Milan Pact Awards 2025	**COLUMBUS**						
Country	United States of America						
Population	913,375						
Title of practice	City of Columbus Food Waste Reduction Strategy						
Subtitle	A Multi-Faceted Approach to Policy, Rescue, Education, and Composting through Funding, Logistics, Resulting in Feeding People and Composting.						
MUFPP Recommended Action	37. Save food by facilitating recovery and redistribution for human consumption of safe and nutritious foods, if applicable, that are at risk of being lost, discarded or wasted from production, manufacturing, retail, catering, wholesale and hospitality. - FOOD WASTE						
Starting year	2023	**Ending year (if any)**				☐already submitted in the past	
Actors and stakeholders' involvement	**Municipal departments**	**Other public institutions**	**NGOs CSOs**	**Research centres**	**Private sectors**	**International organizations**	**Other**
	3	1	2	1			
Budget	The total budget is approximately € 540,000, funded through municipal support, private grants, and nonprofit operations. This includes salaries, food scrap drop-offs, Central Ohio Food Waste Grants, and Columbus Food Rescue's staff and programs.						
Brief description	The City of Columbus, Ohio, the 14th largest city in the U.S., is tackling food waste and food insecurity through ambitious, community-driven action. Every day, over a million pounds of food are landfilled in Central Ohio, even as nearly 11% of residents face hunger. Guided by its Climate Action Plan goal of carbon neutrality and the Local Food Action Plan's focus on waste prevention, the City is advancing local solutions where state and federal policies fall short. In January 2024, Mayor Ginther signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. Through the Food Matters partnership with NRDC, Columbus updated its refuse code to support residential composting, engaged 300+ community gardens, and expanded food rescue operations. Columbus Food Rescue, with City support, redistributed over one million pounds of edible food through an innovative model combining direct delivery and food transformation. The City piloted food rescue at events, launched free Food Scraps Drop-Off sites, and opened new Waste and Reuse Convenience Centres, diverting over 185,000 pounds of food from landfills. A citywide education campaign engages students, residents, and businesses in reducing wasted food. This work benefits a million residents, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, feeds people and strengthens food security. Key lessons include the value of embedding food waste strategies within climate and equity goals, the power of public-private partnerships, and the critical role of community education.						
Innovation	When national policies fail, Columbus acts. In the face of federal backsliding on climate and food security, Columbus is building a local food system transformation from the ground up. Through an innovative partnership with NRDC's Food Matters program, the City taps into a network of cities, blending local action with regional momentum. In government, Columbus is breaking traditional silos—uniting Public Service, Public Health, Sustainable Columbus, and others to weave food waste reduction into everyday operations. On the ground, the City partners with nonprofits, community gardens, and landfill operators to rescue food, compost scraps, and educate residents. Columbus works on internal operations to enhance local food policies through improving our permitting process for city events to require vendors to have a food donation plan - to working with our health inspectors to educate licensed food facilities on food donation. Recognizing our diversity, Columbus created groundbreaking trilingual (English, Spanish, Somali) food waste education—the first in the region—to reach immigrant and refugee communities. Meanwhile, partnering with Ohio State University on a USDA-funded study positions Columbus as a national leader in research-driven food waste solutions.						

	Innovation here is not just about programs—it is about building a new model for cities: one that connects climate action, food justice, and community resilience at every level. This benefits nearly a million people.
Impact	Columbus' food waste programs are delivering quantifiable social, environmental, and economic benefits. As of early 2025: 185,919 pounds of food scraps have been composted, avoiding 158,905 MT CO2 emissions. Seven free food scraps drop-off sites prioritize historically redlined neighbourhoods, advancing equitable environmental access. Food rescue efforts, championed by Columbus Food Rescue, engage 100+ regular donor locations—libraries, schools, hospitals, farmers' markets, and recreation centres—providing surplus food to 80+ receiving agencies (see Resource Map), including food pantries, migrant support networks, shelters, and child/family service organizations. From January–March 2025, rescues diverted over $540,000 worth of food from landfill. Individual agencies report up to $4,500 saved in food budgets, with many relying solely on rescued food for programming. Environmental savings in 2024 include 103.36 million gallons of water and the equivalent of 65,117 gallons of gasoline avoided. Fully rescuing regional food waste could divert 125,802 tons of CO2e annually—equivalent to removing 237,165 cars from the road. Columbus' work demonstrates that integrated food waste strategies can directly mitigate climate impacts, strengthen food security for vulnerable populations, and generate significant cost savings for community organizations. This work benefits nearly a million people through greenhouse gas reductions (resulting in cleaner air) as well as feeding residents.
Inclusion	Columbus' food waste work is deeply inclusive, designed across multiple food system fields and engaging a broad coalition of stakeholders. The initiative connects goals in food waste reduction, climate action, public health, food security, and community equity, aligning with both the City's Climate Action Plan and the Columbus and Franklin County Local Food Action Plan. Implementation involves cross-departmental collaboration among Columbus Public Health, the Department of Public Service, and Sustainable Columbus within Public Utilities. Beyond City government, key partners include the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO), Columbus Food Rescue, Ohio EPA, The Ohio State University, and dozens of local nonprofits and community organizations. Resident voices are elevated through engagement with Columbus' Area Commissions, ensuring programs reach and reflect diverse neighbourhoods across the city, particularly historically underserved communities. Multi-level governance integrates city, county, and state coordination. This holistic approach ensures Columbus' food waste solutions are not siloed but embedded citywide, strengthening environmental, social, and economic resilience across the metropolitan area and touch other MUFPP categories including governance, equity, and food waste.