



STRATEGY #2: WASTE LESS FOOD

Much of the food grown and produced in the world goes to waste. In the United States, approximately 30-40% of food is never eaten. This is a huge amount of food.

Most wasted food ends up in [landfills](#), where it generates methane, a particularly potent greenhouse gas. In the United States, food is the largest component of our trash, and our landfills are one of the largest sources of methane.

Food waste represents excess production: we're growing much more food than we need. This means that the environmental footprint of agriculture is much larger than it needs to be. If food waste were a country, it would be the world's [third-largest greenhouse gas emitter](#), after China and the United States.

As the global population increases, and we have more mouths to feed, there are real worries that the Earth's resources won't be plentiful enough to grow all the food we need. We need to find ways to feed more people using less water and less land, while emitting less greenhouse gases and other forms of pollution. Reducing food waste is an essential part of this. Experts who study the future of the food system agree that feeding a growing world population while keeping environmental impacts within acceptable limits requires three actions: reducing food waste, shifting towards plant-based diets, and adopting more sustainable agricultural practices.

Excess food production causes unnecessary environmental burdens, but it also causes unnecessary harms of other sorts. Around 50 billion chickens and 1.5 billion pigs are slaughtered for food every year. Depending on the country they're raised in, many of these animals may spend most of their lives raised in large indoor facilities, where many animals can be densely packed together. If we wasted less animal-source food, less could be produced, and fewer animals would endure this fate.

Food waste represents a missed opportunity to put wasted food to good use. Worldwide, 1 billion people do not have enough food. In the United States, [11% of the population](#) was food insecure at some point during 2018. If excess food can be recovered and redirected to people in need, this can simultaneously address food waste and food insecurity. For example, a grocery store could send excess food to a food bank or food pantry, rather than a landfill.



Reducing food waste accomplishes multiple ethically important goals. It makes progress on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. It reduces the environmental impact of food production in other ways — less land, less water, and less pollution. It makes the food system more efficient, so we're better positioned to feed a growing world population. Redirecting food rather than throwing it out helps to feed people who are hungry today. Wasting less food saves companies money. It saves families money too: households in the United

States could save around [\\$371 per person](#) each year by reducing food waste.

These days, people are being asked to make many dietary changes that they don't really want to make. Spend more money on sustainably grown foods, even though your food budget is already stretched thin. Eat more fruits and vegetables, instead of the salty snack foods you really crave. So many of the changes we're being asked to make involve trade-offs. Wasting less food is different. Wasting less food will save you money and doesn't require you to give up anything you love. In this way, wasting less food is the ultimate win-win, for you, for your community and for the planet.

Why does food waste occur?

Food waste occurs all along the food supply chain: on the farm, at the food processor, at grocery stores, and at restaurants. However, most food waste in the United States occurs at the consumer level.

Simply put, people waste food because they buy more food than they eat. But there are many reasons why and ways in which this happens.

At the store, people buy more food than they need and will be able to eat. Sometimes this is because shoppers don't have a meal plan for the week, so they're just guessing about what they'll need and how much. Sometimes it's because shoppers make impulse purchases. Sometimes shoppers buy large quantities because they're shopping at a big box store, or they need to stock up because they can't get to the store often.

In the kitchen, one reason people waste food is because they cook too much. A big source of wasted food is leftovers. Even if someone saves their leftovers, they may not eat them; they might just throw the leftovers away later that week.

People also waste food because they don't store food optimally, and it goes bad sooner. Or at least, they're afraid it's gone bad. One source of food waste, it turns out, is that people are insecure about their ability to tell if food has gone bad. We err on the side of caution, and end up throwing out edible food. People sometimes get misled by "use-by" and "best-buy" labels: these labels tell you whether food is at its best, but many people think food goes bad after the "use-by" or "best-buy" date.

It's impossible to avoid all food waste, but our simple [tips](#) might help you reduce your food waste without too much effort.



<https://bioethics.jhu.edu/choose-food>