Cutting Food Waste

About 40 percent of food grown in the United States goes uneaten. On average, Americans toss and waste 23 pounds of potentially edible food per person each month. At this rate, food waste is costing the average family of four approximately $190 per month. Food waste is not only a concern for our pocketbooks, it is a major concern that challenges our natural resources and environment. The U.S. Food & Drug Administration state that food waste is the second biggest component in our landfills. Food production to consumers uses 80% of our freshwater and half our land.

Major Sources of Food Waste

Food waste occurs at every step within the food industry, on the farm and with packers, processors, distributors, and retailers. Some of this waste is caused by simply dumping products that are less than perfect in appearance. Consumers often throw away food because they fear food safety caused by a misunderstanding of what food product dating means, along with uncertainty about perishable food storage.

Product Dating

Sell by and use by dates on food packages are not federally regulated, except in the case of infant formula. The dates printed are used to suggest the product’s quality, not safety. Most of the food dates on packages are on perishable foods, which are foods that will likely quickly spoil, decay or become unsafe to eat if not kept refrigerated at 40° F or below or frozen at 0° F or below.

A Sell by date indicates that a product should not be sold after that date for quality reasons.

A Use by or Best by date is the maker’s best estimate of how long a product will keep at its best quality.

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To access resources and services made available through K-State Research and Extension please contact Ashley or visit any Post Rock District Office.
Tips to Reduce Food Waste

- Be aware of how much food you throw away.
- Shop your refrigerator first! Cook or eat what you already have at home before buying more.
- Plan your menu before shopping and buy only those things on your menu.
- Buy only what you realistically need and will use. Buying in bulk only saves money if you are able to use the food before it spoils.
- Be creative! If safe and healthy, use the edible parts of food that you normally do not eat.
- Safely preserve surplus fruits and vegetables - especially abundant seasonal produce.
- At restaurants, order only what you can finish by asking about portion sizes and be aware of side dishes included with entrees. Take home the leftovers and keep them for your next meal.
- At all-you-can-eat buffets, take only what you can comfortably eat.
- Check the temperature setting of your fridge. Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the temperature is at 40° F or below.

If food is obviously spoiled—abnormally soft, discolored, moldy, or has a strong unpleasant smell—throw it away. No matter if the item was properly stored or stored for a short amount of time. Eating spoiled or contaminated food could cause foodborne illness. If you or a family member has a foodborne illness, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

Source: U.S Food & Drug Administration