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The Forum for America's Ideas

Feeding People, Not Landfills: Why Reducing Food Waste Matters

The Food Waste Challenge

Today in the U.S.

- 40% of food goes uneaten
- 20lbs of food is wasted per person monthly
- There's \$165 billion in food loss each year

Hunger is a daily reality for millions of Americans in states, cities and neighborhoods across the United States. In 2010, 34 million pounds of food went to waste while 17 million families did not have enough food on the table. More than 16 million children, nearly one in five struggle with hunger. An unusual alliance has emerged to remedy the problem,

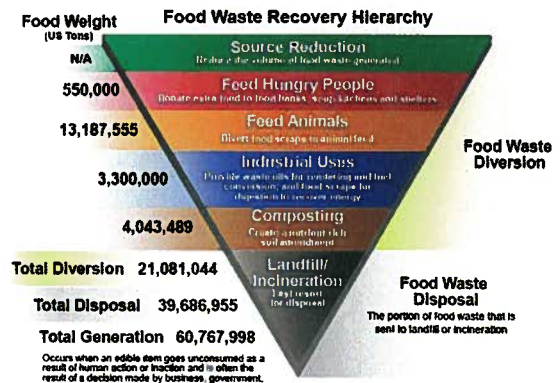
save food, improve the environment and feed people. This is a different kind of "farm to table" story. Private sector companies representing the food supply chain—from farming to manufacturing to distribution—joined forces to accomplish reductions in food waste sent to landfills and increase food sent to donation. Coalitions such as the Food Waste Recovery Alliance and the Food Donation Connection create smart partnerships to reduce food waste, increase efficiencies, and supply food banks and pantries. Organic waste in landfills accounts for 16 percent of U.S. methane emissions, which have 20 times the heat-trapping ability in the atmosphere as does carbon dioxide. Opportunities exist when unusual stakeholders work together to solve the negative environmental impacts of food waste, reducing resources associated with food production, improving sanitation and health, and feeding people. Reducing food waste and feeding hungry Americans is a timely social, economic and environmental issue.

Partnerships

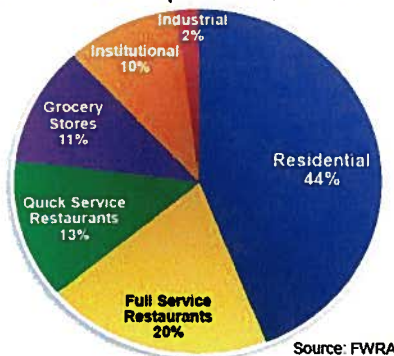
Food Waste Reduction Alliance

The Food Waste Reduction Alliance (FWRA), composed of 23 corporate organizations, has two main goals: 1) reduce food waste going to landfills and 2) increase food donations to the hungry.

From a business standpoint reducing food waste represents opportunities to feed hungry people while increasing efficiency and lowering costs. FWRA members are succeeding in meeting the alliance's goals, for example, General Mills which set a goal to reduce food waste by 50 percent by 2015 and reached its halfway milestone in 2012 while still donating \$38 million in food to Feeding America. Thirteen percent of National Restaurant Association members are composting and are working to improve that number by promoting the issue through awareness and education programs. The Association has also been a partner to Share our Strength's Dine Out For No Kid Hungry campaign to end childhood hunger and is engaging chefs to take over meal preparation for organizations that provide hot food through the Feed the Need initiative. Yum! Brand restaurants are donating an average of 5,000 pounds of food per location a year through their Harvest initiative.



US Food Waste Disposal Data, 39 million tons



Feeding people is not the only issue at hand, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Fourteen percent of greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere come from steps in the food production lifecycle, including the growth, manufacturing and transportation of food. Annually FWRA disposes 40 million tons of food waste into landfills, but at the same time successfully diverts 21 million tons of food for industrial uses, composting, and feeding people and animals. There are other innovative solutions for dealing with food waste. One solution for the harmful effects of food waste that many utility districts are studying is utilizing an anaerobic digester for solid waste, a process in which organic material is broken down by microorganisms without oxygen. This process

produces biogas, a source of energy similar to natural gas, along with a useful soil amendment. If 50 percent of the food waste generated each year in the U.S. were broken down through anaerobic digestion rather than dumped into a landfill, enough biogas would be generated and stored to power 2.5 million homes for a year. The East Bay Municipal Utility District in Oakland, California, was awarded a grant from the EPA to pilot a project using anaerobic digesters to break down food waste.

The Food Donation Connection

The Food Donation Connection (FDC) is a bridge between food service companies and local hunger relief organizations. Its mission is to link available sources of surplus food to those in need through charitable organizations. Last year, FDC donated 35 million pounds of food to 8,000 charities nationwide. FDC partners include Yum! Brands, Darden Restaurants, The Cheesecake Factory, CraftWorks Restaurants, Chipotle Mexican Grill and the National Restaurant Association and they coordinate donations from over 15,000 restaurants. Since its inception FDC has boosted employee morale, reduced waste, increased sustainability, and put food on millions of kitchen tables. According to the EPA, less than 3 percent of food waste is recovered and \$30 billion-\$40 billion of food loss occurs in the commercial or retail sector and FDC's work is helping recover more food.

Stephanie Paine, director of Food Service at the San Diego Rescue Mission, an FDC recipient, stated that donations by Pizza Hut and KFC increased the nutritional value of the food available for the men, women and children they serve. The donated food increased meal variety and helped increase the number of meals to three times a week, serving 500 people at each. At the Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, FDC helped increase its reach by 152 percent since their partnership. City Harvest of New York City has received more than 200,000 pounds of food from KFC and Pizza Hut since the beginning of their partnership. The program development and management creates an easy way for restaurants to donate excess food.

State Actions

Oregon has been a leading force in feeding people and reducing food waste since the 1970s. Its Crop Donation Tax Credit encourages farmers to donate excess crops through gleaning by giving 10 percent of the fair market value of donated products in tax credits to growers. The Oregon Tax Credit sunset in 2011 and is currently going through revisions and reauthorization in the 2013 Oregon Legislature. The Maine Legislature is currently considering Bill H326 requiring state agencies to develop comprehensive policies to reduce food waste in all state-funded institutions and buildings. The Iowa Senate passed Bill 306 directing the Department of Natural Resources to model its efforts on the food recovery hierarchy adopted by the EPA. Lawmakers are also considering Senate Study Bill 1177 to alleviate hunger by creating the Iowa food-link to food-bank initiative and establishing a farm to food donation tax credit for 10 percent of the fair market value of donated products.

Vermont passed the Universal Recycling Solid Waste Act in 2012 that bans food disposal in landfills by 2020. It also bans disposal of recyclables by 2015 and leaf and yard residuals by 2016. In 2014, manufacturers, colleges and others will be required to begin recycling. The legislation also includes a "hierarchy for managing organics," similar to the EPA's food recovery hierarchy. Meanwhile in 2012, neighboring Massachusetts' Department of Environmental Protection issued a rule banning commercial food waste from landfills beginning 2014 and hopes to extend it to homes in the coming years to achieve the goal of diverting a third of the nearly 1.4 million tons of organic waste produced every year.

States have taken steps to increase food donation and reduce food waste. Many have adopted legislation similar to the 1996 Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act—a federal law that protects donors from liability when they donate food that they deem to be in good shape.

Creating tax credits, encouraging food recovery, and banning organic waste in landfills are effective examples of the many ways legislators are coming to the table to address hunger and reduce food waste.

For more information visit www.ncsl.org/hunger. NCSL staff contacts: [Sheri Steisel](#) , [Ann Morse](#) (Hunger); [Tamra Spielvogel](#), [Melanie Condon](#) (Environment, Agriculture).

Prepared by Gilberto Soria Mendoza, Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow, NCSL Hunger Partnership. April 29, 2013.