GOALympics by Sodexo: reducing food waste in the food services and facilities management industry

Overview

Organization: Sodexo
Segment: Catering
Region: 14 countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, China, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, South Africa)
Year: 2024
Target Audience: Front line staff
Evidence: Quantitative (kg reduction, g/cover) and qualitative (staff and consumer feedback)

Executive Summary

Sodexo's GOALympics initiative mobilised 540 sites across 14 countries to drive food waste reduction through a global, staff-focused challenge. By combining daily measurement, team engagement, and practical actions, the programme achieved a 4% reduction in food waste over three months, while significantly improving data accuracy and operational awareness.

The initiative demonstrated that short-term, gamified approaches can effectively drive behavioural change, empowering frontline teams to take ownership and innovate. GOALympics highlights how engagement, consistent tracking, and recognition can accelerate progress and deliver scalable impact across diverse food service operations.

Context

Sodexo is a global leader in food and facility management services. In line with its ambition to be a market maker in sustainability, the company is committed to reducing food waste by 50% across 85% of its sites by 2025. For Sodexo, employees are the driving force in the fight against food waste. Beyond raising awareness and providing training, the company aims to turn food waste tracking and reduction into an opportunity for initiative and creativity.

Actions Implemented

GOALympics is a global contest that promotes and celebrates employee engagement. Held from July to September, this engaging competition aims to improve food waste reduction

performance. In addition to recognizing top performers, GOALympics seeks to foster a culture of sustainability and innovation in daily operations. Participating sites were challenged to achieve a 5% reduction in pre- consumer food waste, including a 10% reduction in waste from overproduction and a 10% reduction in vegetable overproduction. The challenge involved tracking, starting with recording food waste daily to understand where and how improvements could be made. This was followed by monitoring through daily team engagement in pre-shift meetings to discuss food waste progress and prevention goals, keeping everyone informed and involved to drive success. The next step involved acting by implementing zero-waste strategies, including creative repurposing ingredients and optimizing kitchen processes.

GOALympics serves as a platform that encourages collaboration and engagement among teams and stakeholders to reduce food waste. It highlights the importance of individual responsibility, as each person's actions contribute to minimizing waste across operations. Beyond operational benefits, the platform also supports community initiatives and food donations, while boosting consumer confidence and support for sustainability-driven services.

Impact and lessons learned

540 locations were involved in the challenge across 14 countries. Over 3 months, a 4% improvement in food waste reduction rate was achieved and baseline rates improved from 82.8% to 87.8%, supporting stronger data accuracy.

Best-in-class awards were given at the site level to UK&I for 'Veggie Savers,' for reducing vegetable overproduction by 69% through consistent participation. The 'Reducing Overproduction Waste' award was presented to an Indian site for avoiding 127 kg of waste, the highest impact among all sites. The site also achieved the 'Pre-Consumer Waste Champions' title with a 20% overall reduction. This initiative involved excellent participation, consistent tracking, and coverage of a wide range of food items. Lastly, Chef Noohisham (Malaysia) won the 'Zero-Waste Recipe Hero' award for demonstrating an innovative use of surplus ingredients.

Costs & Benefits

GOALympics demonstrated that short-term initiatives can act as powerful catalysts for sustained behavioural change and engagement. The program emphasized the importance of accurate tracking data, leading to better identification of process gaps and enabling regions to focus on targeted waste reduction strategies. Success stories like MEA's use of Shared Goals and UK&I's sustained engagement showcase scalable best practices that can be replicated across regions to drive continuous improvement

Way Forward

Sodexo aims to extend the GOALympics challenge to more countries and units to increase impact and longevity

Quotes

"For Sodexo, the fight against food waste is part of our daily routine. Wasting less inspires creativity and new approaches to our relationship with food." ***- Sophie Bellon, Chairwoman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer.***