



14 Ways Consumers Can Reduce Food Waste

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN
Extension Educator

About 40 percent of the United States food supply (1,500 calories/person/day) goes uneaten. Discarded food in homes and foodservice accounts for 60 percent of this total food loss and is mostly avoidable. The remaining portion is lost or wasted during food production.

This amount of food waste is among the highest globally. Preventing food waste saves money and resources. Resources used to produce uneaten food include: 30 percent of fertilizer, 31 percent of cropland, 25 percent of total fresh water consumption and 2 percent of total energy consumption.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates food wastes at almost 14 percent of the total municipal solid wastes in the United States in 2010, with less than 3 percent recovered and recycled. Food in landfills decomposes to produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Feeding the world will become more difficult in the future as 9 billion people are expected on the planet by 2050, compared to a world population of around 7 billion people in 2015. Developing habits to save more of the food we already have will put less strain on the resources associated with producing and buying food and aid in reducing the creation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Here are 14 ways consumers can



Food waste also wastes money and resources used to produce uneaten food.

help reduce the amount of food wasted. **Shop the refrigerator before going to the store.** Use food at home before buying more. Designate one meal weekly as a “use-it-up” meal.

Move older food products to the front of the fridge/cupboard/freezer and just-purchased ones to the back. This makes it more likely foods will be consumed before they go bad.

Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below to prolong the life of foods. Foods frozen at 0°F or lower will remain safe indefinitely but the quality will go down over time.

Freeze or can surplus fresh produce using safe, up-to-date food preservation methods. Visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation

website (<http://nchfp.uga.edu>) for freezing and canning instructions.

Take restaurant leftovers home and refrigerate within two hours of being served. Eat within three to four days or freeze. Ask for a take home container at the beginning of the meal if portions look especially large. Remove take home food from your plate at the beginning of the meal so leftovers are as appetizing as the original meal ... rather than the picked-over remains. Or, choose a smaller size and/or split a dish with a dining companion.

Dish up reasonable amounts of food at a buffet and go back for more if still hungry.

Compost food scraps for use in the garden. Visit Nebraska Extension for direction on creating compost for your garden (www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g2222.pdf).

Check product dates on foods. The United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS) defines them as:

- A “Sell-By” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- A “Best if Used By (or Before)” date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A “Use-By” date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the

Continued on next page

manufacturer of the product. Do not buy or use baby formula after its “use-by” date.

Look for recipes on websites that can be searched for by ingredients to use up food at home. USDA’s “What’s Cooking: USDA Mixing Bowl” website (www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov) offers several tools for searching for recipes with specific ingredients, nutrition themes and meal course. To find more recipe websites, try using such search words as: “recipe websites that use ingredients you have at home” (include these words in quotation marks).

Buy misshapen fruits and vegetables at farmers’ markets and elsewhere. They taste just as good and are just as nutritious as those with a “perfect” shape, but are more likely to get thrown away.



Pete (comedy_nose), www.flickr.com

This “misshapen” strawberry is just as tasty and nutritious as one with a “perfect” shape.

Rather than buy a food for use in only one recipe, check if there might be a suitable substitute already in the home. The Cook’s Thesaurus website (<http://foodsubs.com>) gives thousands of ingredient substitutions.

Check the garbage can. If the same foods are constantly being tossed: Eat them sooner, buy less of them, incorporate them into more recipes or freeze them. For more information on

recommended storage period for pantry, refrigerator and freezer, check this guide with storage charts from Nebraska Extension (www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/ec446.pdf)

Donate safe, nutritious food to food banks, food pantries and food rescue programs.

If you have several foods that

might go to waste at the same time, try adding them to such adaptable recipes as salads, soups, pasta and casseroles.

References:

- Busby, J. C., Hodan, F. W., & Hyman, J. (2014, February) “The Estimated Amount, Value and Calories of Postharvest Food Losses at the Retail and Consumer Levels in the United States.” *Economic Information Bulletin No. (EIB-121)* Retrieved 2/22/2015 from www.ers.usda.gov/media/1282296/eib121.pdf
- EPA. *Reducing Wasted Food Basics.* Retrieved 2/22/2015 from www2.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-basics
- Reich, A. and Foley, J. (April 2014) “Food Loss and Waste in the US: The Science Behind the Supply Chain,” *Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota.* Retrieved 2/22/2015 from www.foodpolicy.umn.edu/policy-summaries-and-analyses/food-loss-and-waste-us-science-behind-supply-chain
- USDA/FSIS. “Food Product Dating.” Retrieved 2/22/2015 from <http://1.usa.gov/1LrDepJ>

Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended of those not mentioned and no endorsement by Nebraska Extension is implied for those mentioned.

Clean Out the Fridge Potato Salad

Have you ever looked in your refrigerator and found a little bit of this and a little bit of that? And it should all be used – SOON! When that happens, make potato salad! (*Note: Potatoes should be stored in a cool dry place in your house for best quality – not in the refrigerator.*)

Follow these quick “1, 2, 3” steps!

1) Begin with cooked, diced potatoes (1-inch cube). Let them stand until cool enough to handle. *Tip: You can leave the skins on young, tender potatoes and other varieties of potatoes with a thin, delicate skin. There are over 100 varieties of potatoes. If uncertain about the best way to boil potatoes – and potatoes are a food that gets wasted at home – check www.potatogoodness.com, the website of the United States Potato Board, the nation’s potato marketing and research organization.*

2) While the potatoes are cooking/cooling, clean and prepare potential still-edible foods that might soon go in the garbage. Also, look for jars and packages of other still-edible foods that have been lingering in your refrigerator. Use your own preference as to amounts of ingredients. The salad in the photo contains: red peppers, peas, onions, carrots, radishes, fresh dill and pickle relish.



Alice Henneman

3) The last step is combining the potatoes and vegetables with mayonnaise. Or, use your favorite homemade or purchased potato salad dressing. Then, chill your potato salad for about an hour before serving, to let the flavors meld.

Some other foods you can add to potato salads include: hard-boiled eggs, celery, cheese, parsley, green pepper, grape or cherry tomatoes (halved), capers, olives and chives.