

Executive Summary

Food waste remains a critical issue in the United States — some 40 percent of all produced food goes uneaten. That waste has large-scale, negative effects for wildlife, habitat, clean air and water, and the climate. Grocery stores are gatekeepers in the food system, often determining what makes it from farm to shelf and what happens to food that goes unsold. The largest grocery chains are in a unique position to curb food waste, which can improve corporate sustainability, save money and help address social issues.

In 2018 the Center for Biological Diversity released *Checked Out: How U.S. Supermarkets Fail to Make the Grade in Reducing Food Waste*. That report examined 26 different points of analysis — from transparency to tracking and prevention to recycling — to rank the performance of the top grocery chains in America.

For this follow-up report we closely analyzed common gaps and trends from the past year to focus on the most critical aspects of reducing food waste in the grocery sector. We identified three key areas that must be addressed across the industry:

- A time-bound commitment to achieving zero food waste;
- Comprehensive prevention programs to stop waste upstream, before it reaches store shelves, rather than primarily relying on donating and recycling surplus food;
- Tracking food-waste volume and publicly reporting on food-waste reduction efforts to ensure accountability and transparency.

We looked at company websites, corporate sustainability reports, news reports, promotional materials and other publicly available data. We also reached out to each supermarket directly to gather more information from company representatives. Some companies were responsive to request for more information, others were not. We made every effort to include all available, relevant information.

Key finding: Seven of the 10 largest grocery chains still have not taken the first step of making a commitment to zero waste, and while there have been some advances in tracking how much food is donated, the total volume of wasted food across the grocery sector remains untracked.

Using the three main categories outlined above, we scored each of the companies to determine the following overall grades:

A: Kroger, Walmart and Ahold Delhaize USA are the only three grocery chains to publicly commit to zero food waste by 2025, and all have prioritized tracking food waste and prevention.

B: Aldi, Target and Whole Foods have made commitments that are less ambitious than zero waste by 2025 and have begun implementing prevention strategies and tracking that are not yet company-wide or publicly reported.

C: Albertsons has some food-waste reduction strategies in place but has yet to make a clear, company-wide commitment to zero waste by 2025, publicly report food waste data or implement more effective prevention measures.

D: Costco, Publix and Trader Joe's lag behind much of the grocery industry by lacking public commitments, transparent data tracking and comprehensive prevention strategies.

Recommendation: While there has been some important progress in addressing food waste over the past year, the grocery sector needs to fully and publicly embrace solutions that include concrete, measurable deadlines for zero waste and comprehensive prevention programs. Those programs should involve better ordering practices, clearer date labels, improved tracking and distribution technology, promotion of imperfect produce, and minimizing daily waste of meat and dairy.

