

# Practical Ways to Reduce Food Waste

Ann C. Vegdahl, Rutgers PhD Student and

Donald W. Schaffner PhD, Food Science Distinguished Professor and Extension Specialist

**Food waste** = any edible item that goes unconsumed due to: undesirable color or blemish or any discarded kitchen scraps

2013 stat: **More than 37 million tons** of food waste generated in the US; translates to more than **200 pounds per person per year**.

Expert estimates: **25-40% of food** grown and transported for sale or to the consumer **will never be eaten**; total global cost from food waste could be as high as **\$400 billion a year**. (Food & Agriculture Org. estimate)

Environmental impact: **Decomposing food** in landfills can release **methane**, a greenhouse gas 20x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> gas.

**48 mill. People in US (>15 mill. Children)** suffer from **food insecurity**, can't meet basic food needs.

Ways to reduce:

1. **Grocery Shopping Planning:** take a look at what you have so you don't buy it again
2. **List Making:** Take into account how many meals and how much per meal you use
3. **Store Smartly:**
  - a. **Refrigerated fruits & veg** last best at temps at or below 40°F
  - b. **Unrefrigerated fruits** should be kept away from one another—e.g. bananas, apples, tomatoes. They emit a gas which will accelerate the ripening and spoilage rates. Other fruits not to refrigerate: avocado, peaches, nectarines, watermelon
  - c. **Veggies not to refrigerate:** potatoes, onions, winter squash, garlic. Best kept in a cool, dark, dry cabinet & can last a month or more.
  - d. **Freeze foods** that are near the end of their shelf life.
  - e. **Learn the difference between gas releasers and gas sensitive fruits & veg**
    - i. **Gas releasers:** Apples, Apricots, Cantaloupe, Figs, Honeydew, Kiwi, Plums, Avocado, unripe bananas, Nectarines, Peaches, Tomatoes
    - ii. **Gas sensitive:** ripe bananas, Broccoli, Brussel sprouts, Cabbage, Carrots, Cauliflower, Cucumbers, Eggplant, Lettuce & leafy greens, Peas, Peppers, Squash, Sweet potato, Watermelon
4. **Understand expiration dates:** “Use by”, “Best by”, and “Enjoy by” are not necessarily expiration dates but refer to a products prime freshness. Many can be eaten safely after that date—and could be used in cooking.
5. **Support the community:** Consider donating unused, unexpired food to your local rescue organization rather than discarding
6. **Return nutrients to the soil.** This applies specifically to fruits and vegetables—instead of throwing away scraps or expired/unusable produce, add it to a compost pile.
  - a. **If composting, make sure it isn't food that has mingled with oils, fats, proteins, etc.**