming losses may prompt a look at purchasing specifications or cutting methods. Unsold batches raise questions about demand estimates. Repeated returns from one dish may prompt a review of portion size or components. Each pattern suggests an inquiry and leaves the cause to be verified.

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Comparisons need context

When meal counts vary, total weight can be read alongside weight per meal. Comparisons also depend on what was counted, including whether inedible parts were included.

When total weight falls but waste per meal rises

Suppose a restaurant records 12 kilograms across 300 meals in week one and 10 kilograms across 200 meals in week two. Total weight falls while waste per meal rises from 40 to 50 grams. Both figures are correct. One describes how much left the kitchen and the other puts it in the context of meals served.

What if the measurement boundary changes?

If bones and peels count one week and are excluded the next, part of the change may come from the method. A kitchen can retain its total alongside categories such as edible food and plate returns. When comparing dishes, the number ordered also matters. A popular dish may produce more total returns while generating less waste per serving.

Daily figures need a description of the service

The menu and bookings can differ from one day to the next, creating a change that does not recur. Keeping the type of service alongside the weight helps preserve that context. Surplus after a large buffet calls for a different interpretation from the same amount after ordinary service. Comparing several days can separate a recurring pattern from an unusual event. Consistent surplus in one component then gives a clearer reason to examine how its production is planned.

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