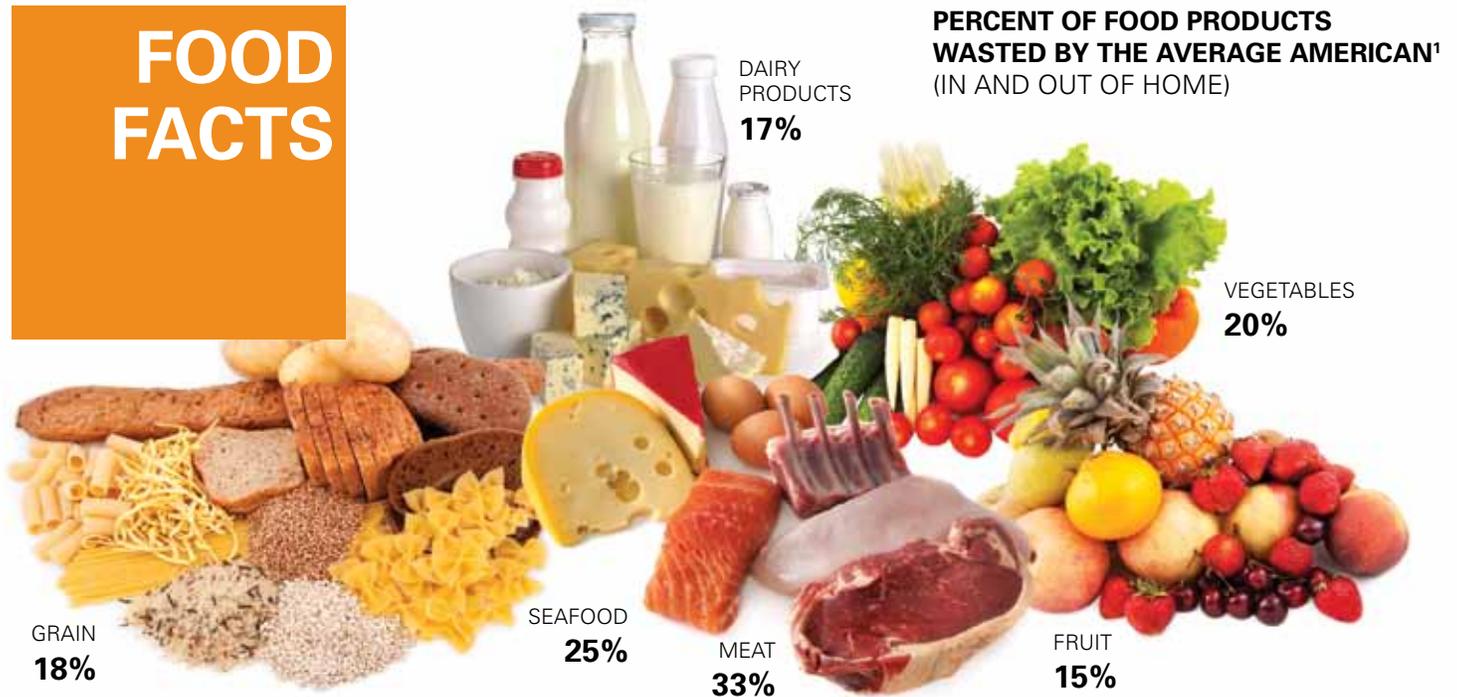


# FOOD FACTS



## Your Scraps Add Up: Reducing food waste can save money and resources

Feeding the U.S. population requires an enormous amount of land and resources. Yet, 40 percent of food in the U.S. goes to waste. When the resources to grow that food are considered, this amounts to approximately 25 percent of all freshwater, 4 percent of the oil we consume, and more than \$165 billion dollars all dedicated to producing food that never gets eaten. Reducing your own food waste is an easy way to trim down your bills and your environmental footprint.

### HOW MUCH DO WE WASTE?

In the U.S., we waste around 40 percent<sup>2</sup> of all edible food. A large portion of that waste is caused by consumers. The average American throws away between \$28-43<sup>3</sup> in the form of about 20 pounds<sup>4</sup> of food each month. If we wasted just 15 percent less food, it would be enough to feed 25 million Americans.<sup>5</sup>

Feeding the planet is already a struggle, and will only become more difficult with 9-10 billion people expected on the planet in 2050. This makes food conservation all the more important. The United Nations has predicted that we'll need up to 70 percent more food to feed that projected population.<sup>6</sup> Developing habits to save food now could dramatically reduce the need for increased food production in the future.

### WHAT DOES WASTING FOOD COST US?

The cost of wasted food is staggering. In addition to the wasting of water, energy, chemicals, and global warming pollution that goes into producing, packaging, and transporting discarded food, nearly all of the food waste ends up in landfills where it decomposes and releases methane, a heat-trapping greenhouse gas that is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Consider these cost estimates of all the food that never gets eaten in the U.S., and imagine just how much we can save by wasting less food:

- 25 percent of all freshwater used in U.S.<sup>7</sup>
- 4 percent of total U.S. oil consumption<sup>7</sup>
- \$165 billion per year<sup>8</sup> (more than \$40 billion from households)<sup>9</sup>
- \$750 million per year just to dispose of the food<sup>10</sup>
- 33 million tons of landfill waste (leading to greenhouse gas emissions)<sup>11</sup>



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25 million people could be fed if we reduced food waste by 15 percent



## EASY STEPS TO REDUCING YOUR FOOD WASTE

Follow these tips to keep your food bill and “food-print” down at the same time:

- **Shop Wisely**—Plan meals, use shopping lists, buy from bulk bins, and avoid impulse buys. Don’t succumb to marketing tricks that lead you to buy more food than you need, particularly for perishable items. Though these may be less expensive per ounce, they can be more expensive overall if much of that food is discarded.
- **Buy Funny Fruit**—Many fruits and vegetables are thrown out because their size, shape, or color are not “right”. Buying these perfectly good funny fruit, at the farmer’s market or elsewhere, utilizes food that might otherwise go to waste.
- **Learn When Food Goes Bad**—“Sell-by” and “use-by” dates are not federally regulated and do not indicate safety, except on certain baby foods. Rather, they are manufacturer suggestions for peak quality. Most foods can be safely consumed well after their use-by dates.<sup>15</sup>
- **Mine Your Fridge**—Websites such as [www.lovefoodhatewaste.com](http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com) can help you get creative with recipes to use up anything that might go bad soon.
- **Use Your Freezer**—Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely. Freeze fresh produce and leftovers if you won’t have the chance to eat them before they go bad.
- **Request Smaller Portions**—Restaurants will often provide half-portions upon request at reduced prices.
- **Eat Leftovers**—Ask your restaurant to pack up your extras so you can eat them later. Freeze them if you don’t want to eat immediately. Only about half of Americans take leftovers home from restaurants.
- **Compost**—Composting food scraps can reduce their climate impact while also recycling their nutrients. Food makes up almost 13 percent of the U.S. waste stream, but a much higher percent of landfill-caused methane.<sup>16</sup>
- **Donate**—Non-perishable and unspoiled perishable food can be donated to local food banks, soup kitchens, pantries, and shelters. Local and national programs frequently offer free pick-up and provide reusable containers to donors.

## WHERE DOES FOOD WASTE COME FROM?

Food waste is a complex problem with losses occurring throughout the supply chain from “farm to fork.” Crops are sometimes left unharvested because their appearance does not meet strict quality standards imposed by supermarkets. Food can be mishandled or stored improperly during transport. Large portions, large menus, and poor training for food handlers contribute to food waste in restaurants.

In households, fresh products make up most of the wasted food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that a typical American throws out 40 percent of fresh fish, 23 percent of eggs, and 20 percent of milk. Citrus fruits and cherries top the list for fruits, and sweet potatoes, onions, and greens are commonly wasted vegetables.<sup>12</sup>

Much of household waste is due to overpurchasing, food spoilage, and plate waste. About 2/3 of household waste is due to food spoilage from not being used in time, whereas the other 1/3 is caused by people cooking or serving too much.<sup>13</sup> Single households produce proportionately more waste per person than multiple occupancy situations with more than one adult. Children, however, can add to the waste tally too. In fact, in a study of British households, those with children produced 41 percent more food waste than similarly sized households without children.<sup>14</sup>

The good news is we can reverse this costly food waste trend. Follow these tips and you’ll finish your plate feeling satisfied in a whole new way.

<sup>1</sup> Buzby, et al. The Value of Retail- and Consumer-Level Fruit and Vegetable Losses in the United States. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, Fall 2011: 492-515.

<sup>2</sup> Hall KD, Guo J, Dore M, Chow CC (2009) The Progressive Increase of Food Waste in America and Its Environmental Impact. *National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases*. PLoS ONE 4(11):e7940.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bloom, *American Wasteland* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Food Losses and Food Waste*. [http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/ags-division/publications/publication/en/?dyna\\_fef%5Buid%5D=74045](http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/ags-division/publications/publication/en/?dyna_fef%5Buid%5D=74045).

<sup>5</sup> This calculation assumes 2,500 kcal/capita/day and an annual total of 150 trillion calories in losses, as reported in K.D. Hall, J. Guo, M. Dore, C.C. Chow, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, “The Progressive Increase of Food Waste in America and Its Environmental Impact,” PLoS ONE 4(11):e7940, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert\\_paper/How\\_to\\_Feed\\_the\\_World\\_in\\_2050.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert_paper/How_to_Feed_the_World_in_2050.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> See Hall 2009 above.

<sup>8</sup> J. Buzby, and J. Hyman. “Total and per capita value of food loss in the United States”, *Food Policy*, 37(2012):561-570.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, Timothy. Corner on Food Loss. *Biocycle*, July 2005. p25.

<sup>10</sup> USDA and US EPA. Waste Not, Want Not. Feeding the Hungry and Reducing Solid Waste Through Food Recovery. EPA 530-R-99-040. See vii above.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conservation/materials/organics/food/fd-basic.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/TB1927/TB1927.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Household\\_Food\\_and\\_Drink\\_Waste\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_Nov\\_2011.da3b238f.8048.pdf](http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Household_Food_and_Drink_Waste_in_the_UK_Nov_2011.da3b238f.8048.pdf) p27.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/food\\_product\\_dating/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/food_product_dating/index.asp).

<sup>16</sup> See USDA/EPA above.