



Food Waste and Hunger in the United States Key Facts and a List of Resources

Background of Organized Efforts

The first food bank was founded in 1967 in Phoenix, Arizona with a mission to acquire surplus wholesome food for distribution to hungry people. The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank was founded in 1973, and other food banks and organizations have started throughout the United States to address and link the problems of food waste and hunger. The food bank movement has expanded to countries throughout the world during the past 15 years.

The federal government's efforts to link these two problems started in response to the Great Depression of the 1930's although the focus at that time was less on food waste and more on food distribution programs. After the end of World War II, presidential administrations and Congress have funded and launched programs and initiatives that have focused on food, international trade, food insecurity, the environment and related areas with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) typically serving as the primary federal administrative agency.

Food Waste

In 2014, the USDA published *The Estimated Amount, Value, and Calories of Post-Harvest Food Losses at the Retail and Consumer Levels of the United States* finding that:

“In the United States, 31 percent—or 133 billion pounds—of the 430 billion pounds of the available food supply at the retail and consumer levels in 2010 went uneaten. Retail-level losses represented 10 percent (43 billion pounds) and consumer-level losses 21 percent (90 billion pounds) of the available food supply. (Losses on the farm and between the farm and retailer were not estimated due to data limitations for some of the food groups.)”

The estimated total value of food loss at the retail and consumer levels in the United States was \$161.6 billion in 2010. The top three food groups in terms of share of total value of food loss were meat, poultry, and fish (30 percent, \$48 billion); vegetables (19 percent, \$30 billion); and dairy products (17 percent, \$27 billion). The total amount of food loss represents 387 billion calories (technically, we mean Calorie or kcal hereafter) of food not available for human consumption per day in 2010, or 1,249 out of 3,796 calories available per American per day. Recovery costs, food safety considerations, and other factors would reduce the amount of food that could actually be recovered for human consumption.”

To access the report, go to <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1282296/eib121.pdf>

In 2012, the Natural Resources Defense Council published *Wasted: How America is Losing Up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill* focusing on associated problems of food waste:

“Getting food to our tables eats up 10 percent of the total U.S. energy budget, uses 50 percent of U.S. land, and swallows 80 percent of freshwater consumed in the United States. Yet, 40 percent of food in the United States today goes uneaten. That is more than 20 pounds of food per person every month. Not only does this mean that Americans are throwing out the equivalent of \$165 billion each year, but also 25 percent of all freshwater and huge amounts of unnecessary chemicals, energy, and land. Moreover, almost all of that uneaten food ends up rotting in landfills where organic matter accounts for 16 percent of U.S. methane emissions. Nutrition is also lost in the mix—food saved by reducing losses by just 15 percent could feed more than 25 million Americans every year at a time when one in six Americans lack a secure supply of food to their tables.”

To access the report, go to <http://www.nrdc.org/food/files/wasted-food-IP.pdf>

Food Insecurity & Hunger

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) publishes an annual report tracking the number of households that experience food insecurity titled *Household Food Security in the United States in 2015*. The findings from September 2016 report include:

The estimated percentage of U.S. households that were food insecure remained essentially unchanged from 2013 to 2014; however, food insecurity was down from a high of 14.9 percent in 2011. The percentage of households with food insecurity in the severe range—described as very low food security—was unchanged:

- In 2015, 87.3 percent of U.S. households were food secure throughout the year. The remaining 12.7 percent (15.8 million households) were food insecure, a decrease from the previous year. Food-insecure households (those with low and very low food security) had difficulty at some time during the year providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources.
- In 2015, 5.0 percent of U.S. households (6.3 million households) had very low food security, a decrease from 5.6 percent in 2014. In this more severe range of food insecurity, the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted at times during the year due to limited resources.”

To access the report, go to:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/79761/err-215.pdf?v=42636>

In 2015, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health released *Rising Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County* finding that more than a half million households reported not being able to afford sufficient food in the previous year of the 2011 survey. The report outlines that food insecurity is a problem in each of the eight Service Planning Areas of Los Angeles County.

To access the report, go to:

http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/reports/LAHealthBrief2011/FoodInsecurity/Food_Insecurity_2015Fs.pdf

In 2015, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank released *#HungerFacts*, a report based on surveys of agencies and people seeking food assistance. To access the report, go to:

<https://www.lafoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/HungerFacts-Report.pdf>

Food Safety

Accessing, transporting and handling food safely is a critical consideration to ensure that good intentions don't lead to health problems for people receiving donated food from charitable organizations. The USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have worked to develop standards and guidelines for food recovery efforts since the 1990's. The Conference for Food Protection's Food Recovery Committee updated the *Comprehensive Guidelines for Food Recovery Programs* in 2007. To access the report, go to:

<http://www.foodprotect.org/media/guide/food-recovery-final2007.pdf>

In recent years, the USDA, FDA and Congress have been reviewing various food safety provisions in order to protect consumers from a variety of food borne illnesses. In 2015, the FDA released updated Food for Human Consumption regulations (see

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfCFR/CFRSearch.cfm?CFRPart=110&showFR=1>). The USDA's resources for food safety can be accessed at <https://fsrio.nal.usda.gov/faq-page/regulations-standards-and-guidelines>

This report also details the importance of the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act enacted in 1996 to limit the liability of donors making food donations (see <http://www.feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>)

Other Considerations

The State of California has enacted AB1826 which will also drive significant change in both the short and long term. "In October of 2014 Governor Brown signed [AB 1826 Chesbro \(Chapter 727, Statutes of 2014\)](#), requiring businesses to recycle their organic waste on and after April 1, 2016, depending on the amount of waste they generate per week. This law also requires that on and after January 1, 2016, local jurisdictions across the state implement an organic waste recycling program to divert organic waste generated by businesses, including multifamily residential dwellings that consist of five or more units (please note, however, that multifamily dwellings are not required to have a food waste diversion program). Organic waste (also referred to as organics throughout this resource) means food waste, green waste, landscape and pruning waste, nonhazardous wood waste, and food-soiled paper waste that is mixed in with food waste." See <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/recycle/commercial/organics/>

When developing programs to find the best use for surplus food products, it is important to build in options for reusing food for other purposes (e.g., composting, animal feed, energy conversion and other uses). The current environment provides an opportune time to develop a full menu of options for utilizing surplus food.