

TOGETHER WE CAN REDUCE FOOD WASTE

By Clara Wicoff



With Earth Day coming up, it's the perfect time to work on reducing your food waste! Did you know that 30 to 40% of edible food in the United States currently goes to waste? Or that the average family of four loses \$1,500 each year on uneaten food? When we throw food away, we are throwing away the money we spent on those items as well as wasting the water, energy, and labor used to produce that food. As consumers, there are many steps we can take to reduce our food waste!



According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the most preferred method of reducing food waste is to reduce the volume of surplus food generated in the first place. To reduce the amount of surplus food you generate, you can take several steps. First, try meal planning and strategic grocery shopping. Make a meal plan and then shop your refrigerator first before making your shopping list. Once you have your shopping list, stick to it. Shopping from a list and eating before you shop helps curb impulse shopping that can contribute to additional food waste. After coming home from the grocery store, employ proper

food storage techniques to prevent food from spoiling more quickly. An essential step is to use a thermometer in the refrigerator and the freezer to keep food fresh and safe. You should maintain your refrigerator at 40°F or less, and your freezer at 0°F or less. If you have questions about how to properly store specific food products, the USDA FoodKeeper app is an excellent resource that provides guidance on the safe handling, preparation, and storage of food.

Another important step is understanding food product date labels. The dates listed on food products can be very confusing for consumers and can lead to unnecessary food waste. “Best by” or “use by” dates are not safety dates. They represent the manufacturer’s recommendation for best flavor and quality. With the exception of infant formula, if the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. However, if you are not sure whether an item is safe to consume, it is best to throw it out or compost it. When in doubt, throw it out!

By taking these simple steps, we can all reduce food waste! For more information, please contact me at clarawicoff@ksu.edu or 620-365-2242.