A Beginner's Guide to Food Waste

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Food waste is an environmental, social, and financial problem.

### ENVIRONMENTAL
- Approximately 30–40% of food is wasted 1 in the United States.¹
- If wasted food was a country, it would be the third largest producer of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the world, after China and the United States.²

### SOCIAL
- Meanwhile, 48.1 million Americans lived in food-insecure households in 2014.³
- Reducing food losses by only 15 percent would be enough food to feed more than 25 million Americans each year.⁴

### FINANCIAL
- $218 billion is spent to grow, process, transport, and dispose of food that is never eaten.⁵
- Food & money is lost at every step in the supply chain — across farms, manufacturers, restaurants, and homes.⁶

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1. USDA, 2. FAO, 3. USDA, 4. NRDC, 5. RPFED, 6. FAO

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A Beginner's Guide to Food Waste

Here’s an overview of the current food waste landscape.

It can serve as a primer for those looking for a quick guide to government calls to action, legislation, and online awareness campaigns.
Chapter 1: An Overview

A NATIONAL FOOD WASTE REDUCTION GOAL

In September 2015, the USDA and EPA announced the first-ever national food waste reduction goal. The organizations called for a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030. The announcement propelled the topic into national conversation, eventually leading to Food & Wine magazine naming food waste as “the most discussed food-related topic of the year.”

U.S. FOOD WASTE CHALLENGE

The reduction goal came over two years after the U.S. Food Waste Challenge was launched in June 2013, which had over 4,000 participants by the end of 2014. Organizations within the U.S. food supply chain can participate in the challenge by submitting an activity form or joining through the Food Recovery Challenge.

FOOD RECOVERY HIERARCHY

At the forefront of all food waste reduction efforts is the Food Recovery Hierarchy from the EPA, which is a great resource for understanding how organizations can identify landfill alternatives for wasted food. The hierarchy ranks ways to prevent and divert wasted food from most preferred to least preferred.

Source: EPA
REFED ROADMAP

In March 2016, ReFED (Rethink Food Waste Through Economics and Data) released their roadmap of 27 actionable solutions to reducing food waste. It’s the first data-driven guide for businesses, government, funders, and nonprofits to collectively reduce food waste at scale.

Through the lens of the Food Recovery Hierarchy, the roadmap outlines 12 solutions regarding food waste prevention, 7 solutions regarding food recovery, and 8 solutions regarding food waste recycling.

Source: ReFED
Chapter 2: Legislation

GOOD SAMARITAN ACT

Passed in 1996, the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act — commonly referred to as just the Good Samaritan Act — provides liability protection for food donations made in good faith. Good faith donors, including individuals, wholesalers, distributors, nonprofits, farmers, gleaners, and restaurants are protected, except in cases of gross negligence (intentionally donating food that is known to cause harm to the recipient).

FOOD DATE LABELING ACT

Maine Congresswoman Chellie Pingree and Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal introduced the Food Date Labeling Act in May 2016 in an effort to standardize date labels such as “use by,” “sell by,” and “best by.”

Confusing date labels contribute to 90% of Americans throwing out perfectly good food, according the ReFED report. There are currently no national or governmental regulations on food date labeling for safety.

ENHANCED TAX DEDUCTIONS FOR FOOD DONATIONS

In December 2015, Congress passed a permanent extension of enhanced tax deductions for food donations. When donating inventory of wholesome food to charity, Section 170(e)(3) of the U.S. Tax Code stipulates that businesses are eligible for enhanced tax deductions, up to 15% of their taxable income.
Chapter 3: Awareness

NRDC’S SAVE THE FOOD CAMPAIGN

The “Save the Food” ad campaign (savethefood.com) by the creators of Smokey the Bear (Ad Council) and the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) brings consumer attention to the issue of food waste.

EXPIRED: FOOD WASTE IN AMERICA FILM

Spearheaded by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, EXPIRED explores how misleading date labels on food products contribute to food waste in America.

UGLY FRUIT & VEG TWITTER HANDLE

Ugly produce has become a star on social media, most notably on the Twitter handle @UglyFruitandVeg and Instagram page. Anti-food waste advocate Jordan Figueiredo runs the account and features ugly fruits and vegetables sent in by fans.

JUST EAT IT FILM

The documentary features Canadian filmmakers Grant Baldwin and Jenny Rustemeyer who aim to survive for six months solely on food that would have otherwise gone to waste.

JOHN OLIVER SEGMENT

The Last Week Tonight with John Oliver: Food Waste segment brought the issue to national attention outside of the food and waste industries.
Chapter 4: Additional Resources

Visit these websites for more information on how to reduce food waste.

- BioCycle
- Champions 12.3
- EPA’s Sustainable Management of Food
- Food Loss + Waste Protocol
- Food Recovery Challenge
- Food Waste Reduction Alliance
- Further with Food
- Greater Boston Food Bank’s Glossary Terms
- Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic
- RecyclingWorks Massachusetts
- ReFed: A Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste by 20 Percent
- Save Food: Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction
- USDA Food Product Dating
- USDA U.S. Food Waste Challenge
- U.S. Zero Waste Business Council
- WasteWise
- WRAP’s Food Waste Reduction
About Us

Spoiler Alert is a Boston-based software company helping food businesses manage unsold inventory.

We offer an enterprise web platform that allows food manufacturers, distributors, and retailers to get a better handle on their food recovery and waste diversion efforts, as well as an online, controlled marketplace that facilitates real-time food donations, discounted sales, or organic byproduct redistributions.

Spoiler Alert provides data to optimize the flow of unsold inventory to new and existing outlets, enabling the promotion of key environmental, social, and financial metrics to increase engagement of key stakeholders.

Contact Us

Want to learn more? Visit www.spoileralert.com

Ready to get started?
Email us at info@spoileralert.com, or give us a call at 617-917-4123.