**What is Food Waste?**

**By: Sarah Buckley**

So, what is food waste and why should we care? My friend Maddie Nagel and I decided we wanted to answer this question for ourselves with an X-Credit project. In this blog series, you will get answers to this question and learn about the impacts of food waste on the world, in the United States, and in Maryland. You will learn about the relationships between food waste and the economy, food insecurity, climate change, and more. Let’s get started by checking out [**this video**](https://youtu.be/CLFOK4U34wI) made by the Ad Council and the Natural Resources Defense Council. How many places can you spot where the strawberry could go to waste on its way from the farm to the home? In this blog you will learn what food waste is, why it is bad, and how you can prevent it.



**Three Ways: 40 Percent**

Food loss and waste happens everywhere in the food chain, including with you. An astonishing 40% of all food produced in the United States and one third of all food produced around the world is wasted. How often do you throw food away just because it’s close to or a few days after the sell-by date?

Let’s think about the three main places food is wasted as the producer, the retailer, and the consumer. For clarification, food loss occurs with the producer, and food waste occurs with the retailer and the consumer. About 50% of all wasted food is actually food loss. In a strawberry field, strawberries that get damaged, aren’t harvested in time, or even don’t look ‘normal’ are considered food loss. On their way to the retailer, any strawberries that get damaged or go bad are also food loss. Once they reach the store, if someone drops a bin of strawberries on the floor, they’re wasted. If the strawberries aren’t bought in time? Same thing. Retailers must err on the side of caution when it comes to something ‘being bad.’ While this is good for our health, it usually means that refrigerated food can’t go back to the store shelf after a customer has picked it up. This results in lots of fresh meat, dairy products, and other refrigerated products going to waste. This also happens with restaurants because they can’t reuse food once it has been served. After you get back from the store with your strawberries, the first thing you do is put your groceries away. Maybe you empty out your refrigerator while you’re at it and throw the now moldy strawberries from last week. Do you go through your cabinets as well and replace anything past its expiration date? Think about how much food you put in the trashcan every day, week, and month. Believe me, it’s more than you think.

**Why This Is Bad:**

Food waste isn’t just bad because it wastes resources like water, land, labor, and nonrenewable energy. It’s bad because most of the food wasted goes directly to landfills, where it doesn’t decompose properly. Instead, it rots and produces methane, a very concentrated greenhouse gas that contributes heavily to climate change. About 6.7% of greenhouse gas emissions are from food waste. In addition, according to a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimate, 133 billion pounds and almost $162 billion of food were wasted in 2010. **That roughly equals one pound and $1.35 of food wasted per person in the United States per day**. Imagine how much pollution, time, money and food we could save if we reduced our food waste!

**What YOU Can Do to Help:**

Over the past twenty years, food waste has become a hot topic, and lots of resources have been made to help people reduce their food waste. The Food and Agriculture Organization came up with a [**super cute flyer**](http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7059e.pdf) with nine tips to fight food waste. I hung mine in my kitchen!

1. Ask for Smaller Portions: you can always go back for more
2. Love Your Leftovers: save food you didn’t use to make a new meal or eat the same meal again
3. Shop Smart: make a list to avoid over-buying at the store
4. Buy ‘Ugly’ Fruits and Vegetables: because they are just as good to eat!
5. Check Your Fridge: make sure it’s the right temperature for storing food and ensure nothing is going bad
6. Practice FIFO: First In, First Out of the fridge and cupboard
7. Understand Dates on Your Food: use-by means it isn’t safe to eat anymore, but best-by and sell-by are still good to eat after the date
8. Turn Waste into Compost: set up a compost bin for fruit and vegetable peelings and food waste. It turns into great fertilizer!
9. Sharing is Caring: give your surplus food to those who may need it, or food banks that will use it if you don’t have time.

Good lucking fighting food waste! Keep an eye out for more blogs in this series. If you want to know more or check our facts, here are the sites I used for this post:

<https://moveforhunger.org/food-waste>

<http://www.fao.org/food-loss-and-food-waste/en/>

<https://www.usda.gov/foodwaste/faqs>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26758659>

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