



## Reducing Food Waste

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Is it a surprise to you to learn that, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, 40 percent of all food purchased in the United States is not eaten? In fact, Americans throw away about 35 million tons of food each year, making up the largest percentage of waste that travels to landfills and burns in incinerators. Why is this happening? Why is food being purchased but not prepared or consumed? How are your children/grandchildren reacting to the new offerings in the school lunchroom? Are they eating the foods offered or throwing them away?

This amount of food waste costs the average American family up to \$2,275 annually. Start watching your family's uneaten and wasted food to make your own observations. Will your family members eat a bruised piece of fruit or a wilted carrot? Do you observe half jars of nacho dip trashed or leftovers that were never consumed being throw away or sent to the garbage disposal?

Managing a household takes time and effort on the parts of all family members. When considering the average American family, two-thirds of the waste is due to food *spoilage* to include fresh fish, eggs, milk, citrus fruits and vegetables.

Let's discuss some tips for reducing food waste.

- Donate non-perishable and unspoiled, perishable food to the Wakulla County food pantries.
- Be creative and search your refrigerator to see what you can make before grocery shopping.
- Freeze fruits, vegetable, leafy green and other foods before they spoil. The leafy greens will not be suitable for salads but certainly can be consumed in casseroles and soups.
- Start at the beginning of the cooking process to reduce waste. Cook and serve smaller food portions to reduce waste. Realize that there are family members who may not be willing to consume leftovers.
- Shop smart by preplanning meals and quantities that will be needed, live by your shopping list at the supermarket to avoid impulse purchases. This will allow you to only buy the foods needed and your family will eat.
- Buying in bulk is a sustainable practice and can save you money, but be sure you will use all of the items you buy.
- Composting turns food waste into rich soil. In fact, more than 95 percent of foods, from fruit and vegetable peels to stale potato chips to egg shells are thrown away when they could be composted.
- Plan your leftovers for lunch later in the week or freeze them to eat at a later time. Don't let them spoil in the refrigerator.
- Buy local foods when possible to reduce food's travel times and keep the foods fresher longer.
- When eating out, take the leftovers home with you. Don't over select when eating at the buffet. It really isn't fair to the restaurant owner to ask to take a buffet meal home when you are full. Large servings at an "all you can eat" buffet will result in a great deal of waste.
- Extend the life and get the most out of certain vegetables, fruits, meats and other foods by learning how to store them properly in your refrigerator and freezer. Refrigerator compartments are designed with a purpose; they are thermostatically controlled to properly store the food item. Don't let food get lost in them for sometimes *out of sight is out of mind*.

I sound like my mother, who during my youth, would ask me to eat the food left on my plate by reminding me of all the starving people in this world. Consider the next time you are about to scrape leftovers into the trash or throw away spoiled foods, that one in six American does not have access to enough food. I wish she would have taught me about smaller servings instead of insisting that I clean my plate; I ended up being a heavy child.

As with many social and environmental-friendly practices, each step, no matter how small, helps make a positive difference. I encourage you to do your part.