



IOWA CHAPTER

The Problem of Food Waste

The obvious problem with food waste is that when consumers throw away food, they are throwing away money. But the problem with food waste is much broader than that.

Food that is tossed into landfills decomposes and creates methane, a greenhouse gas that is more potent than carbon dioxide, even though it stays in the atmosphere a shorter time period before it degrades. Approximately 40 percent of all food in the United States is never eaten.¹

As landfills are filled with food waste, more land must be devoted to land-filling thus destroying natural areas and farms. Furthermore, the public spends money to operate the landfills. Food waste fills 15 percent of Iowa landfills.² Land would be better used to grow the food.

Water is also required to grow food. Current industrial agriculture uses large amounts of artificial fertilizers and pesticides that run off the land and pollute water bodies.

Transporting all the uneaten food, from the farm to warehouses, stores and distribution centers, restaurants, homes and finally to the landfill, results in the release of greenhouse gases.

The solutions start with consumers reducing food waste. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 40 to 50 percent of the food waste is created by consumers.

- Buy only what you will eat
- Reduce serving sizes
- Eat leftovers
- Freeze extra food, to be eaten later



Photo credit USDA NRCS, Joe Larson



Photo credit USDA NRCS, Stephen Kirkpatrick

¹ Grant Gerlock, "Food waste weighing down U.S. food system," Harvest Public Media, September 21, 2014

² Erin Jordan, "Food waste study diverts 1,000 pounds from landfill," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, November 29, 2014

Institutions that produce food for the public or sell food, including restaurants and cafeterias, can also contribute by

- Redistributing extra food to food banks and soup kitchens

Compost your food rather than throw it in the garbage. The compost can be used in gardens as fertilizer.

- Homeowners can compost their own food waste
- Communities can establish compost facilities, which divert food waste from the landfill
- Communities can collect food waste as part of curbside collection of yard waste
- Communities can establish drop-off points for food waste if they do not have curbside pickup of yard waste

Large-scale industrial uses of food waste can also divert the waste from landfills

- Using the waste for other products
- Channeling the food waste to biofuel stock, such as biodiesel, biogas and biochar

The solutions benefit all of us by

- Saving the consumer money
- Reducing methane emissions created by the decomposition process and contributing to climate change
- Decreasing the amount of items put in landfills thereby cutting the cost of landfill operation and the amount of land required for them
- Increasing the protection of natural areas and highly erodible soils by reducing the amount of land used for growing food



Photo credit USDA NRCS, Stephen Kirkpatrick