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Go Further with Food

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In March we celebrated National Nutrition Month, highlighting the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. This year's theme encouraged us to develop ways to cut back on food waste. Developing techniques to manage food resources at home will help you "Go Further with Food" while saving both nutrients and money.

Our Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Mary O'Hara delivered an informative presentation to the staff of God's Love We Deliver regarding food loss and food waste, the environmental and societal impacts of food loss, as well as, practical tips to reduce and prevent the waste of food. The following is a written summary of the content and research shared during the presentation.

Define food loss and food waste

There are differences between the terms food loss and food waste depending on when it occurs. Food loss refers to food lost during production, post-harvest, processing stages and distribution. Food waste happens at the retail and consumer level. Both are important, but as consumers, we have more control over food waste.

It's no surprise, tracking wasted food is complex. Varying definitions and "yardsticks" are used to measure it and much of our data is outdated. In the United States, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) define the problem differently. However, the EPA seemed to hit the target:

"Wasted, surplus or excess food" are terms commonly used to describe wholesome, nutritious food that is lost or sent for disposal. It isn't spoiled food, but rather it may include unsold food from retail stores or untouched prepared food or trimmings from restaurants, grocery

stores, cafeterias or industrial processing. The terms “wasted, surplus or excess food” are often used when discussing food recovered for donation to feed people.”

It’s been estimated that billions of pounds of food are thrown away each year in the United States alone. That’s roughly 300 pounds of food per year for the average American. Although food is wasted throughout the food supply chain, consumers are responsible for the majority of wasted food that winds up in landfills.

As consumers, we throw out an average 400 pounds of food per person each year. That estimates to a family of four throwing away about \$1,800 a year. This is often a result of buying too much food at one time or throwing out food based on its date stamp.

The impact of food loss and waste

The impact of food loss and waste severely impacts the environment. Food is considered to be the number one contributor in landfills by weight, making up approximately 21% of US landfill waste. This waste produces approximately 2.6% of all U.S greenhouse gas emissions, which is equivalent to more than 37 million cars worth of methane.

Wasted food not only equates to environmental damage but also wasted money, resources, and nutrients directly impacting American households. Experts estimate that somewhere between 1,217 and 1,400 calories is found in food waste every day. In addition to calories, 33 grams of protein and 5.9 grams of dietary fiber were also lost every day.

In 2016, 41.2 million people in the U.S. reported living in a food-insecure household. In a stark comparison, 40% of U.S. food is wasted each year, while 1 in 6 Americans don’t know where their next meal is coming from.

Identify ways to reduce and prevent the waste of food

Although it may take conscious effort to reduce food waste, here are some easy tips to make a true impact.

1. Make a food plan for the week to avoid purchasing too much. Take inventory of what you currently have and incorporate perishable ingredients into weekly recipes.
2. Be creative and utilize leftovers in unique ways. For example, leftover veggies can be tossed in an omelet the next day or make homemade broth with leftover food scraps.
3. Buy ugly produce. Asymmetrical, lightly bruised or oddly shaped produce are equally beneficial as perfectly shaped ones. Grocery stores and farmers have trouble selling “ugly produce” and are more likely to throw them out.
4. Visit the grocery store more frequently, rather than buying perishable foods in bulk. Keep in mind, bulk only saves you money if you use the food before it spoils
5. Learn how to properly store produce to slow down ripening – some produce should be stored in the refrigerator like cucumber, broccoli, apples, and leafy greens, while others are better kept at room temperature, like tomatoes, bananas, avocado, and potatoes. [Click here for a detailed infographic on where to store produce.](#)
6. Take advantage of your freezer. Surplus produce, excess sauces, and portioned meats or fish can be stored in the freezer for future use.
7. Don’t be so quick to throw away food based on product dates. Most product dates (“Best if Used By/Before”, “Sell-By Date”, “Use-By Date”) describe the quality and are not indicators of a product’s safety (except for infant formula).

Resources:

Vogliano C, Brown K. The State of America’s Wasted Food & Opportunities to Make a Difference. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; 2016.

United States Department of Agriculture, Office of the Chief Economist. Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm>.

Vogliano C, Brown K. The State of America’s Wasted Food & Opportunities to Make a Difference. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. <https://eatrightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-State-of-Americas-Food-Waste-Report.pdf>. Published 2016.

Gunders D. Wasted: How America is Losing Up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill. Natural Resources Defense Council. <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/wasted-food-IP.pdf>. Published August 2012.

Food Product Dating. United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service. <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/food-product->

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