

What do Americans Think about Wasted Food?

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Americans wasted \$162 billion worth of food in 2010

In the United States, 30 – 40% of the post-harvest food supply goes to waste—and that's only the waste at the consumer level. Long before food finds itself in refrigerators or on plates, there are also wasteful practices at processing plants, retail outlets, and restaurants. In 2010, food lost along the chain from harvest to consumer cost \$161.6 billion. What if we could put that \$162 billion back into circulation? We might see improved nutrition and improved food security, as well as a reduction in environmental degradation.

This was the first national consumer survey focused on wasted food. The researchers wished to understand U.S. consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors related to wasted food, hoping that a better understanding will inform efforts to address the issue. Prevention efforts in the U.S. are still being developed, but there is hope for improvement: the U.K. achieved a 21% reduction in avoidable consumer food waste in five years following a range of activities supported by research. With the information gained from this survey, perhaps the U.S. could achieve a similar positive outcome.



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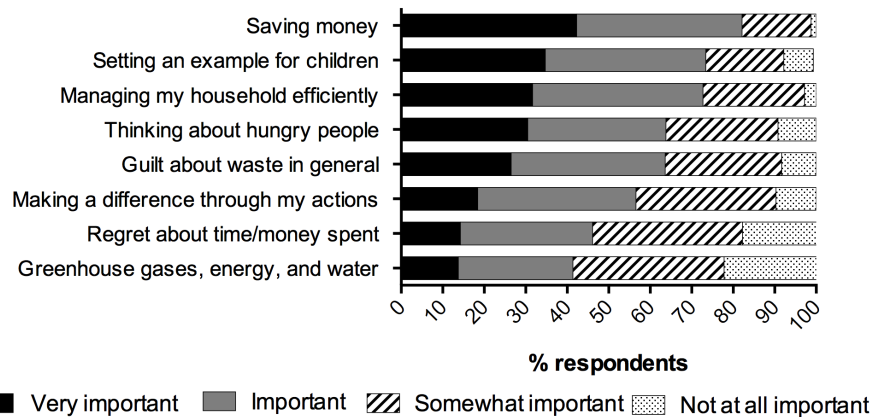
Key Findings

- Which foods do respondents say they waste the most? Fruits and vegetables. After that they report wasting homemade meals, bread, meat, milk, and packaged foods.
- The most commonly reported reasons for discarding food were concern about foodborne illness and desire to eat only the freshest food.
- Among people who reported composting, 41% indicated that because they compost, discarding food does not bother them.
- 23% of respondents reported being very interested in taking more action to discard less food and 65% reported a moderate interest.
- 73% reported that they discard less food than the average American household
- Based on what is known about wasted food in the U.S., it is clear that respondents as a group are substantially underreporting their waste levels.

Who We Are

Based within the Bloomberg School of Public Health, The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) is an academic center that conducts and promotes research and communicates information about the complex inter-relationships among food production, diet, environment and human health.

Motivations to reduce food discards



Study Summary

The survey was administered online from April 16 – 20, 2014, to a nationally representative sample of 1,998 adults. The response rate was 51%, leaving a sample size of 1,010 respondents.

We performed a survey of U.S. consumer awareness, attitudes and behaviors related to wasted food to provide baseline data and track change. Many questions were copied from other surveys to enable comparison.

Strategies for Action

- The food industry could make low-cost changes that appeal to consumers: smaller packages, donating food, offering containers for leftovers, smaller portions, resealable packages and making food to order.
- Food waste prevention strategies might have more resonance if they focused on budget, rather than environmental concerns.
- A well-communicated expiration date label system to reduce consumer confusion about when to discard food.
- Expand the acceptability of still-good produce and other foods that are older and/or blemished/damaged, and those nearing their expiration dates. Such items can be sold at a discount.

Full Title:

Wasted Food: U.S. Consumers' Reported Awareness, Attitudes, and Behaviors

Abstract available at:

<http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127881>