Original Research

IDB #SinDesperdicio and the role of restaurants: myth vs reality

By **Diego F. Parra** · Updated 2026-07-30 · Social Impact

QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: cutting food loss and waste is NOT big-chain philanthropy, it is the most ignored profit lever of the independent restaurant. The Champions 12.3 evidence (WRI, 2024) is stubborn: for every *USD 1* invested in cutting waste, the median restaurant recovered *USD 7*. The IDB Group's #SinDesperdicio initiative rallies the public-private sector around that goal, but the link that decides the number is the operator: whoever standardizes the recipe and measures waste captures the saving; whoever doesn't, gives it away. Diego F. Parra orders it at Masterestaurant, SATE Institute's technology ally: first measure waste per dish, and only then does SDG 12 stop being a poster and turn into cash.

🔬 **Original Study / Industry Index** First-party research · methodology & sample disclosed · 13 min read · 2026-07-30

The world wasted 1.05 billion tonnes of food in 2022 and the food-service sector —restaurants included— accounted for 28% of it, some 290 million tonnes (UNEP, Food Waste Index 2024). In Latin America and the Caribbean roughly 127 million tonnes are lost or wasted per year, enough to feed 300 million people (IDB #SinDesperdicio, 2023). Against that figure, the owner's question isn't moral, it's cash: how much of my food cost is avoidable waste?

The #SinDesperdicio initiative, launched by the IDB Group in 2018, is the platform bringing together governments, companies, academia and development banks in the region to reduce food loss and waste (FLW) in line with SDG target 12.3: halve per-capita waste by 2030. This original study —an expert synthesis of IDB, FAO, WRI and ReFED sources, with no invented primary data— dismantles three myths that keep the restaurant out of that agenda and shows exactly where the operator captures the return.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	THE INSTALLED MYTH	THE MEASURABLE REALITY (IDB · WRI · FAO)
Who is #SinDesperdicio for?	✕ Only big chains and multinationals with a sustainability team	✓ The return is proportionally HIGHER for the independent: up to 7:1 (WRI 2024)
Does cutting waste pay back?	✕ It's philanthropy, a green cost with no ROI	✓ USD 7 recovered per USD 1 invested in the median restaurant (WRI 2024)
Is kitchen waste inevitable?	✕ Taken for granted: 'there's always leftover, it's the business'	✓ 4-10% of food purchased is dumped from measurable, avoidable causes (ReFED 2024)
Restaurant's weight in the chain	✕ Marginal versus households and agriculture	✓ Food service holds 28% of global food waste (UNEP 2024)
Impact on food cost	✕ Waste dissolves into a 'normal' 35-40% food cost	✓ Cutting waste drops food cost 3-6 pts toward the 32% ceiling
Lever that decides the outcome	✕ Campaigns and staff goodwill	✓ Standard recipe + menu engineering + AI measurement

Finding 1 — Is the IDB #SinDesperdicio initiative only for large restaurant chains?

No: reducing food loss and waste pays off MORE, proportionally, in the independent restaurant than in the large chain. The myth comes from confusing scale with relevance, and the data dismantles it:

the food-service sector generated 28% of the 1.05 billion tonnes wasted worldwide in 2022 (UNEP, 2024), and that volume doesn't live in the multinationals but in the hundreds of thousands of small venues that make up 95% of the market in countries like Colombia (Acodrés, 2024). #SinDesperdicio, the platform the IDB Group launched in 2018, asks for no sustainability team or ESG report; it asks the operator to measure what it throws away. The independent isn't exempt from this agenda: it's its silent protagonist, and whoever first orders their kitchen is the first to collect the saving. The second myth treats sustainability as a green cost with no return, and the evidence says the opposite with hard numbers.

Finding 2 — The ROI myth: why cutting waste pays USD 7 for every USD 1, and isn't philanthropy

The flagship Champions 12.3 study, coordinated by WRI across 700 sites in 17 countries, found that the median return in restaurants was 7 USD recovered for every 1 invested in cutting waste, with nearly 1 in 3 venues topping a 14-to-1 ratio (WRI, 2024). That's not a donation: it's food cost now going down the drain under the comfortable label of 'normal waste'. An independent restaurant with a 37% food cost that trims three points of avoidable waste didn't do charity; it recovered margin that was already its own. Sustainability, properly measured, doesn't compete with profitability: it's one of its most ignored levers. The third myth takes waste for granted, as if 'there's always leftover' were a physical law of the kitchen. It isn't. ReFED (2024) breaks food-service discard into nameable causes —overproduction, mis-sized portions, prep trim, spoilage of poorly rotated inventory— and puts avoidable food ending in the trash at up to 10% of purchases.

Finding 3 — The inevitability myth: kitchen waste is measured, costed and cut

Each of those causes is measurable with a three-week weigh-in and fixable with a standard recipe and inventory control. What's truly inevitable isn't the waste: it's that without measuring, the owner never sees it. In a venue buying USD 30,000 a month, that hidden 9% is about USD 2,700 monthly no one books because no one looks. Waste isn't destiny; it's data with no owner. #SinDesperdicio is the regional platform the IDB Group launched in 2018 to reduce food loss and waste (FLW) in Latin America and the Caribbean, aligned with target 12.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals: halve per-capita waste by 2030. Its logic is coalition-based: it gathers governments, companies, academia, banks and civil-society organizations because no single actor cuts a chain that runs from field to plate alone. The region loses or wastes about 127 million tonnes a year, enough to feed 300 million people (IDB, 2023), a contradiction on a continent with food insecurity.

Finding 4 — What IDB Group's #SinDesperdicio is and why it rallies the public-private sector

Multilateral banking gets involved because waste is at once a climate, social and productivity problem. And the restaurant gets involved because it's where food, already prepared, is decided between the plate and the bin. Within the FLW chain, the restaurant occupies the link of highest lost value: it discards food already bought, transported, stored and often cooked, with all its cost baked in. That's why food service, at 28% of global waste (UNEP, 2024), concentrates a share of the economic impact greater than its weight in tonnes. Waste is born at four concrete points —purchasing without forecasting, storage without rotation, production without grammage, and service without portion control— and each is cut with a different operational action. Purchasing is tuned with demand forecasting; storage with FIFO rotation; production with a standard recipe; service with portions calibrated by menu engineering. The operator isn't a spectator of #SinDesperdicio: it's the node where target 12.3 is won or lost every service.

Finding 5 — Standard recipe plus menu engineering: the method that captures the saving

The insight SATE Institute adds to this agenda is operational, not rhetorical: target 12.3 and the IDB Group agenda aren't met with campaigns, they're met on the production line. The method is a sequence. First the standard recipe digitizes the cost breakdown and fixes gram weights, turning the diffuse 'there's always leftover' into an exact amount to buy and produce; that step alone drops food cost by 3 to 6 points toward its 32% ceiling. Then menu engineering crosses margin and turnover of each dish to cut production of the ones that spoil and reformulate those that create trim, attacking overproduction, the number-one discard cause per ReFED (2024). The independent restaurant that runs this sequence isn't buying brochure sustainability: it recovers margin already its own and, along the way, meets a development goal without setting out to. Measuring waste by hand for three weeks reveals the problem, but it's artificial intelligence that keeps it under control without stealing kitchen hours.

Finding 6 — AI to measure waste: from the three-week weigh-in to continuous control

Demand forecasting tunes purchasing to the real cover forecast and cuts overproduction before it happens; discard-pattern detection finds leaks manual counting misses and turns them into tonnes avoided and food-cost points recovered, the exact operational series the IDB Group and multilateral banking ask for to finance the transition. Diego F. Parra sums it up at Masterestaurant, SATE Institute's technology ally: waste isn't fought with willpower, it's fought with fixed grammage, a calibrated menu and an algorithm that buys for you. First measure waste per dish; then let the machine keep it from coming back. That's how SDG 12 stops being a poster and turns into cash. The first myth confuses scale with relevance. Food service holds 28% of the 1.05 billion tonnes wasted in 2022 (UNEP, 2024), and that volume doesn't live in the chains: it lives in the hundreds of thousands of independent venues that make up 95% of the market in countries like Colombia (Acodrés, 2024).

Finding 7 — Why each myth collapses against the data

The independent isn't exempt from #SinDesperdicio; it is its silent protagonist. The second myth treats sustainability as a cost. The Champions 12.3 evidence across 700 sites in 17 countries is the opposite: the median return was 7:1 in restaurants, and nearly 1 in 3 sites topped 14 USD recovered per 1 invested (WRI, 2024). It isn't a donation: it's the margin now thrown away labeled 'normal waste'. The third myth deems waste inevitable. ReFED (2024) breaks food-service discard into concrete causes —overproduction, mis-sized portions, prep trim, inventory spoilage— all measurable and fixable with a standard recipe and inventory control. What's inevitable isn't the waste; it's not seeing it without measuring. The insight SATE Institute adds: SDG target 12.3 and the IDB Group agenda aren't met with campaigns, they're met on the production line. Whoever digitizes the cost breakdown and calibrates the menu with menu engineering turns a development goal into recovered food-cost points, and generates the operational evidence multilateral banking needs to finance it.

POINT BY POINT

Myth by myth, against the data

WHO DOES THE AGENDA APPLY TO?

A · THE INSTALLED MYTH Myth: only big chains with ESG reporting

B · MASTERESTAURANT Reality: the independent, which is 95% of the market and 28% of waste

Verdict: Reality wins: the small operator is the protagonist, not the excluded one.

NATURE OF THE SPEND

A · THE INSTALLED MYTH Myth: a green image cost, no return

B · MASTERESTAURANT Reality: investment with a median 7:1 in restaurants (WRI 2024)

Verdict: Reality wins: it's recovered margin, not a donation.

ORIGIN OF THE WASTE

A · THE INSTALLED MYTH Myth: inevitable, 'there's always leftover in the kitchen'

B · MASTERESTAURANT Reality: 4-10% of purchases from measurable causes (ReFED 2024)

Verdict: Reality wins: what gets measured gets cut; the inevitable part was not measuring.

OPERATIONAL LEVER

A · THE INSTALLED MYTH Myth: campaigns and team goodwill

B · MASTERESTAURANT Reality: standard recipe + menu engineering + AI on waste

Verdict: Reality wins: the method moves food cost, the poster doesn't.

VALUE FOR MULTILATERAL BANKING

A · THE INSTALLED MYTH Myth: a reputational topic of the IDB Group

B · MASTERESTAURANT Reality: an operational waste series as financeable evidence

Verdict: Reality wins: the waste data enables credit and inclusion.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

The three myths that leave waste untouched **MYTH**

- ✗ '#SinDesperdicio is a big-chain thing': the independent thinks it doesn't apply.
- ✗ 'Cutting waste is philanthropy with no ROI': treated as green spend, not margin.
- ✗ 'Kitchen waste is inevitable': assumed as a fixed part of food cost.
- ✗ 'It's a matter for governments and banks': the operator sees itself outside the agenda.

The measurable reality that reorders the decision **MASTERESTAURANT**

- ✓ The return on cutting waste is proportionally higher for the small operator (WRI 2024).
- ✓ Each USD 1 in FLW reduction returned USD 7 to the median restaurant (Champions 12.3).
- ✓ 4-10% of food purchased is discarded from measurable, avoidable causes (ReFED 2024).
- ✓ IDB Group's #SinDesperdicio rallies public-private; the operator executes and collects.

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

Data that sizes the waste and its return

1050 M
tonnes of food wasted worldwide in 2022 (millions)

28 %
of global food waste is generated by the food-service sector

127 M
tonnes of food lost or wasted per year in LAC (millions)

7 x
USD recovered per USD invested in cutting waste (median in restaurants)

12 %
SDG target 12.3: halve per-capita food waste by 2030

10 %
of food purchased by food service is discarded from avoidable causes (up to)

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

Sources: UNEP Food Waste Index 2024 · IDB #SinDesperdicio 2023 · WRI / Champions 12.3, 2024 · UN / 2030 Agenda · EPA / ReFED, 2024

Chart by masterestaurant.com

REAL CASE

“The mistake I see over and over: the owner thinks #SinDesperdicio is a poster for multinationals and keeps pouring money down the drain. In a set-menu restaurant in Medellín we measured real waste per dish for three weeks: 9% of purchases went to overproduction and badly calibrated trim. We standardized the ten best-selling recipes and adjusted portions with menu engineering. Food cost dropped from 37% to 31% in two months, no price hikes, no layoffs. It wasn't brochure sustainability; it was margin that was already his and sitting in the trash.”

— Diego F. Parra, Masterestaurant consultant — SATE Institute technology ally

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to align your restaurant with #SinDesperdicio in 4 steps

1

1. Measure real waste per dish (3 weeks)

Before any campaign, weigh what gets discarded by cause: overproduction, prep trim, returned plate, spoilage. Without that baseline, waste is invisible and SDG 12 stays a slogan. Record the percentage over total purchases.

2. **2. Standardize the recipe of your 10 star dishes**
Digitize the cost breakdown and fix gram weights. The standard recipe turns 'there's always leftover' into an exact amount to buy and produce. This is where waste is cut: without fixed grammage every cook improvises and food cost rises 3-6 points.

3. **3. Recalibrate the menu with menu engineering**
Cross margin and turnover of each dish. Cut production of the dogs that spoil, reformulate those that create trim and push the profitable stars. Menu engineering attacks overproduction, the #1 cause of discard per ReFED (2024).

4. **4. Automate measurement with AI and report impact**
Use demand forecasting to buy lean and waste detection to stop repeat leaks. Define two indicators: food cost and tonnes avoided. That operational series is the evidence the IDB Group and multilateral banking ask for to finance.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions

Does the IDB #SinDesperdicio initiative work for a small independent restaurant?

Yes, and that's where it pays most. Food service generates 28% of global waste (UNEP, 2024) and lives mostly in independent venues. Cutting waste returned a median of 7 USD per 1 invested in restaurants (WRI, 2024); the small operator captures that margin without needing a sustainability team.

Does reducing food waste have a real economic return?

It does, and it's measured. The Champions 12.3 study of 700 sites found a median 7:1 return in restaurants, with nearly a third topping 14:1 (WRI, 2024). It's not green spend: it's food cost being thrown away. Cutting waste drops the cost per dish toward the 32% ceiling.

What role does the restaurant play in #SinDesperdicio and the IDB Group?

That of a key executing actor. #SinDesperdicio has rallied governments, firms and development banks since 2018 around SDG target 12.3, but the operator moves the number: whoever standardizes the recipe and measures waste cuts discard and generates the operational evidence multilateral banking needs to finance.

How does AI help measure and reduce kitchen waste?

AI forecasts demand to buy lean and detects discard patterns manual counting misses, attacking overproduction, the #1 waste cause per ReFED (2024). It turns the three-week weigh-in into continuous control and reports tonnes avoided and food-cost points recovered, the exact operational series multilateral banking asks for to finance the transition.

DATA & SOURCES

Sector data 2026 (official sources)

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Desempleo juvenil en ALC	**13,8% en 2024 — casi el triple que el de los adultos**	OIT — Panorama Laboral 2024
Informalidad juvenil	**≈6 de cada 10 jóvenes ocupados de ALC trabajan en la informalidad**	OIT
Peso de las pymes en la economía	**≈90% de las empresas y >50% del empleo a nivel mundial**	Banco Mundial — SME Finance
Innovación inclusiva (Grupo BID)	**BID Lab moviliza capital y conocimiento para emprendimientos de impacto en ALC**	BID Lab
Mortalidad empresarial a 5 años	**solo ~34 de cada 100 empresas creadas sobreviven al quinto año (Colombia, Confecámaras)**	Bloomberg Línea
Ventas de la industria restaurantera EE. UU. 2025	**USD 1.5 billones en ventas en 2025 (+4% vs 2024)**	National Restaurant Association 2025