

What's this lesson all about?

Food waste is a major problem in the U.S.— and what's worse, is that it's a preventable problem. Given that we produce so much food, why is it that people still go hungry? This lesson will explore what food waste is, why it happens, how it affects us all, and the little ways we can prevent food waste at home.

## LET'S START WITH VOCAB

**Waste:** Eliminated or discarded as no longer useful.

**Waste Stream:** The lifecycle of the products we produce. There are multiple waste streams which include the lifecycles of trash, recycling, and food.

**Landfill:** A place where trash is dug into the ground and covered with soil.

**Greenhouse Gases:** Refers to the heat-trapping gases that keep our planet warm enough to sustain life.

- These gases include water vapor, carbon dioxide, and methane.
- Without greenhouse gases, the sun's rays would pass through and the planet would be too cold to sustain the life that we know.
- However, what we are experiencing now is too much of a good thing, causing rapid climate change.



## HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Waste happens at every level of the food system:

**On the farm:** Food may be discarded due to disease, insects, birds, rabbits, or even cross-contamination from dairy & meat farms. Some food never leaves the farm simply because it may not meet the consumers expectation of "perfect." Uniquely shaped fruits and veg almost never make it to the grocery store.

**Distribution:** Malfunctioning refrigeration in shipment containers causes food to go bad.

**In-Store:** Waste happens when food is over-ordered and expires, or when equipment malfunctions. As consumers, we like to see stores fill to the brim with fresh produce and other products. It's aesthetically pleasing and encourages buying, but also contributes heavily to the waste that comes from over-ordering.

**At home:** Sometimes we buy too much, things go bad in the fridge, or leftovers go uneaten.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

It is estimated that 31 – 40% of our food goes uneaten— which means that 31 – 40% of the resources we use to grow that food also get wasted.

### **Wholesome food that is currently wasted could help feed families in need**

- Safe and wholesome food that is currently thrown away could help feed hungry people and reduce food insecurity today.

### **Reducing food waste can save or make money**

- When food is wasted, so too is the land, water, labor, energy and other inputs that are used in producing, processing, transporting, preparing, storing, and disposing of the discarded food.

### **Greenhouse gases generated from food rotting in landfills could be reduced to help mitigate climate change**

- According the [U.S Environmental Protection Agency](#), in the United States, food is the single largest category of material placed in municipal landfills, where it emits methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. Municipal solid waste landfills are the third-largest source of human-related methane emissions in the United States, accounting for approximately 14.1 percent of these emissions in 2017.

Resource: [USDA](#)

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Food waste is a systemic issue, but we can *slow and manage* waste at home. This begins with preventing it from happening; buy only what we know we can use.

- Once the food is home, [proper storage is essential](#).
- Leftovers? Eat them! *Or* gift them to a friend.
- Cooking ideas with leftovers and scraps:
  - Bone, chicken, or vegetable broth/stock
  - Curry, soup, or chili are great ways to use up a bunch of veggies that may go bad soon.
  - Nachos, piled high with whatever's in the fridge.
- Plate waste: only put on your plate what you want to eat.

## STILL CURIOUS?

WATCH: Below are some interesting videos to watch. Take a deeper look at the impact food waste has on climate change, go dumpster diving for fresh food, and learn about how and why the low-waste movement has roots in black and indigenous cultures.

- [How Food Waste Contributes to Climate Change](#)
- [Dumpster Diving with Yara](#)
- [Being Black and Zero-Waste-ish](#)

READ: Check out some of the resources used to create this lesson plan.

- [Why Wasted Food Matters](#)
- [Stopping Food Waste in Its Tracks](#)
- [More on Animal Agriculture's Impact on Climate Change](#)

## LET'S EXPERIMENT!

Sweet potatoes aren't started by seed like most other vegetables, they're started from slips. Slips are shoots that are grown from a mature sweet potato. Leftover sweet potato starting to sprout in your cupboard? You can make your own slip with a glass of water and plant it. [Check out this how-to video](#) for more.

