

Jiawen Shou

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Global Trends: Food Waste

Food waste has become an alarming issue globally. In the past years of the pandemic, many people experienced food insecurity which led to concerns about health problems. While food insecurity is still a problem in many households of the U.S., wasted food is taking up the most space in US landfills than anything else.¹ There are several sources of food wastes such as unsold food in stores, plate waste, uneaten prepared food, kitchen trimmings or by products from processing.² There are about 1.4 billion tons of food wasted every year on a global level and the U.S. the country that discards the most food than any other countries. There are many reasons for food waste such as mis-understood food labels, large portion sizes, and excessive trimmings in the kitchen.¹ The problem with food waste is ranked the most important global trend because many people are suffering from food insecurity at this moment and resources are so unevenly distributed. A lot of the food wasted can be used to feed other families or children in need. The problem is solvable with cooperation and education. It is not an irreversible condition but an individual habit that people can benefit from having.

In order to reduce the amount of food wasted, people should learn to read food labels and not discard good-to-eat food products. For example, many packages are dated with the best before date. Many interpret that as the expiration date. However, the best before data only recommends what is the time to eat this food to get the best flavor. It does not mean the food has expired after that date. Public education on food waste is needed so that people become more aware of the problem and try to waste less food in daily life. Organizations should take actions on collecting unsold leftover food from stores and distribute them to people in need. Restaurants should also be mindful when trimming the ingredients and try to leave as much edible as possible. One good example is broccoli stem, which is delicious and healthy, but always disposed of by people. Those are all possible steps to take and relatively easy to implement because people could benefit from more food resources or even reduced prices. The goal is to change waste into products to feed more people.

¹ Food waste in America in 2023: Statistics & Facts: RTS. Recycle Track Systems.
<https://www.rts.com/resources/guides/food-waste-america/>. Accessed February 13, 2023.

² Sustainable Management of Food Basics . EPA.
<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics>. Accessed February 13, 2023.