



**SOUTH AFRICAN
CHEFS ASSOCIATION**
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Unilever Food Solutions Future Menus Launch 4

President's Address

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UFS Head Office, La Lucia, Durban

Chef Coo Pillay



Topic: Low Waste Menus – A Trend We Should Never Lose

Colleagues, friends, fellow chefs, industry associates, Good Afternoon

Firstly, I would like to thank UFS for this incredible platform afforded to our chefs. Future Menus Trends and the Chef of the Year which is not just a competition, it is a showcase of forward-thinking culinary talent, a space where innovation meets responsibility, and where the future of our industry is actively being shaped. It challenges chefs to think beyond the plate, to engage with global trends, and to redefine how we approach food in a rapidly changing world.

To Kevin, Yonela, Chef Vusi, and the rest of the team, well done on the work you continue to do in supporting our kitchens and our chefs, who are constantly adapting to the changes and trends that influence not only our craft, but ultimately our businesses.

There are many trends that come and go in our industry, plating styles, flavour pairings, even entire cuisines that rise and fall in popularity. But today, I want to speak about something that should never be reduced to a trend.

Low waste cooking is not a phase. It is not a marketing angle. It is a responsibility, and more importantly, it is an opportunity.

I've had the privilege throughout my career, particularly during my time with Protea Hotels, to see how kitchens operate at scale. Large volumes, diverse clientele, tight budgets, and constant pressure.

In that environment, you very quickly learn one thing: waste is not just an environmental issue, it is a leadership issue.

I remember walking into storerooms and seeing produce that had simply been over-ordered, or trimmings that were discarded without a second thought. At the time, it was normal. It was accepted. But it never sat well with me. Because every onion skin, every fish bone, every unused herb told a story, not just of waste, but of missed potential.

And that's where this conversation begins.

We cannot ignore the reality that food waste is one of the biggest contributors to climate change. As chefs, we sit at the centre of that conversation, whether we like it or not.

We are the gatekeepers of ingredients. We decide what gets used, what gets celebrated and unfortunately, what gets thrown away. Low waste menus allow us to reduce our environmental impact in a very real, practical way. But more than that, they allow us to lead. When a guest sits down and enjoys a dish that has been thoughtfully created using the whole ingredient, they are not just eating, they are learning. And sustainability becomes something tangible. Something delicious. But let's be clear, this is not just about scraps. It's about rethinking everything:

From how we source,
To how we store,
To how we design our menus,
And ultimately, how we plate.



Some of the best dishes I've ever seen and tasted have come from what others would consider "waste."

I started challenging our teams:

What can we do with what we usually throw away?

We serve melons daily on our breakfast buffets, so what are we doing with the rinds and peels? These became preserves and pickles that went back onto the buffet and even found their way into other menus and offerings.

Carrot tops became vibrant pestos.

Banana peels became plant-based "bacon" alternatives.

And we didn't stop there.

Items that could not be used were diverted to compost, together with garden waste and ground coffee beans. We started producing our own compost. From there, chefs began saving seeds from vegetable prep, tomato, butternut, chilli. These were dried, planted in biodegradable cups from our bar and banqueting areas, and nurtured into seedlings. Those seedlings became part of our kitchen gardens.

And suddenly, we weren't just cooking, we were telling a story.

A story our guests could connect with.

A story our teams could be proud of.

We even extended this into our communities, supporting staff to start their own home gardens, and working with local schools and old age homes to create community gardens.

And then something interesting happened.

Our chefs became more creative. More curious. More invested.

Because low waste cooking forces you to think differently. It pushes you beyond the obvious. It teaches you to respect the full journey of an ingredient.

And in doing so, it elevates the ordinary into something extraordinary.

Now let's talk about something every kitchen understands, cost.

Managing food cost is always under the microscope. And one of the biggest lessons we learned was this:

You don't always need to buy cheaper, you need to waste less.



Reducing waste has a direct impact on your bottom line. When you use more of what you buy, your margins improve, without compromising quality.

Smart menu design plays a big role here: Seasonal ingredients, Flexible dishes, Cross-utilisation of components.

When your menu is driven by ingredients rather than rigid recipes, you naturally reduce spoilage.

And here's the added benefit, guests notice.

Restaurants that embrace low waste practices build stronger loyalty. People want to support businesses that care. It strengthens your brand, your story, and your connection with your customers.

As chefs, we are more than cooks, we are leaders. Cultural leaders. What we normalise in our kitchens influences not only our teams, but also our communities.

When a young commis chef learns to value every part of an ingredient, that mindset stays with them for life. When we train our teams in low waste techniques, we are not just building efficiency, we are building pride.

Pride in craftsmanship. Pride in discipline. Pride in respect. Because at its core, this is about respect.

Respect for the farmer who grew the produce. Respect for the supplier who delivered it. Respect for the ingredient itself. And ultimately, respect for the profession we represent.

The world is changing. Diners are more aware, more conscious, and more demanding than ever before.

They are asking questions: Where does this come from? How was it produced? What impact does it have?

Low waste menus answer those questions, authentically.

This is not about ticking boxes. It's about aligning our craft with the future of food. Because the truth is, this is not a trend. It is a necessary shift.

If we want future generations of chefs to inherit not only our techniques and traditions, but also a sustainable industry, then we need to act now.



So I leave you with this challenge:

The next time you step into your kitchen, don't just ask, "What am I cooking today?"

Ask,

"What am I wasting, and why?"

"What can I do differently?"

"How can I lead better?"

Because low waste cooking is not about limitation, it is about possibility.

And if we embrace it fully, we don't just reduce waste...

We elevate our craft.

Thank you,

C. Pillay

Chef Coo Pillay