

Save-On-Foods: Operationalizing Food Recovery at Scale in Retail

Company Overview

Save-On-Foods is a full-service grocery retailer operating across Western Canada as part of Pattison Food Group. With a large-format store network and a strong presence in fresh categories, including produce, meat, dairy, and prepared foods, the company manages significant product volumes across multiple departments and daily replenishment cycles.

Operating at the retail stage places Save-On-Foods at a critical point in the food system: where purchasing decisions, merchandising practices, and inventory management directly influence whether food is sold, redistributed, or lost.

Over time, Save-On-Foods has developed a structured, system-wide approach to food loss and waste (FLW), integrating prevention, redistribution, and diversion into standard store operations.

The Challenge

In grocery retail, food loss is driven less by production issues and more by timing, presentation, and demand alignment.

Common drivers include:

- Fresh products with limited shelf life and variable turnover
- Consumer expectations for full shelves and consistent appearance
- Forecasting variability across store locations and seasons
- Products approaching or exceeding optimal sell-by windows

These conditions create a steady stream of surplus across departments. While much of this product remains edible, it often exits the retail system due to operational constraints rather than quality or safety concerns.

At the same time, demand from food banks and community organizations continues to grow, requiring more consistent, predictable access to nutritious food.

The Solution: From Surplus to System

At Save-On-Foods, the approach to food loss and waste is not treated as a separate sustainability initiative, it is built into how stores operate day to day.

The focus is straightforward: **reduce surplus where possible and ensure that what remains stays in the food system at the highest possible value.**

📍 Where Loss Occurs

Retail Stores (Grocery)

⚠️ Main Drivers

Perishability of fresh products; Forecasting variability and demand fluctuations; Cosmetic standards and full-shelf expectations; Product nearing or past optimal sell-by windows

🔧 Solutions

Real-time inventory and shrink management; Structured food donation and redistribution programs; Full diversion models prioritizing human consumption; Secondary channels (animal feed, organics processing); Discounted resale pathways

🤝 Key Partners

FoodMesh; Food banks and community organizations; Redistribution and logistics partners

🥬 Produce Types

Fresh produce, meat, dairy, prepared foods, bakery, and grocery

📊 Measurement

Store-level shrink data; Redistribution partner reporting; Waste hauler data (measured and estimated)

🌱 Social / Environmental Impact

More food redirected to people; Less waste to landfill; Reduced emissions; Improved system efficiency

🌍 UN SDGs

2 – Zero Hunger
12 – Responsible Consumption
13 – Climate Action

A key shift within Save-On-Foods has been moving from **ad hoc donation practices** to a **standardized, system-enabled model**.

Building Consistency Across Stores

Rather than relying on individual store relationships or one-off donations, stores operate within a structured system that:

- Identifies surplus in real time
- Matches product with appropriate outlets
- Ensures timely pickup and redistribution

This reduces the friction that often prevents food from being recovered.

Expanding Full Diversion Models

Stores participating in full diversion programs can direct the majority of surplus to higher-value uses, including:

- Human consumption through food banks and community organizations
- Secondary use channels such as animal feed
- Organics processing for remaining material



This model has enabled Save-On-Foods to achieve **high diversion rates away from landfill**, reaching approximately **94% diversion** within its banner.

In the broader company, Pattison Food Group, stores achieved **91% diversion** in 2025 collectively.

Supported by FoodMesh and Loop Resource, surplus food is redirected from retail to a network of local food banks, charities, and farms—ensuring it remains in the food system

Using Data to Drive Performance

Data plays a central role in maintaining and improving performance at Save-On-Foods. By integrating store-level shrink data, reporting from redistribution partners, and waste-hauler data, the organization gains a comprehensive view of how surplus moves through the system.

This integrated data set allows the company to track diversion performance by store and region, identify gaps or underperforming locations, and continuously adjust operations to reduce waste while improving recovery outcomes.

Over time, this has supported a measurable reduction in surplus per store, indicating improved prevention at source.



Save-On-Foods stores across Western Canada provided more than 17million meals to community partners in 2025

Model Insight: Designing for Recovery, Not Disposal

What distinguishes the Save-On-Foods approach is a shift in how surplus is treated operationally.

The system is designed so that:

- Edible food is expected to move to people first
- Secondary uses are built in as standard pathways
- Disposal is minimized through process and infrastructure

This is not driven by individual decisions at store level alone—it is enabled by:

- Coordinated partnerships
- Standardized processes
- Supporting infrastructure that makes recovery practical

The result is a system where **surplus is managed intentionally, rather than absorbed as waste**.

Results and Impact

Save-On-Foods' integrated approach has delivered measurable outcomes across environmental, social, and operational dimensions.

Key Outcomes

- **High diversion performance:** Leading banner within Pattison Food Group
- **Reduction in landfill volumes** alongside increased redistribution
- **Growing share of surplus directed to human consumption**

This approach has contributed to:

- Increased diversion to charities (growing year-over-year)
- Majority of surplus moving to **higher-value uses**

Impact At a Glance

- **94%** of food surplus diverted away from landfill
- **17M+** meals supported annually through redistribution
- **3,000+** charities and local farms engaged across the network
- **40,000+** tonnes CO₂e avoided each year

The Takeaway: Retail as a System Lever

Save-On-Foods demonstrates that grocery retail is a **critical control point** in reducing food loss and waste. Several practical insights emerge:

- **Most retail food loss is operational, not inevitable.**
Product often leaves the system due to timing and logistics—not quality.
- **Recovery depends on systems, not goodwill.**
Consistent outcomes require structured processes and reliable partners.
- **Data enables both performance and credibility.**
Measurement supports continuous improvement and ESG reporting.
- **Retail can function as a redistribution hub.**
When systems are in place, stores become consistent sources of supply for community networks.

Save-On-Foods shows that grocery retail is not merely a point where food waste occurs—it is one of the most powerful leverage points for preventing it. When retail systems are intentionally designed, surplus can be redirected from waste streams into outcomes that create environmental, social, and business value.

The lessons are clear. Scale delivers impact only when paired with structure. Standardized processes, clear accountability, and durable partnerships turn good intentions into consistent results. Data is the enabler of progress. Measurement strengthens daily operations, supports credible ESG reporting, and makes system-wide performance visible and improvable. And finally, high diversion is a design outcome, not a coincidence. It depends on the right infrastructure, coordinated partners, and continuous operational optimization.

“Reducing food waste isn’t a separate initiative for us — it’s part of how we operate better stores, support our communities, and manage resources responsibly.”

Paul Cope, SVP, Save-On-Foods

Taken together, this case reinforces a broader truth for the sector: reducing food loss is not an add-on to retail—it is a core function of well-run, resilient food systems.

For more information visit our [website](#)