

# ECOWATCH

## Food waste in America 2023 on the rise

BY DELORES SAVAS

“Cutting waste is a delicious way of saving money helping to feed the world and protect the environment.”

“We are trashing our land to grow food that no one eats.”

*Tristram Stuart,  
English author and  
environmental campaigner*



As many Americans scurry around shopping for the much-needed groceries for one of the favorite times of the year, getting ready for the delicious feast on Thanksgiving Day, when family and friends will sit down at the family table and partake of all the special foods and desserts, they will hopefully remember that many in the world will not have such a luxury.

According to a host of organizations that monitor food waste in the world, especially in America, two facts are clear: Number one, America as a nation generates more waste than any other nation in the world, with 4.5 pounds of municipal solid waste per person per day, 55 percent of which is contributed as residential garbage. Number two, fast-food waste is on the rise.

Earth.org, an organization that has monitored this problem closely, has reported that “at least one-third of global food supplies are wasted or lost every year. That is equivalent to 40 percent of all food or 222 million tons of food each year ... while more than 800 million people globally continue to suffer from hunger and food insecurity. Food waste has a massive impact on the environment.”

Yet studies by Concern.org have shown that the world produces enough food to feed all its eight billion people, yet 828 million people go hungry every day. Of these 828 million,

the World Food Program estimates that over 40 percent are facing acute levels of hunger. And 29.6 percent of the global population does not have adequate access to food.

And now in 2023, the number of people facing acute hunger has increased by 25 percent in just three months due to the conflict in Ukraine. Consider these dire facts:

- Nine million people die from hunger-related causes every year, among them many children under the age of five.

- 149 million children under the age of five show signs of stunted growth.

- Even if we rebound from the economic fallout of the pandemic, the United Nations organization predicts that we will fall well short of our goal for zero hunger by 2030. At that end of the decade, it is estimated there will still be 670 million people facing hunger.

Why do Americans waste so much food? Food spoilage, whether real or perceived, is one of the biggest reasons people throw out food. More than 80 percent of Americans discard perfectly good, consumable food, simply because they misunderstand expiration labels. Households are said to be the largest contributor to America’s food waste problem, responsible for

about 20 percent of the total waste.

Danielle Melgar, a food and agriculture advocate with Public Interest Research group (PIRG), reported on a study which “found that some 80 percent of consumers throw away food that is near the ‘date’ label at least some of the time, even though in reality, the dates are typically just a manufacturer’s best guess as to when a product will be no longer be at peak freshness.” According to a 2019 Food and Drug Administration report, “Consumer uncertainty about the meaning of the dates that appear on the labels of packaged foods is believed to contribute to about 20 percent of food waste in the home. Now, enter the federal bipartisan Food Date Labeling Act, which would establish an easily understood two-phase food date labeling system: one phase to communicate that the quality of the food product may begin to deteriorate after a certain date, and the other to mark the date after which the product should not be consumed.”

Consider that over 240 million slices of bread are thrown away every year. Around 5.9 million glasses of milk are poured down the sink every year. Some 5.8 million potatoes are chucked every year along with cheese, apples, deli meat, eggs and

vegetables when they are adjudged to be spoiled.

Twenty-five percent of all fresh water we use goes to produce food we never eat; four percent of all oil we consume goes to produce food we never eat. Altogether, \$166 billion (the retail value of preventable waste) is spent on food we never eat.

What can we do to help stop food waste? First, understand that food will get damaged or spoiled along the supply chain, and food is thrown out due to physical blemishes or overbuying by the retail stores. That is something consumers cannot control. However, we do have control in stopping the waste in our own kitchens. Some of these ways are listed below.

- Shop your refrigerator first before buying more.
- Plan your menus before buying.
- Buy only what you realistically need.
- Freeze, preserve or can surplus fruits and vegetables.

Food waste also happens in the kitchen when we prepare food that is left uneaten or spoils in our fridges and cabinets.

For millions of people in low-income countries, this food waste happens at harvest time. Poor storage leads to pest infestations or molds that ruin crops before they can be eaten.

Now, because of rising populations, according to Earth.org, “global food demand is creating more land degradation and deforestation, disrupting entire ecosystems.”

While we cannot control what is happening around the world, we can control our kitchens and prevent food waste. This Thanksgiving let’s strive for zero food waste and remember all the inhabitants of this planet who go to bed hungry every night.

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