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ReFresh Nebraska

Exploring Food Waste Issues

Winter 2023

MITRE-Gallup Survey Finds U.S. Households Waste 6.2 Cups of Edible Food Every Week on Average

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The [MITRE-Gallup State of Food Waste in America](#) (SFWA) survey reveals new data and trends gathered from more than 9,000 households nationally. The 50-state survey of U.S. households includes user-reported data of daily food waste to investigate how much edible food is being tossed out and why. On average, American households are throwing away 6.2 cups of food per week, with leftover waste/spillage and over-reliance on date labels identified as two of the primary contributors to this waste.

According to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, [30% to 40%](#) of food in the United States is wasted. ReFED [estimates this waste is costing](#) residents \$310 billion as otherwise edible food fills up landfills and generates greenhouse gas emissions. When asked what motivates them to reduce food waste, Americans rank saving money as the top motivating factor. Eighty-two percent report saving money motivates them a fair amount or a great deal. Reducing environmental impacts (40%) ranks lower than the other motivators; however, the MITRE-Gallup survey reveals there is awareness of the environmental implications. Fifty-five percent of consumers believe climate change is a consequence of food waste.

"We knew about half of food waste occurs at home, but we didn't have a good measure of household food waste," said Laura Laets, Ph.D., senior principal scientist, MITRE. "MITRE developed a first-of-its-kind app to measure household food waste and launched a national study with Gallup to better understand why and how households waste food, and what would motivate them to prevent waste. Our findings are valuable to organizations creating waste-reduction initiatives as well as consumers who want to save money, maximize available food resources for benefit of disadvantaged communities, and address related environmental consequences."

THE STATE OF FOOD WASTE IN AMERICA BY THE NUMBERS:

- The average household wastes an average of 6.2 cups of food per week, or 322 cups per year, which is enough to fill 360 medium-sized take-out containers.
- 87% of households reported wasting edible food the prior week.
- Despite 81% of households citing price as the top food-related issue, only 33% are aware the average American household could save at least \$1,500 per year by eliminating food waste, and almost half (49%) underestimate potential cost savings.
- 86% of households think Americans should do more to reduce the amount of food we waste.
- Households that frequently throw away leftovers report throwing out over three times as much food as those who do so less frequently. Respondents who say they often or always dispose of food because the date on the label has passed report throwing away more than twice as much food as those who say they never or rarely throw away food past its date label.

"As the holidays approach, and people are worried about the high cost of meals, it is a good time to consider how we can all save money and reduce food waste at the same time," said [Dr. Jay Schnitzer](#), chief medical officer and corporate chief engineer, MITRE. "This research is being driven via MITRE's [Independent Research and Development Program](#), which pursues evidence-based solutions that will work in the real world."

FOUR TIPS TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE:

- Make best use of leftovers.** People who reuse leftovers waste less food. Three out of 10 Americans report frequently using leftovers as ingredients in future meals and five out of 10 report frequently eating leftovers as another meal. People who frequently throw out leftovers because no one wants to eat them (9%) estimate wasting approximately 12 cups of food each week. People who **infrequently** throw away leftovers because no one wants to eat them (38%) waste only 3.5 cups per week of edible food.
- Learn label language.** Food labels are confusing, and many people don't realize that food date labels are generally indicators of freshness, not safety. People who frequently throw away food that has passed its date label waste twice as much safe and edible food (8.9 cups per week) as those who never or rarely throw away food that has passed its date label (4 cups per week).
- Inventory your food before shopping.** Before grocery shopping, take an inventory of your food and/or make a shopping list. Think about meal preparation and portion size. After the meal, store and/or freeze leftover food to consume later. Consider composting or locating food waste drop-off stations (e.g., local farmer's market).
- Download the MITRE Food Waste Tracker app.** The app is free and will help you track your food waste. After one week it will estimate how much money you can save by lowering your amount of food waste.

"Gallup is proud to partner with MITRE to create the largest nationally representative study about food waste in the United States," said Iliana Ron-Levey, managing director, Gallup. "The first step in mitigating the negative financial and environmental impacts is understanding how we all contribute to wasted food and how we can join together to reduce waste."

MEASURING FOOD WASTE—THERE'S A FREE APP FOR THAT

MITRE researchers designed an app that consumers can use to track their own food waste. In conjunction with the MITRE-Gallup survey, more than 250 participants tested the MITRE Food Waste Tracker app, recording their daily food waste for a week. Some people estimated their waste in cups and tablespoons, while others used a digital scale for more accurate measurements. Based on their experience, MITRE has updated the app, which is available free of charge on the [Apple](#) and [Google Play](#) app stores.

About the Survey

The SFWA survey was commissioned by MITRE's Independent Research and Development Program and conducted online and by mail across the United States between June 21, 2023, and August 23, 2023. A detailed description of the survey methodology is included in the report.

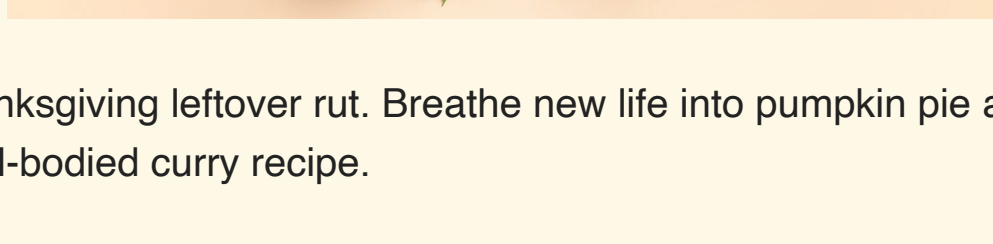
For more survey details, including food waste reduction tips, please visit The State of Food Waste in America report at <https://sites.mitre.org/household-food-waste/>

ReFresh Recipes

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!

Pumpkin Pie & Turkey Curry

November is the perfect time to try this delicious holiday ReFresh recipe



Ditch the Thanksgiving leftover rut. Breathe new life into pumpkin pie and turkey with this sweet, full-bodied curry recipe.

USES UP	MAKES
Pumpkin Pie & Turkey	10 Servings

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon black mustard seeds
- 1 large red onion, diced
- 8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 fresh red chilies, thinly sliced
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons ground turmeric
- 1/2 pumpkin pie, filling and crust separated, divided
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 bunch cilantro, stems minced, leaves torn, divided
- 2 (15-ounce) cans coconut milk
- 4 cups cooked shredded turkey
- 1 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 1 cup plain yogurt, for serving
- Steamed basmati rice and lime wedges, for serving

DIRECTIONS

In a large Dutch oven, heat oil and mustard seeds over high heat. When seeds start to pop, add red onion, garlic and chilies. Reduce heat and sauté for 5 minutes until onions are soft, about 5 minutes.

Add spices and cook for 1 minute. Add pumpkin pie filling, maple syrup and cilantro stems. Cook for another 3 minutes.

Add coconut milk and turkey. Season with salt, bring to a boil, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

Serve curry topped with yogurt, cilantro leaves and crushed pie crust. Serve alongside rice and lime wedges.

TIPS: After scraping out filling, bake pie crust at 400°F for about 10 minutes to re-crisp. Throw your chili stems into soups and stews for a bit of heat (remove before serving!) To get the onion and garlic scent off your hands, rub them with parsley.

Credit: Joel Gamoran, Sur La Table National Chef and Host of [Scraps](#)

FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

PANTRY STAPLES

SUGAR, BROWN

REFRIGERATE IT: No AT FRESHEST: Indefinitely

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Opaque, airtight, moisture-proof container in a cool location.

FREEZING: Necessary only if storing for a very long time or in a very dry area.

Place in an airtight container. Thaw for 2 to 3 hours. If ice crystals form after long freezer storage, gently stir the sugar as soon as it thaws to prevent pockets of moisture from causing damage.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Brown sugar hardens easily. To soften hardened brown sugar, place in a bowl with a slice of bread, an apple slice, or a couple of damp paper towels. Cover tightly, and let sit for about 2 days. Remove the bread or apple or towels after the sugar absorbs the moisture and softens. Stir the sugar with a fork. To soften more quickly, remove from the package and pour into an oven-safe container. Place in a 250°F/120°C oven. As soon as it's soft, measure out the amount you'll need, as it will quickly harden. Use caution, because it will be very hot

SUGAR, WHITE

REFRIGERATE IT: No AT FRESHEST: Indefinitely

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Opaque, airtight, moisture-proof container in a cool, dry location.

FREEZING: Not recommended.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: To soften granulated sugar that has caked together, preheat oven to the lowest temperature. Remove the sugar from the package and put in an oven-safe container that will hold the sugar. Place in the warm oven for approximately 15 minutes. Tap the sugar with a spoon. If it starts to fall apart, turn off the oven and leave the sugar in the oven for 1 to 2 hours to completely dry out.

WHOLE GRAINS

REFRIGERATE IT: No AT FRESHEST: 6 to 12 months

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Airtight container in a dry, dark, cool place, or freeze in an airtight container.

FREEZING: Airtight container.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Whole grains are great in kids' craft projects, such as gluing different grains onto paper to make a mosaic art piece. Make a garland of popped popcorn for your trees; the birds will love it. Make a popcorn ball to prolong the life of popcorn that you've popped.

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

QUICK TRICKS

Food tossed is money lost. One way to add new life to still edible foods is to repurpose leftovers and reuse them in new ways and new recipes. This booklet will get you started with simple tips and recipes. You'll find "recycled" can taste just as good, maybe even better than the original recipe.

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN Extension Educator

How to Freeze Milk and Cheese

Milk and cheese are very affordable sources of nutrition and make it easy to eat healthy. Milk and cheese provide essential nutrients including calcium to build strong bones and protein to support healthy muscles. A frequently asked question is whether milk and cheese can be frozen, such as when meal plans change or there is an especially good sale. Here is how to freeze them.

Freezing Milk

While milk can be frozen; it may separate, or be slightly grainy when thawed. Frozen milk works best for cooking, but you may find it is still acceptable for drinking. If you are thinking about freezing milk for drinking, you might try freezing a small amount first to see how you like it before freezing a larger batch.

Freeze milk in plastic freezer containers or special freezer-proof glass jars. Leave some extra space at the top since milk expands during freezing. If packaged in a wide-mouth container, leave 1/2-inch headspace for pints and 1-inch for quarts. If packaged in a narrow-mouth container (such as jars), leave 1 1/2-inch headspace for either pints or quarts.

Frozen milk will maintain best quality in the freezer for about 3 months; but will remain safe after that if stored at 0°F. Thaw milk in the refrigerator. Stir well before using. Plan to drink within two or three days.

Freezing Cheese

Hard or semi-hard cheese can be frozen if cut into portions no larger than 1/2 pound blocks. Wrap in plastic wrap and then put in freezer bags. After freezing, cheese may become crumbly and mealy, but it will retain its flavor. It works best for cooking. Plan to use frozen cheese within 4 to 6 months for best quality; however if stored at 0°F, it will remain safe after that time. Thaw cheese in the refrigerator. Use soon after thawing.

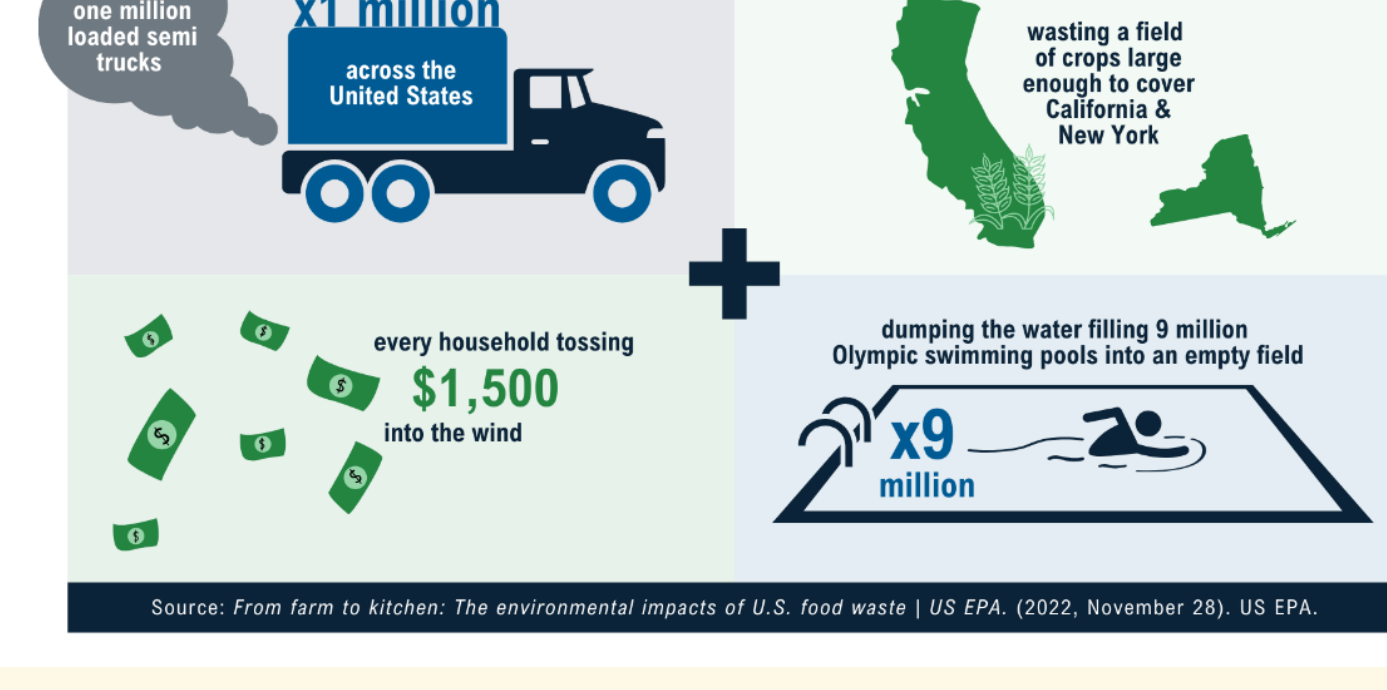
The cheeses that freeze best are:

- Brick
- Camembert
- Cheddar
- Edam
- Mozzarella
- Muenster
- Parmesan
- Provolone
- Romano
- Swiss

Blue cheeses are more prone to becoming crumbly but they will still taste good. Cream cheese and cottage cheese do not freeze well.

For more waste reducing tips, go to:

www.food.usl.edu/food-waste-reduction-tips/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf



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