



## A GOOD FOOD FIGHT

### Keeping Food Out of the Trash Bin

by April Thompson

**A**s much as 40 percent of food produced in the U.S. is wasted, even as one in six Americans goes hungry. Instead of feeding people better, we are feeding the city dump. Of all types of trash, food consumes the most space

in our municipal landfills, followed by plastic and paper. Rotting food then releases harmful methane, a greenhouse gas 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

While food waste is a big problem, social entrepreneurs see a big

opportunity. Around the country, they are working to reduce, recover and rethink discarded food valued at more than \$160 billion a year. In the process, they are not only cutting food costs, but also creating jobs and fighting climate change.

University of Maryland College Park alumna Cam Pascual co-founded the nonprofit Food Recovery Network (FRN) after watching hundreds of pounds of food hit the trash in her campus dining hall every night. Pascual and her colleagues mobilized a volunteer network to shuttle leftovers from the university to soup kitchens, donating 200 meals a night to feed the hungry.

In the last five years, FRN has recovered more than 1 million pounds of food from 184 campuses in 42 states, proving that ingenuity and philanthropy can together fight the food waste travesty. "There are two major barriers to recovering leftover food; one is awareness, like helping businesses to understand the laws that protect them from liability," says Pascual, the organization's current director of innovation and operations. "The other is the labor involved. Universities are the perfect ecosystem for food recovery because college students have flexible schedules and are community service-minded, offering a ready supply of volunteers."

The latest FRN initiative is a certification program to verify that farms and restaurants are engaging in food recovery that includes creating a toolkit to help restaurants safely recover leftover meals.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture recently set a goal of slashing food waste in half by 2030, with several supporting bills approaching the floor in Congress. The EPA food recovery hierarchy calls for reducing food waste first and foremost, with recovering food to feed people or animals as a fallback and utilizing landfills only as a last resort.

"It's one thing to set goals, but to realize those reductions in food waste, we have to change our behavior,"

says Jonathan Bloom, author of *American Wasteland: How America Throws Away Nearly Half of Its Food (and What We Can Do About It)*. Farms and households are the two largest generators of food waste, according to Bloom, whose blog at *WastedFood.com* offers dozens of beneficial tips for keeping food out of the trash bin.

Fighting food waste starts before we go to the grocery. Bloom recommends consumers organize cupboards to know what's already in stock, plan meals and stick to the shopping

list. Post-purchase, easy tips include serving smaller portions, freezing leftovers and sharing surplus with friends and neighbors.

Bloom's website fans contribute more ideas like mixing veggie scraps into pet food or making them into soup stock. Using a smaller refrigerator keeps shoppers from bulking up while saving energy costs. The battle against wasted food needs to start at home, where small steps add up to big change.

Connect with freelance writer April Thompson, of Washington, D.C., at *AprilWrites.com*.

## A FOOD FIGHT WORTH WINNING

### Diverting Unsold Food from Full Landfills to Hungry Tummies

Jonathan Bloom speaks to college students around the U.S. explaining how fighting food waste requires changing beliefs and behaviors about food. "Recognize that taste should trump appearance, and don't be so concerned with superficialities," is a leading message. He cites replicable countermeasures like Hungry Harvest and Imperfect Produce, both predicated upon giving "ugly produce" a second chance. Based in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco's Bay Area, respectively, these businesses offer low-cost home delivery of surplus produce, much of which is rejected for not meeting grocery stores' high cosmetic standards.

Here are more examples of the community pioneers working to divert food from overstuffed landfills to people.

■ **Daily Table** (DailyTable.org) purchases excess food from growers, manufacturers and supermarkets to provide healthy food at fast-food prices for populations in need. The Dorchester, Massachusetts, retail grocery store offers fresh produce and grocery items, plus ready-to-cook and grab-n-go prepared meals.

■ **Fruitcycle** (TheFruitcycle.com) makes healthy dried snacks from produce that would otherwise be tossed. The Washington, D.C. area business also provides jobs for formerly incarcerated, homeless or otherwise disadvantaged women.

■ **Food Cowboy** (FoodCowboy.com) reroutes food rejected by distributors. Truck drivers use a mobile app to communicate availability of such produce and find a charity or compost site to accept it.

■ **Re-Nuble** (Re-Nuble.com) transforms food waste into affordable, organic fertilizer for hydroponic growing, thus contributing a solution to hunger.

■ **BluApple** (TheBluApple.com) makes a plastic, fruit-shaped device that can triple the shelf life of refrigerated food. It absorbs ethylene, a naturally occurring gas that accelerates spoilage.



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