

FACT SHEET

NRDC: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO REDUCING FOOD WASTE






Up to 40 percent of all food in the United States is wasted. Producing food that we don't consume also swallows up roughly 20 percent of America's cropland, fertilizers, and agricultural water—and generates greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 37 million passenger vehicles each year. Yet, 41 million Americans lack consistent access to adequate and nutritious food.



By combining thought leadership, research, advocacy at the national level with action on-the-ground at the city level, NRDC has been a driving force for food waste reduction in the United States since 2012. In fact, NRDC kindled a movement first by shining a spotlight on this environmental tragedy and then by (1) designing a set of solutions, (2) advocating for innovative adoption of better business practices, and, ultimately, (3) aiming to define a new norm with an efficient food system absent of unnecessary waste.

Food waste has *serious resource impacts*



-  **21%** OF U.S. WATER USE
-  **19%** OF CROPLAND
-  **37M** CARS-WORTH OF GHGs
-  **18%** OF FERTILIZER
-  **22%** LANDFILL CONTENT

SPEARHEADING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND RESEARCH

In 2012, NRDC's work on sustainable agriculture led us to groundbreaking estimates of how much food goes to waste across the globe, but especially in the United States. With this discovery, we published *Wasted: How American is Losing Up to 40 Percent of its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill*. This catalytic report (and a second edition produced in 2017) were cited in just about every major US news outlet helping start a national dialogue about food waste and what can be done about it. *Wasted* was a first-of-its-kind effort to define, explain, and challenge the problem of food waste in the United States.



NRDC's analysis helped catapult the issue into the public consciousness and outlined the path toward a more efficient food system. Now, NRDC's research and advocacy spans the full set of challenges: why food goes to waste, measurement of food waste generated by homes and businesses, city-scale potential for increased food rescue, and in-depth, system-wide recommendations.

ENGAGING CONSUMERS AND RAISING AWARENESS IN AMERICAN KITCHENS EVERYWHERE

In the United States, consumers are collectively responsible for more than 40 percent of the food going to waste, which is more than grocery stores, restaurants, or any other business sector. Changing our collective attitude and behaviors at home will be key to reducing wasted food. NRDC's Save the Food campaign, developed in partnership with the Ad Council, is a major public education initiative aimed at combatting food waste from its largest source: consumers. The campaign encourages consumers to reduce the amount of food they trash in their homes, thereby saving the water, energy, money, and other resources that are lost whenever food is wasted. The campaign builds awareness of the implications of food waste and to start empowering consumers with tools to cut household food waste.

HELPING CITIES LEARN, IMPROVE AND SHARE BEST PRACTICES

NRDC is continually working to understand not only how to implement solutions but also how to measure progress. As part of our Food Matters work, NRDC developed and tested novel methodologies to estimate both how much food goes to waste and how much currently discarded food could be rescued to assist people in need at the municipal level. In addition to publishing our original research, we developed tools for other cities to easily replicate these assessments. This has helped cities overcome a critical barrier in trying to curb food waste—insufficient data on what, where, and why food is wasted and how surplus food could be redirected to address community needs.

Now, NRDC's Food Matters initiative is catalyzing action by partnering with cities to help them prioritize, fund, and implement high-impact food waste policies and programs at the municipal level. Addressing food waste helps cities stabilize municipal waste management costs and meet both climate and sustainability goals. Expanding food rescue enables cities to address gaps in the nutritional needs of communities.

More than a dozen cities are now using our methodologies and other tools developed through the Food Matters program. NRDC also provides the technical assistance to cities needed to translate that analysis into high impact, cost effective initiatives. By testing those strategies on the ground, and sharing the learnings with other communities, Food Matters is creating replicable models to prevent food from being wasted, steer surplus food to food-insecure populations, and recycle food scraps.

ENCOURAGING SOUND ACTION ACROSS ALL SECTORS AND ALL STATES

NRDC inserted food waste into the agenda of policymakers, cities, and food businesses through partnerships, policy and, when needed, advocacy. In the autumn of 2015, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced federal targets to cut food waste in the United States by 50 percent by 2030. After announcing this goal, the USDA and the EPA launched 2030 Champions, a group of businesses and organizations that made a public commitment to reduce food loss and waste in their operations. Also, legislative measures multiplied at the federal, state, and city level to address food waste in recent years, and the 2018 Farm Bill made major strides on food waste for the first time ever.

We also recognize that industry leadership is critical for reducing food waste and codifying sustainable business practices. As a result, NRDC is exploring how to lead businesses to integrate innovation into operations, measure and track meaningful and transparent progress.

INTRODUCING FOOD WASTE SOLUTIONS TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

NRDC is well-positioned to continue to lead the food waste movement. The suite of solutions NRDC developed address underlying issues causing food waste, are well-documented, and many come with a well-honed business case. Ultimately, a holistic approach to reducing food waste will require standardized commitments and action, paired with tracking and reporting mechanisms, across the policy and industry landscape. With almost 50 years' experience scaling environmental movements using science, law, and advocacy, NRDC is poised to propel the food waste movement to the next stage: one that will be marked by verifiable measurement, expanded policy and legislation, and markets that promote continued innovation.