

ReFresh Nebraska

Stop the Rot

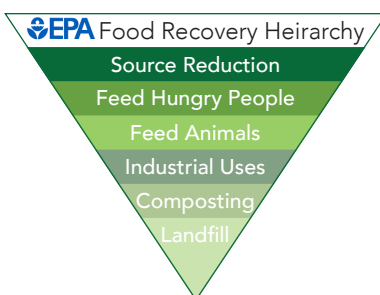
Spring 2019

School Food Waste Solutions

In the very first issue of ReFresh Nebraska, we shared the success of Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) cafeteria composting program. In three short years, the practice had grown from 3 pilot schools, to 35 locations, each of which saw school-wide recycling rates more than double from a 20% average to an estimated 52% after implementation. The 2017-2018 school year then saw the addition of six schools, and district-wide totals reach more than 440 tons of cafeteria waste and other organic material diverted from the landfill. The number of schools involved now stands at 49, with more than 31,000 students and staff engaged in the program each and every day.

While easily responsible for keeping the greatest amount of organic material out of the landfill, it's important to remember that recycling, or composting is also the last step in a Food Recovery Hierarchy that starts with source reduction. Case in point: USDA proudly serves some 30 million kids each school day through their National School Lunch Program (NSLP). However a 2013 American Journal of Preventive Medicine study found that students throw away about \$25 million worth of edible food each week as well. Reasons vary. Perception of quality or freshness plays a role, but so does a USDA reimbursement requirement that students select items from at least three out of five categories — vegetable, fruit, protein, grains, and milk, with at least one of those choices being a fruit or vegetable. The takeaway isn't that policy changes are in order - kids should always be encouraged to make healthy food choices, but it also doesn't mean

that uneaten items need to end up as compost or landfill fodder either - especially when strategies can be employed that help reduce waste in the first place. For instance, USDA found that scheduling recess before lunch can reduce plate waste by as much as 30%, and increase fruit and vegetable consumption by 54%. Fun, descriptive names for healthy foods can also bump up the amount eaten by 30%, and offering 2 or more fruit choices, with at least one of them being a pre-sliced option, can increase consumption by more than 70%! For those interested in learning more, check out the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement website at



www.smarterlunchrooms.org. With some 60 no-cost, low-cost strategies listed on their Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard, it's a terrific resource for improving consumption and reducing waste.

That said, food will inevitably remain on the plate, yet here again, solutions for certain items should be pursued before resorting to the compost pile. As the hierarchy suggests, feeding hungry people is the next priority and schools can do their part on this front as well. A 2011 amendment to the Richard Russell National School Lunch Act encourages food recovery in the nation's schools, bringing them in line with the pro-

tections provided by the 1996 Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. It should be noted that USDA's School Food Waste Policy Guidelines support in-school food donations as well.

Logistical issues can be a burden, and the destination of rescued food may differ by district, school, or even by item, but one of two avenues are most often pursued. Regardless of whether or not food rescue schools are able to recycle, students finishing lunch are instructed to put their leftovers in one of two bins - the compost or trash bin for partially eaten food scraps and the food recovery bin for appropriate uneaten, unopened, or unpeeled items. Some programs then donate their rescued items to area food banks or soup kitchens, while others make it available to the student body itself, placing them on a Food Share Table, either for immediate consumption or to take home at the end of the day.

Either way, students grow up understanding that food is a valuable resource not to be wasted. They also learn that helping hungry people is a community service they too can take pride in being a part of. Unfortunately, in today's world only 5% of schools in America compost, and less than one half of one percent participate in a food rescue program. Imagine however, a world where both are common practice, and students each and every day experience real world lessons on the benefits of civic responsibility - THAT's the world we need to live in if we're ever going to reduce food waste by 50% in this country.

A quarterly publication from Keep Nebraska Beautiful

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10 EASY TIPS FOR MEAL PLANNING

40% of food in the U.S. is never eaten. Meal planning helps reduce waste & also saves time, stress & money. Even better, it leads to healthier eating.



1. DON'T START FROM SCRATCH

Meal planning doesn't have to mean hours spent with a cook book. Start with your go-to meals. Repeat them every week or two. Then try something new.

2. CHECK THE REFRIGERATOR

Next week's meals get their start in the fridge. See what needs to be used up and then think of a meal to make with those items. Check your pantry for the rest of the ingredients and add missing pieces to the shopping list.

3. USE PORTION PLANNERS

Portion calculators can help you feed a big group, but they can offer insight into daily cooking too.

4. HAVE KITCHEN ESSENTIALS HANDY

Having two or three grains, cooking fundamentals, key spices, and "hero" sauces like barbecue and peanut sauce can use up odds and ends in the fridge and bring new life to old meals.

5. USE BUILDING BLOCKS

Pick two types of protein, one or two grains, and a veggie medley to make at the beginning of the week and then incorporate into different meals. A sauce of broccoli and peppers can be used as a side one night, spooned onto enchiladas another night, and worked into a soup or meatloaf later in the week.

6. THINK DOUBLE DUTY

Planning a Tuesday taco night? Think about the other ways to use the extra tortillas. Ingredients sometimes come in larger portions than we need. If you plan a second meal around them, it's easier to avoid overload.

7. SCHEDULE A LAZY NIGHT

The truth is we don't always have the time or energy to cook every night. Plan a few lazy nights that don't require cooking and take the opportunity to order takeout or dine with friends.

8. GO FRESH FIRST

To preserve freshness and nutrition, use perishables like seafood and meat earlier in the week and save pasta, dairy, and omelets for later in the week. Some greens like kale, will stay fresh longer than others.

9. LEAN ON FROZEN INGREDIENTS

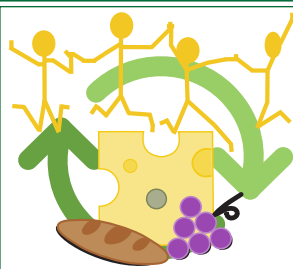
Frozen foods have nearly all of the nutrients (and sometimes more) as their fresh counterparts. And they don't go bad.

10. COOK AND FREEZE

Soups, stews, casseroles, and lasagnas can all be made in large batches and then frozen and defrosted when you need a quick dinner. To keep it easy, freeze the portion sizes you'll want to defrost.

SAVETHEFOOD.COM

From Waste Free Kitchen Handbook by Dana Gunders, 2015.
Used with permission from Chronicle Books, San Francisco.



ReFresh Success

Outback Steakhouse Food Rescue Program

While not something most folks would know, Outback Steakhouse has a longstanding commitment to reducing food insecurity in America, encouraging restaurateurs under their banner to be a part of the solution. One such

proprietor Lindsey Adams, has been an enthusiastic proponent of the program since moving to the Outback in Davenport, Iowa five and a half years ago, donating pre-consumer excess food to service groups in the communities she operates. A founding member of the Quad Cities Food Rescue Partnership (FRP), her Davenport store was also the first to be acknowledged by the FRP Donor Recognition Program.

Lindsey next brought her passion to the Outback in Lincoln where one of her first objectives was to identify a local food rescue partner. She settled on People's City Mission (PCM) and has been donating between 75 and 100 pounds of food each week ever since. That's the equivalent of some 3,750 to 5,000 meals a year, and while not one to toot her own horn, the enthusiasm she brings to the program is infectious. So much so, that her Outbackers take ownership in the program as well and are always on the lookout for items to put in the donation bin. "It's an organized part of our system," she says. "Everyone participates... it's just what we do".

The average weekly donation includes items like honey wheat bread, soups, prime rib, onions, mashed, baked and sweet potatoes. When raw items become near the end of freshness, they'll cook them up for the donation bin as well. Items are collected throughout the day as warranted, and again at close, when everything is put away for the night.

The food is then weighed and entered into the Harvest Food Donation Log who in turn tracks donations for all of their restaurants online, through the Food Donation Connection app. Donation bins are kept in the walk-in freezer until a People's City Mission driver picks them up and brings them back to the PCM kitchen for use in recipes throughout the week.

There is a tax credit received for donating food, but that's not really a motivating factor for Lindsey. She just hates to see people go hungry, and is committed to helping however she can. Open to the possibility of tackling post-consumer food waste as well, she has yet to see logistical issues addressed in a way that alleviate her concerns. That said, she's aware of the importance, stating that "(rescuing food) makes you aware of waste, and the need to reduce it wherever you can".

At Keep Nebraska Beautiful, we look forward to the day that all restaurants are as committed to food rescue as Lindsey not to mention the greater Outback Steakhouse family, and that composting post-consumer waste becomes routine as well.



Shopping your fridge first is an important strategy for reducing food waste. Here's a recipe idea that will help you use what you have before buying more!

SAVORY BROCCOLI, CHEDDAR & BACON SCONES

These savory buttermilk scones are a "mother" or choose-your-own-adventure recipe. Mix & match leftover veggies (like spinach, roasted butternut squash or caramelized onions) & meats with herbs, green onions, & cheese to make a perfectly portable breakfast or lunch.

SERVINGS:

8

USES UP:

Veggies, meat & cheese

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup whole-wheat flour
2 Tbsp baking powder
1 1/2 tsp salt
1/2 cup unsalted butter, chilled & cut into cubes
1/2 cup chopped cooked broccoli

1/4 cup crumbled cooked bacon
1 green onion, minced
1 Tbsp chopped fresh herbs (dill, basil, oregano etc)
1 cup grated cheddar (gouda, blue cheese, feta etc)
1/3-1/2 cup half & half or buttermilk & more for brushing
poppy seeds or sesame seeds for sprinkling

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 350°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
 - In a food processor, combine the all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour, baking powder, salt & butter. Pulse until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, then transfer to a bowl.
 - Stir broccoli & bacon into mixture along with green onion, herbs, & cheese. Add enough cream to make a soft dough (depending on moisture of veggies) & stir with a fork until it comes together - the less it's handled, the flakier the scones)
 - Dump dough onto a floured surface & knead gently, then pat lightly into a rectangle 1 1/2" to 2" thick. Cut into 4" squares, & again crosswise into triangles. Set on prepared baking sheet. Brush tops lightly with extra cream & sprinkle with seeds.
 - Bake 20 to 25 min until golden, then cool on rack. Serve warm with butter.
- Tip: Check fridge for other complementary combinations - red pepper, oregano & cheddar; spinach, dill & feta; prosciutto or Italian sausage, basil & parmesan; caramelized onion, cheddar & thyme.

CREDIT: From "The Waste Not, Want Not Cookbook" by Cinda Chavich

For those of you dedicated to the old school card file recipe box, here's the recipe in a 3"x5" format to print

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SAVETHEFOOD.COM

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FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

TROPICAL FRUITS

REFRIGERATE IT: After ripe

AT FRESHEST: Whole, 2-3 days past ripe on counter; 5-7 days in fridge

OPTIMAL STORAGE: If unripe, store whole on the counter at room temperature. Once ripe, store loose on refrigerator shelf or in low-humidity drawer. If cut, place in an airtight container. Refrigerate mangoes & papayas immediately. Pineapples will turn gold & then almost brown, but sugars do not increase or ripen further.

FREEZING: Peel & cut into chunks. Place on a baking sheet & freeze, then transfer to an airtight container.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Refrigerate if bruised or damaged. Papaya seeds can be dried & used as mild, mustardy seasoning. Green papaya & mango can be used in salads, eaten fresh, or pickled. Overripe mango can still be used in chutney.

Brown or black areas inside pineapples are caused by over chilling - cut out & enjoy the rest. Use scooped-out pineapple shell as a serving bowl for fruit salads or pineapple fried rice.

COCONUT MILK

REFRIGERATE IT: Yes, opened **AT FRESHEST:** Open, 4-6 days

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Store in covered airtight container. Do not store metal cans in the refrigerator or freezer.

FREEZING: Coconut milk can be frozen, but consistency may change. Use frozen coconut milk for smoothies or other dishes that don't rely on consistency. Freeze in zip-top freezer bags or ice-cube trays, then pack frozen cubes into a freezer bag.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Coconut milk has many beauty uses, like hair conditioner, & moisturizer when added to bath water.

COFFEE

REFRIGERATOR: No **AT FRESHEST:** Room temperature, up to 2 weeks; freezer, 1 month

OPTIMAL STORAGE: For optimum quality, purchase only 2 week supply at a time. Store in airtight glass or ceramic container in a dark, cool location. If purchased in larger quantities, freeze a portion of it.

FREEZING: Wrap weekly portions in zip-top freezer bags. Don't refreeze as changes in temperature & moisture affect quality.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Coffee beans past their prime can be put in the bottom of flower vases or in votive containers under tea lights as decoration. Place an open bowl of coffee beans in fridge to reduce unwanted odors (do not plan on using the beans to make coffee to drink after this). Rub your hands with coffee grounds to reduce lingering odors of garlic, salmon, and cilantro. Used coffee grounds can be turned into soil as fertilizer (in small amounts), or used to scour caked pans. It can also be used to dye paper: Pour hot coffee into a 9-by-13-in/23-by-33-cm glass container, and soak up to three pieces of paper at a time; allow to dry fully.

To see the interactive Food Storage Guide, go to www.savethefood.com/food-storage

QUICK TRICKS

Food tossed is money lost. Refresh still edible foods, re-purpose leftovers and reuse or "recycle" them in new ways.

FOOD COMBINATIONS

1. Make a chopped salad with small amounts of extra fruits, vegetables, nuts, cooked eggs, etc.

2. Combine leftover pasta with foods such as boiled egg slices, bite-sized chunks of cheese, chopped fresh vegetables, or cooked dry beans. Mix with your favorite vinaigrette-type dressing. Refrigerate about an hour before serving to let the flavors blend.

3. Create a colorful parfait by layering cookie crumbles, then pudding followed by fruit or berries in parfait or wine glasses. Alternate as desired. Serve soon after preparation to prevent crumbles from getting soggy.

For more ideas on how to makeover your leftovers, go to: food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf

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FOOD LOSSES**

In industrialized countries, consumers throw away 286 million tonnes of cereal products



763 billion boxes of pasta



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