About 40 percent of the United States food supply (1,500 calories/person/day) goes uneaten. Discarded food in homes and foodservice accounts for 60 percent of this total food loss and is mostly avoidable. The remaining portion is lost or wasted during food production.

This amount of food waste is among the highest globally. Preventing food waste saves money and resources. Resources used to produce uneaten food include: 30 percent of fertilizer, 31 percent of cropland, 25 percent of total fresh water consumption and 2 percent of total energy consumption.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates food wastes at almost 14 percent of the total municipal solid wastes in the United States in 2010, with less than 3 percent recovered and recycled. Food in landfills decomposes to produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Feeding the world will become more difficult in the future as 9 billion people are expected on the planet by 2050, compared to a world population of around 7 billion people in 2015. Developing habits to save more of the food we already have will put less strain on the resources associated with producing and buying food and aid in reducing the creation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Here are 14 ways consumers can help reduce the amount of food wasted.

- **Shop the refrigerator before going to the store.** Use food at home before buying more. Designate one meal weekly as a “use-it-up” meal.
- **Move older food products to the front** of the fridge/cupboard/freezer and just-purchased ones to the back. This makes it more likely foods will be consumed before they go bad.
- **Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below** to prolong the life of foods. Foods frozen at 0°F or lower will remain safe indefinitely but the quality will go down over time.
- **Freeze or can surplus fresh produce** using safe, up-to-date food preservation methods. Visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation website (http://nchfp.uga.edu) for freezing and canning instructions.
- **Take restaurant leftovers home and refrigerate within two hours of being served.** Eat within three to four days or freeze. Ask for a take home container at the beginning of the meal if portions look especially large. Remove take home food from your plate at the beginning of the meal so leftovers are as appetizing as the original meal … rather than the picked-over remains. Or, choose a smaller size and/or split a dish with a dining companion.
- **Dish up reasonable amounts of food at a buffet and go back for more if still hungry.**
- **Compost food scraps** for use in the garden. Visit Nebraska Extension for direction on creating compost for your garden (www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendit/g2222.pdf).
- **Check product dates on foods.** The United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS) defines them as:
  - A “Sell-By” date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
  - A “Best if Used By (or Before)” date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
  - A “Use-By” date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the

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Buy misshapen fruits and vegetables at farmers’ markets and elsewhere. They taste just as good and are just as nutritious as those with a ‘perfect’ shape, but are more likely to get thrown away.

Rather than buy a food for use in only one recipe, check if there might be a suitable substitute already in the home. The Cook’s Thesaurus website (http://foodssubs.com) gives thousands of ingredient substitutions.

Check the garbage can. If the same foods are constantly being tossed: Eat them sooner, buy less of them, incorporate them into more recipes or freeze them. For more information on recommended storage period for pantry, refrigerator and freezer, check this guide with storage charts from Nebraska Extension (www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/ec446.pdf)

Donate safe, nutritious food to food banks, food pantries and food rescue programs.

If you have several foods that might go to waste at the same time, try adding them to such adaptable recipes as salads, soups, pasta and casseroles.

References:
• USDA/FSIS. “Food Product Dating.” Retrieved 2/22/2015 from http://1.usa.gov/1LrDepJ

Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended of those not mentioned and no endorsement by Nebraska Extension is implied for those mentioned.