

Be Food Wise to Reduce Food Waste
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Leader Guide

Lesson Description - Did you know that we waste about 40% of the food we buy? Can that be true? Learn about food waste – where it comes from, who is responsible, why it's a problem, and what can be done to reduce it.

Leader Materials

Leader Guide

Computer to show Save the Food PSA video (optional)

Poster paper & markers (optional)

Member Materials

Handout #1 – Food Waste Survey

Pencils

Handout #2 – Notes Page

Handout #3 - 14 Ways Consumers Can Reduce Food Waste, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Optional Materials

Let's Talk Trash - <https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/printablematerials/2015-LetsTalkTrash-2page.pdf> (1-page front/back handout on this topic if you don't have time to do the whole lesson)

6 Tips on how to Reduce Food Waste - <http://www.cooksmarts.com/cooking-guides/cook-on-a-budget/reduce-food-waste/> (3-minute video on this topic if you don't have time to do the whole lesson)

INTRODUCTION

Food waste is making the news! Billboards, public service announcements, newspaper articles, books, blogs, etc. Here's an example of what we're talking about today:

(open this website & scroll down to strawberry farmer image – 2 minute video - <http://savethefood.com/>)

Let's see how you handle different food situations. **Handout #1 – Food Waste Survey.** Ask members to answer the questions. When everyone is done, read each question out loud and discuss the various responses.

Handout #2 – Notes Page – share this with members who might want to take notes during the lesson

How much food is wasted?

Figuring out how much food ends up in the trash is tricky, and the data that we have on national food waste is, at best, an estimate. However, several different studies have put food waste between 30-40%. If we subtract farm, retail and restaurant loss, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 21% or 90 BILLION pounds of food is wasted at the household level. It's safe to say that something around 1/3 of our national food supply is never eaten. How much is that really? One source reports that in the United States, we waste about 20 pounds of food per person, per month!

Where does food waste happen?

Even though it's tempting to point fingers at restaurants or a wasteful next-door neighbor, and though consumer losses do account for a big portion of food wasted, the reality is that food waste occurs at every point along the food production chain.

Ask members this question – *Think about a strawberry from the plant to the plate. What are the five links of the food production chain?* (Write the 5 links on poster paper if you want to)

Agriculture

Post-harvest

Processing

Distribution

Consumption

When we think about where food waste happens, we can probably imagine problems for each link of the food production chain. Ask members - What might be happening at each of the five links of the food production chain that could lead to food loss or waste?

Agriculture – too hot, too cold, not enough moisture, too much moisture...

Post-harvest – picked too early, picked too late...

Processing – not the right size or shape, blemished,

Distribution – excess inventory, damaged packaging, transportation glitches...

Consumption – purchased too much, made too much, didn't turn out right, didn't like it, poor training for food service workers...

The breakdown of food waste can be divided into two groups:

- **Food Loss** – food that is lost during agricultural production, post-harvest and processing - 40% of food waste happens during food production and never even makes it to the store or the table
- **Food Waste** – food that is discarded by retailers & consumers during distribution and consumption – homes and foodservice account for 60% of total food loss in the US and is mostly avoidable.

A lot of food is lost in distribution and in grocery stores. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), 20% of all fruits and vegetables grown never even leave the farm!

Why does food waste happen?

About 1/3 of Americans say they “don’t create any food waste.” Of those who do admit to wasting food, the top causes include

- Forgetting about perishable foods until it’s too late
- Purchasing too much fresh or perishable food
- Cooking big meals and throwing some of it away
- Not eating everything on their plate

Ask your members - Do any of these things happen to you? Which one of these things is your biggest frustration?

According to the experts, the three biggest reasons food is tossed are:

- 1) cosmetic standards that demand that fruits and vegetables are free of blemishes, spots or wrinkles;
- 2) overstocking and over-purchasing, and
- 3) confusion about sell-by and expiration dates.

Whether it’s ugly, extra, or not quite fresh, the food that we are throwing away is, for the most part, perfectly safe, edible and tasty.

Why is food waste a problem?

Food waste is so frustrating for many reasons. Ask your members: Why do you think food waste is a problem? Allow some time for members to share some of their ideas. (Write the 4 issues below on poster paper if you want to)

- Wasted food is a **social problem** because hunger and food insecurity are on the rise. There are nearly 50 million people in the United States living in households without suitable access to healthy food (that’s called “food insecurity”). It’s not because of food shortages or a lack of production. The issue is much more about distribution than the supply. Wholesome, nutritious food should feed people, not landfills.

- Wasted food is an **economic issue**: It is estimated that at the retail and consumer levels in the United States, food loss and waste totals \$165 billion each year just to produce the food that gets thrown away. That is really like putting money in the trash or down the drain.
- Food waste also constitutes a **waste of resources** on a massive national scale. It has been calculated that 30% of fertilizer, 31% of cropland, 25% of fresh water consumption, and 2% of total energy consumption is used on food that is never eaten.
- Wasted food is an **environmental problem**. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) reports that food waste accounts for 14% of municipal solid waste in landfills. That's more than one out of every 10 pounds of garbage! Food in landfills decomposes & produces methane (a potent greenhouse gas).

What can you do to reduce food waste?

Now that you know a little more about food waste, what small changes do you think you can make to reduce it in your own home or family? Allow time for a few responses.

According to the International Information Council Foundation's 2016 Food & Health Survey, you could join with other Americans in taking steps to reduce food waste:

- 58% of us are taking leftovers home from restaurants
- 53% of us are using leftovers from our own home cooking
- 47% of us are freezing leftovers in a timely manner
- 51% of us plan our meals
- 51% of us make shopping lists

The University of Nebraska-Extension has produced a fact sheet on Food Waste with many ideas for all of us to consider. **Handout #3 - 14 Ways Consumers Can Reduce Food Waste**. Check out the 3rd column on the first page of the handout. Did you know that "sell by" and "use by" dates are not federally regulated?!? Those dates do not indicate anything about food safety except when they are printed on baby foods. The manufacturers use those dates to SUGGEST peak quality – not food safety. Many foods can be safely consumed well after their RECOMMENDED "use by" dates.

What about food waste beyond the household?

If members are curious about food waste beyond their own homes you can share - Here are some ideas you may consider to learn about food waste in your communities:

- Talk to your school food service director or manager to learn about how schools are reducing food waste
- Ask your grocery store manager what they do with out-of-date products & produce

- *Inquire from your local restaurants what they do to reduce food waste AND how they dispose of their foods (plate waste, over-prepping, over-purchasing)*
- *Visit your local farmer's markets and talk with the vendors about their "not-quite-perfect" produce and what they do with it*
- *Check out your local food pantry and ask them what they do with "expired" foods*

IN CONCLUSION

There are many benefits to being food wise by reducing food waste:

- ***Saves money** from buying less food.*
- ***Reduces methane emissions** from landfills and lowers your carbon footprint.*
- ***Conserves energy and resources**, preventing pollution involved in the growing, manufacturing, transporting, and selling food (not to mention hauling the food waste and then landfilling it).*
- ***Supports your community** by providing donated untouched food that would have otherwise gone to waste to those who might not have a steady food supply.*

Resources for Background and to Learn More

- 14 Ways Consumers Can Reduce Food Waste, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension <http://food.unl.edu/14-ways-consumers-can-reduce-food-waste>
- Waste Free Kitchen Handbook by Dana Gunders, Chronicle Books, ©2015
- www.foodinsight.org
- www.savethefood.com
- www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
- www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-home
- <https://foodforward.org/>
- <http://www.foodwastemovie.com/> A 75-minute documentary film about food waste and food rescue by Peg Leg Films
- <https://www.nrdc.org/issues/food>
- <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/urban-expeditions/austin/take-this-food-waste-quiz-show-off-your-knowledge/>
- <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/03/global-food-waste-statistics/#foodwastegraphic>
- <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/lets-talk-trash>

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