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Exploring Food Waste Issues Winter 2022

# Six Things Every Business Can Do to Waste Less Food

By Dana Gunders  
September 29, 2022

With the possible exception of EPA, ReFed is the best food waste resource we've found here at ReFresh Nebraska, and Executive Director Dana Gunders is a big reason why. A national expert on the subject, she was one of the first to bring to light just how much food is lost throughout the food system.

I focused my major in college on energy efficiency. It seemed so obvious —why use resources to produce more energy when we could figure out ways to use less? It was that same question that struck me years later when I was working on a sustainable agriculture project and stumbled upon numbers showing how much food was going to waste throughout our food system. I would speak with farmers and food companies and say, "This report says approximately 40% of food is going to waste, and 25% of our water is going to grow it—could that possibly be true?" They would think for a moment and respond, "Yeah, that sounds about right." But they didn't seem to think it was a problem. I was shocked that this amount of inefficiency in our food system was simply accepted. It was like energy efficiency, but for the food sector. Except no one was talking about it, let alone doing anything.

That was 10 years ago. People are now waking up to the issue of food waste, though we are still in the early days—just as energy efficiency was back in the 1970s. The [ReFED Insights Engine](#) indicates the U.S. let a huge [35% of food go unsold or uneaten in 2019](#). That's [almost 90 billion meals' worth of food](#), roughly 2% of the U.S. GDP.

The impacts of surplus food and food waste on our climate and natural resources are enormous. In fact, if global food waste were a country, it would be [the third largest GHG emitter](#) in the world. This is due to the methane produced from food decaying in landfills; the resources it takes to grow, transport, cool, and cook food even when it is ultimately disposed of; and the conversion of native ecosystems to agriculture.

The World Resources Institute (WRI) predicts [the world will need to produce 56% more food in 2050](#), which will require the conversion of rainforests and native grasslands into farmlands unless food systems become more efficient in using the food already being produced. Cutting food loss and waste in half could reduce that demand by more than 20%, saving natural ecosystems from conversion into agricultural land and saving massive GHGs. This is a big part of why Project Drawdown ranks [reducing food waste as a top solution](#) for mitigating climate change. And [the co-benefits of this](#) would include reducing freshwater use by 13%, reducing projected biodiversity losses by up to 33%, and avoiding conversion of natural ecosystems for a land area the size of Argentina.

Fortunately, food waste is a solvable problem and things are starting to move in the right direction. In the past few years, [more than 200 food businesses have committed](#) to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 to cut food loss and waste in half by 2030. Several of them are already achieving significant reductions: General Mills has cut food loss and waste within their operations by 24% since 2020, Kroger has cut it by 19% since 2017, and foodservice company Compass has achieved a 33% decrease since 2020.

So, what can you do as a sustainability leader to cut food waste at your own company—even if you're not in the food business? Throughout your operations, your company likely manages huge amounts of food—at internal meetings, in your employee cafeterias and breakrooms, and at special events. You also may have the ability to influence what your vendors and suppliers do and what happens in the communities where you operate. Here are some easy actions to get you started:

**• Talk to Your Foodservice Vendors**  
While your foodservice vendors may have existing food waste diversion programs, they often need client support to implement necessary changes. Talk to your vendors to create joint reduction goals and open the discussion to learn where operational or contractual changes could lead to less waste, e.g., different requirements for end-of-service, offering half portions, flexibility in menus, and other steps.

**• Be Waste-Conscious When Planning Business Meetings and Events**  
Whether it's a 20-person meeting or a large, multi-day conference, we've all seen the extra food sitting uneaten at the end. Reduce this by getting pre-orders from attendees for smaller meetings and when ordering catering, order slightly less than what you expect, as most meetings include absentees or attendees who choose not to eat. For larger events, hone guest counts as the event gets closer. Ask your caterer for options to reduce buffers, for some if not all dishes. And provide to-go containers for guests or staff to take leftovers home.

**• Measure and Set Targets**  
You manage what you measure—so determine your waste, evaluate its [impact](#), and the impact of taking more action, and then develop a plan to address it. Ask your foodservice vendor to be a partner in this. And include food waste reduction as part of your company's greenhouse gas mitigation plan. Perhaps even consider adopting the international 2030 target and joining the [U.S. Food Loss and Waste 2030 Champions program](#).

**• Educate Employees**  
Households are the largest source of food waste—according to ReFed's analysis, [37% of all surplus food is generated in homes](#). Help your employees better manage their food through education and engagement programs. Studies show that consumers want to waste less food, they just don't know how.

**• Establish Food Donation Relationships**  
Establish a relationship with one or more organizations that can pick up surplus food when needed. Often local governments or your local food bank will have a list of which groups are accepting donations. And be proactive about it so that you have a rescue partner ready when it's needed—that way, good food won't be waiting around while you are struggling to determine where it can go.

**• Recycle Food Scraps**  
Despite your best efforts to prevent food from going to waste, there will always be food scraps—bones, banana peels, etc. Compost them, send them to anaerobic digestion, or better yet, find animal feed outlets.

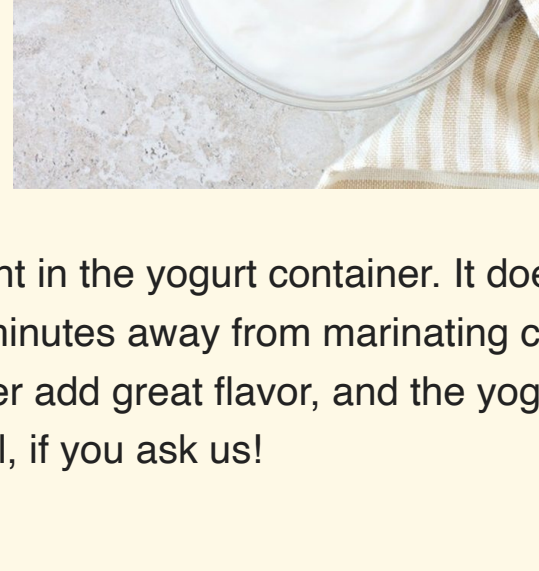
We all touch food. And we need more than the food industry to be involved if we are going to make a dent in this issue—and reap the environmental, economic, and social benefits that will come from it. That's why it's important to remember that you have the ability to make a real difference. Solutions exist to stop food waste. And you can use your leverage to get them adopted.



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!

## TANDOORI MARINADE

KICK UP CHICKEN OR LAMB WITH THIS CURRY MARINADE



Whip up this marinade, right in the yogurt container. It doesn't take a lot of prep, which means you're only minutes away from marinating chicken, lamb, or meaty fish. The curry, garlic, and ginger add great flavor, and the yogurt's acidity tenderizes the meat. That's pretty magical, if you ask us!

<p><b>USES UP</b> Plain Yogurt</p>	<p><b>MAKES</b> 1.5 Cups</p>
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<p><b>INGREDIENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cup full fat yogurt</li> <li>• 1 (1 to 2-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and sliced into coins (or minced if whisking)</li> <li>• 2 garlic cloves, peeled (and minced, if whisking)</li> <li>• 1 Tbsp curry powder</li> <li>• 1 tsp ground cumin</li> <li>• 1 tsp salt</li> <li>• 1 tsp honey</li> <li>• Juice of 1 lemon (about 1/4 cup)</li> <li>• Freshly ground black pepper</li> </ul>	<p><b>DIRECTIONS</b></p> <p>You can make this marinade right in the yogurt container.</p> <p>Add all of the other ingredients to the yogurt and whisk or puree with an immersion blender. The marinade can be used right away or covered and refrigerated for 3 to 5 days.</p> <p><b>USE THE MARINADE</b></p> <p>Arrange up to 2 pounds of meat or fish in a shallow casserole dish, and toss with the marinade. Cover and refrigerate for 15 – 60 minutes for fish and 2 – 8 hours for chicken or lamb. Broil on high 3 to 4 inches from the element until browned and cooked through (time varies, depending on the cut). Serve hot or at room temperature.</p> <p><small>CREDIT From 'Eat it Up!' by <a href="#">Sherri Brooks Vinton</a>, Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2016</small></p>
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# FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

**PANTRY STAPLES**

**QUINOA**

REFRIGERATE IT: No      AT FRESHEST: 1 year

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Airtight container in a dry, dark, cool place, or freezer.

FREEZING: Airtight container.

USE IT UP/REVERSAL: Bake uncooked quinoa into cookies for an added crunch. Leftover cooked quinoa? Make a flourless chocolate cake!

**BREAD**

REFRIGERATE IT: No      AT FRESHEST: Counter, a few days; freezer, 6 months

OPTIMAL STORAGE: If using bread within 2 days, store at room temperature in a bread box or paper bag to reduce moisture loss while allowing the crust to remain crisp. Do not keep at room temperature in a plastic bag, as this encourages mold. If using beyond 2 days, freeze individual slices, if that's how you plan to use it. Keep in the refrigerator, well wrapped, only if you plan to toast it.

FREEZING: Wrap tightly in airtight wrapping. Thaw at room temperature or put directly in the toaster or oven.

USE IT UP/REVERSAL: As long as it's not too old, staling can be reversed by toasting or reheating at about 140°F/60°C. There are myriad recipes for using stale bread—bread pudding, French toast, bread crumbs, and croutons are some of the most common. Gazpacho uses stale bread as well.

**BREAD CRUMBS**

REFRIGERATE IT: Not necessarily

AT FRESHEST: Commercial, in pantry, 1 year; fresh, in refrigerator, 1 month; fresh, in freezer, 1 year

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Airtight container in a cool, dry place.

FREEZING: Airtight container.

USE IT UP/REVERSAL: Discard if moldy. Use bread crumbs as a filler to make meatloaf, hamburgers, or veggie burgers.

**FLOUR, WHITE**

REFRIGERATE IT: Not necessary      AT FRESHEST: Pantry, 1 year; refrigerator, 2 years

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Opaque, airtight container in a cool, dry, dark place. For longer storage, place in the refrigerator (bring to room temperature before using). In all cases, store away from foods with strong odors.

FREEZING: Store in an airtight container or zip-top freezer bag. Bring to room temperature before using.

USE IT UP/REVERSAL: Use up your flour by making a pie crust or cookie dough and freeze it for up to 3 months.

Polish sponges or brass? Combine equal parts flour, salt, and white vinegar and apply the mixture with a copper to brass or copper, let dry, then rinse with warm water and buff dry with a cloth.

**FLOUR, WHOLE WHEAT**

REFRIGERATE IT: Yes, freezer recommended

AT FRESHEST: Opened, in refrigerator, 6 to 8 months; freezer, 2 years

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Opaque, airtight, moisture-proof container in the refrigerator or freezer away from foods with strong odors.

FREEZING: Store in an airtight container or zip-top freezer bag. Bring to room temperature before using.

USE IT UP/REVERSAL: Old whole-wheat flour won't make you ill, but it can go rancid. In order to tell, taste a tiny amount. If it has a strongly bitter taste, it's likely rancid. Otherwise, it should still be fine to use. Substituting half the required amount of white flour with wheat flour can make any recipe more healthful.

To download the entire Food Storage Guide, go to: [www.savethefood.com/food-storage](http://www.savethefood.com/food-storage)

## Quick Tricks! Brought To You By: Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources NEBRASKA EXTENSION

**QUICK TRICKS**

Is this Food Still Safe to Eat? Frequently Asked Questions  
Alice Henneman, MS, RDN Extension Educator

**How can you tell if food is safe after a power outage?**

Keep the freezer door closed to keep cold air inside. Don't open the door any more than necessary. A full freezer will stay at safe temperatures about 2 days; a half-full freezer about 1 day. If your freezer is not full, group packages so they form an "igloo" to protect each other. If you think the power will be out for several days, try to find some dry ice. Keep dry ice wrapped and do not touch it with your bare hands. Use cubed ice or block ice in the refrigerator.

**Even if the food is started to thaw, foods can be safely kept in the freezer.** The foods in your freezer that partially or completely thaw before power is restored may be safely refrozen if they still contain ice crystals or are 40°F for 2 hours or more. Also discard any other food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.

**Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer at all times.** This will remove the guesswork of just how cold the unit is because it will give you the exact temperature. The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is knowing how cold they are. The refrigerator temperature should be at 40°F or below; the freezer, 0°F or lower.

More detailed information, along with a chart that tells which foods may be saved and which should be thrown out, may be found in *Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency* at <http://bit.ly/2mbrjac>

For more useful reducing tips, go to: [www.food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf](http://www.food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf)

**ZERO WASTE TIP**

Left over veggies and cold cuts make for good omelette fillings

**OLIO**

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AS OF  
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