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## Your Food Waste Has Global Impact

Gemma Alexander September 29, 2020



You probably feel a little guilty about tossing leftovers. Throwing out uneaten food is a waste of the

money you spent to buy it and the resources it took to grow and prepare it. But did you know that wasted food is so harmful that the United Nations has a campaign against it?

Last year, the UN designated September 29 as the [International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste Reduction](https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day) (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day>). The name is a mouthful, but dealing with food waste is fundamental to the UN's sustainability goal "[Responsible Consumption and Production](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal12.html) (<http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal12.html>).” This goal directly supports two others: “Zero Hunger” and “Climate Action.”

Food loss is one of the [root causes](https://www.wfpusa.org/wfps-work/problems-of-hunger/) (<https://www.wfpusa.org/wfps-work/problems-of-hunger/>) of hunger worldwide and [accounts for 6%](https://ourworldindata.org/food-waste-emissions) (<https://ourworldindata.org/food-waste-emissions>) of global greenhouse gas emissions.

## Pandemic Problem

Although the UN had already identified food loss and waste as an issue to address in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has added [new urgency](https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day) (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day>) to the problem.

At a time when food banks in the developed world are facing unprecedented demand, physical distancing measures are combining with supply chain disruptions to create significantly more food loss and waste, especially of healthy perishable produce. Supermarkets (key donors to food banks) are struggling to keep their shelves stocked due to panic buying and stockpiling.

Yet, much of the food purchased by households will end up being discarded, not only because they've purchased more than they can use, but also through improper storage and misunderstanding food labels.

## Food Loss vs. Food Waste

Technically [food loss and food waste](https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day/background) (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day/background>) are different. Food loss includes food that rots in the field unharvested, or food that doesn't survive storage and transit. Food waste occurs at or after the point of retail. It's when grocery stores throw out food that is reaching the end of its shelf life, or when food rots in the refrigerator.

In industrialized countries, 40% of the problem is food waste at the retail or consumer level. Although consumers can only indirectly influence food loss, we can do a lot about food waste. [Americans waste](https://earth911.com/home-garden/infographic-us-food-waste/) (<https://earth911.com/home-garden/infographic-us-food-waste/>) about 400 pounds of food

per capita each year.

## What You Can Do

First of all, learn what to do [instead of stockpiling](https://earth911.com/inspire/avoid-stockpiling-food-during-coronavirus/) during the pandemic. Learn to decipher [confusing food date labels](https://earth911.com/food/report-finds-misleading-food-date-labels-lead-to-waste/) and [store food properly](https://earth911.com/home-garden/keep-food-produce-fresh-longer/) to maintain freshness. See just how much [food you waste](https://earth911.com/food/stop-wasting-food/), and then look to the less wasteful [food cultures of other countries](https://earth911.com/inspire/3-countries-food-waste-strategies-what-can-they-teach-us/) for ways to make the most of your food.

Don't wait until the end of the pandemic to start building [less wasteful habits](https://earth911.com/home-garden/eliminate-food-waste-at-home/). Getting creative with [leftovers](https://earth911.com/?s=leftovers) and [food scraps](https://earth911.com/home-garden/grow-food-from-scrap/) helps you minimize your need to shop. [Precycling](https://earth911.com/inspire/precycling-helps-shoppers-save/), which involves planning the types and [amount](https://earth911.com/living-well-being/events-entertainment/dinner-party-calculator/) of food you buy, will minimize your leftovers in the first place.

Cutting down on your own food waste is [worth the effort](https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-food-waste-day/background). Not only will you save a lot of money on your grocery bill – about [\\$660 on average](https://earth911.com/home-garden/infographic-us-food-waste/), you will make the world a better place. Saving one-fourth of the food currently lost or wasted could feed 870 million hungry people worldwide and restore [700 billion dollars'](http://www.fao.org/zhc/detail-events/en/c/243143/) worth of annual [ecosystem services](https://earth911.com/business-policy/ecosystem-services-natures-gifts-that-help-us-thrive/) such as restored wetlands and biodiversity.

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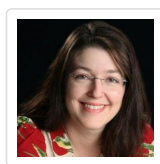
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**Gemma Alexander** (<https://earth911.com/author/galexander/>)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing here (<https://gemmadeealexander.com/>).


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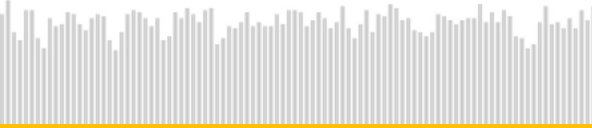
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