

Precision in Practice: How Salem Health Cut Food Waste with AI

Salem Health is a leading healthcare provider in Oregon, operating a dual foodservice model that serves both retail guests and hospital patients. Every day, the culinary team manages meal production at scale, delivering thousands of dishes with consistency and care. At the center of this effort is Kevin Offield, food service analyst with over 20 years in the industry, specializing in menu management and production planning.

Tackling Waste

Food waste had long been a challenge in Salem Health's kitchens. Traditional waste logs were limited, relying on handwritten entries that made it difficult to trace the source of losses. **"We recognized we had an excessive amount of waste but couldn't pinpoint the cause"** Kevin explained. **"When we came across Winnow, it was the obvious choice to solve this."** The scale of the operation made the challenge urgent: the retail side serves roughly 1,200 people daily, while patient dining prepares about 400 covers.

Motivation for Change

Daily waste logs revealed striking figures: 50 pounds of chicken one day, 35 pounds of salmon on another and the losses quickly added up. Without a scalable way to track waste, the team lacked visibility and accountability. Winnow changed that, bringing data, images, and actionable insights to the forefront. **"It's hard to identify the root cause of food waste but when you have the pictures from Winnow, it's a lot easier to identify where it came from and why it was thrown away,"** Kevin noted.

Implementing Winnow

Since launching Winnow in March 2025, the system has become a part of the teams daily routine. Kevin and his team use weekly reports to discuss the most wasted items, distinguish one-off mistakes from recurring issues, and relay insights directly to kitchen staff. **"Being able to meet on that every single week and then take those results and talk to the frontline staff really helps out,"** Kevin shared.

Within just 17 weeks, Salem Health achieved a full return on investment. Waste dropped from **\$0.12 to \$0.08 per dollar spent—a 33% reduction by value**, with a target of reaching **\$0.05**.

Smarter Use of Salmon

Winnow's insights helped unlock creative ways to repurpose ingredients. One standout example is salmon: **"We get in our whole fillets fresh and trim them. We used to have a lot of scraps,"** Kevin explained. **"We've been able to develop recipes to utilize all salmon trimmings instead of throwing them away on a daily basis."** Now, what was once discarded is transformed into: Smoked salmon cream cheese spread, Salmon cakes and salads. The retail kitchen has since reduced salmon waste by **65%**.

Team Engagement and Training

Culinary leadership plays a key role in embedding waste reduction into the culture. For each new menu item, staff are trained not only on cooking technique but also on waste-conscious preparation and repurposing strategies. The team is shifting toward more versatile menus that make repurposing easier, breaking away from rigid structures that previously led to unnecessary discard.

Conclusion

Salem Health's journey with Winnow demonstrates that even in the complex world of healthcare dining, meaningful food waste reduction is possible. By combining clear data, team engagement, and a culture of continuous improvement, Salem Health has transformed waste into opportunity—advancing its mission to care for both people and the planet.

Advice to Peers

"It's okay to work on one item at a time. Get one high-ticket item and really find out the root cause."

Kevin Offield | Analyst
Salem Health

