

Reduce Food Waste @ Home

Food for Thought

Food waste leads to the release of extra greenhouse gases and missed opportunities to provide for those experiencing food insecurity. Uneaten food represents a waste of resources, including agricultural land, water, fertilizer, energy, and transportation.

- Food waste, which is the most common category of waste to landfills and incinerators, accounts for 24% of landfilled and 22% of combusted municipal solid waste in the U.S. (EPA, *From Farm to Kitchen: The Environmental Impacts of U.S. Food Waste, 2021*. <https://www.epa.gov/land-research/farm-kitchen-environmental-impacts-us-food-waste>)
- Marylanders generated 1.06 million tons of food scraps in 2021. (Maryland Dept. of the Environment (MDE). <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/RecyclingandOperationsprogram/Pages/Solid-Waste-Management---Organics-Recycling-and-Waste-Diversion---Food-Residuals.aspx>).



● Organic matter (ex. food waste and grass clippings) in landfills releases methane. Municipal solid waste landfills are the 3rd-largest human-related source of methane emissions in the U.S., accounting for more than 14% of those emissions in 2021. (EPA, *Basic Information About Landfill Gas*. <https://www.epa.gov/lmop/basic-information-about-landfill-gas>)

- In Maryland, landfills accounted for 37% of methane emissions in 2021, which is the leading source. (*Environmental Integrity Project*. https://environmentalintegrity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/MD-Landfill-Methane-Report-6.9.2021-unembargoed_with-Attachments.pdf)
- Roughly 96% of wasted food from households ended up in landfills, incinerators, or down the drain in 2019. (EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home>)
- Americans waste 92 billion pounds of food annually, throwing away more than \$473 billion worth of food. (*Feeding America*. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste>)
- Each year, the average American family of 4 loses \$1,500 to uneaten food. (US Dept. of Agriculture. <https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/consumers#:~:text=Each%20year%2C%20the%20average%20American,makes%20nutritious%20diets%20more%20affordable>)



Tips for Reducing Food Waste at Home

Many foods can be safely used beyond the date stamped on the packaging. Understand food labeling. Check out USDA "Food Product Dating."

(<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>)

Try using an app that allows you to remember, manage, and track your food, including those close to the expiration date. Visit your app store to check available apps, such as *Best Before*.

(<https://www.peytuapp.com/best-before-food-tracker/>)

Check out apps like *SuperCook* to find zero-waste recipes and online databases that allow you to enter the ingredients you have on hand to find recipes that match.

<https://www.supercook.com/#/desktop>

Prepare a menu before grocery shopping, then create a shopping list. Only buy what you can realistically use.

Designate a "leftover night," ideally a day or 2 before trash pickup.

Organize your fridge to keep track of what you have.

Purchase imperfect produce or upcycled products, such as "baby" carrots.

- ✓ Keep leftovers in the front.
- ✓ Date the containers
- ✓ First in, first out!

Chop veggies right away. They are more likely to get used if ready to eat.

Vacuum seal and freeze meat that you won't use right away. Freeze fruit before it goes bad.

Excess edible food may also be used for animal feed on farms or in pet food.

Compost food scraps and unwanted food for later use as fertilizer.

(<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home>)

Why should I care?

- Food scraps decomposing in a landfill generate greenhouse gases, such as methane, which is responsible for 30% of global rise in temperatures. (iea.org)
- Food scraps take up a large amount of landfill space, resulting in landfills filling and closing at a faster pace.
- If burned in an incinerator, gases, such as carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide, contribute to increased air pollution.
- Much of the food discarded into the waste stream is perfectly fine and edible.
- Composting food scraps and unused food not only prevents that material from going into the landfill/incinerator, but it also helps build healthy soil, reducing the need for fertilizers. Check out EPA's [Composting at Home](#) site.
- The number of Marylanders experiencing food insecurity notably increased since the Covid pandemic. The Maryland Food Bank reports that 1 in 3 Maryland households are food insecure, with the majority of those households including children. Food pantries in Carroll County provide hundreds of families with food each month.

Environmental Impacts of U.S. Food Waste: EPA

What resources go into a year of food loss and waste in the U.S.?
*excluding impacts of waste management, such as landfill methane emissions

 Greenhouse gas emissions of more than 42 coal-fired power plants	Enough water and energy to supply more than 50 million homes
 The amount of fertilizer used in the U.S. to grow all plant-based foods for U.S. human consumption	An area of agricultural land equal to California and New York

Learn more: www.epa.gov/land-research/farm-kitchen-environmental-impacts-us-food-waste

Food Recovery

- There are organizations that “rescue” food from restaurants and grocery stores and share it with those in need. For a list of organizations that assist with donations of food or provide outlets for donated foods, check out MDE’s “[Food Recovery and Donation](#)” list (scroll down).
- According to [Maryland law \(COMAR 26.04.13.03\)](#), any person, business, or cafeteria that produces more than 1 tons of food residuals in a given week or is within 30 miles of a composting or digestion facility must ensure organic waste is separated and diverted from landfills. This equates to 2 64-gallon trash totes per day. ([MDE - Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals](#))

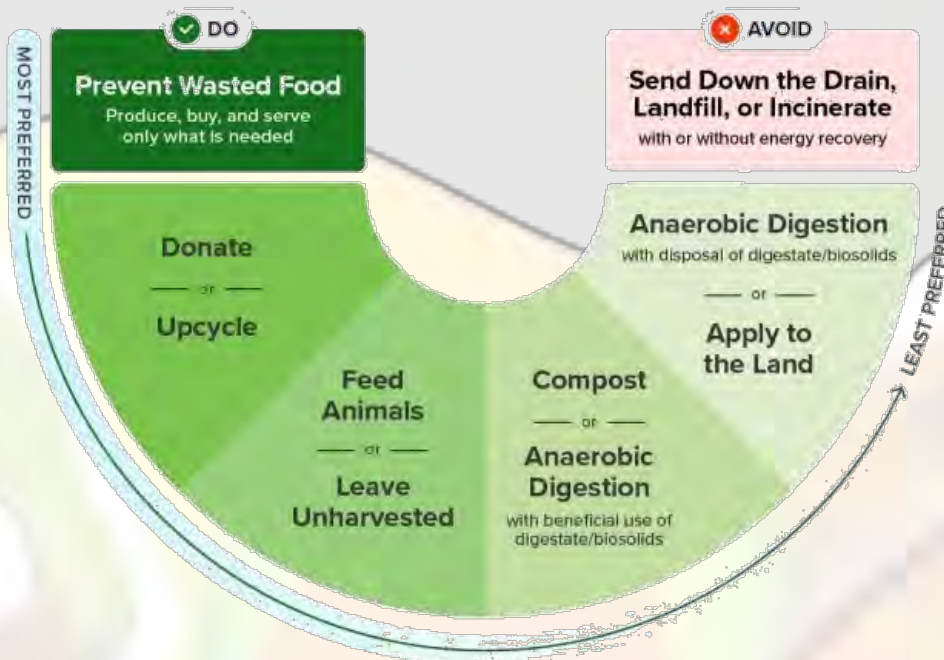
- Westminster Rescue Mission’s [Free Food Resources](#) guide lists many of the food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens in the county that accept donated food items and provide for those in need. (<http://bit.ly/ccfreefood>)
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) offers a [Food Donation Guide](#) that directs how surplus edible, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods can be made available for all people.

Maryland Food Recovery Hierarchy



Wasted Food Scale

How to reduce the environmental impacts of wasted food



The EPA developed a new Wasted Food Scale based on the findings of its 2023 report *From Field to Bin: The Environmental Impacts on U.S. Food Waste Management Pathways*. The report assesses 11 common pathways for managing food waste based on their environmental impacts. The “drain” scale prioritizes avoiding food waste and shows landfilling and incineration as a last option.

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/wasted-food-scale>

Online Resources

EPA. “From Farm to Kitchen: The Environmental Impacts of U.S. Food Waste:”

<https://www.epa.gov/land-research/farm-kitchen-environmental-impacts-us-food-waste>

EPA. “Preventing Food Waste at Home:”

<https://www.epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home#:~:text=Look%20in%20your%20refrigerator%2C%20freezer,things%20needed%20for%20those%20meals>

EPA. “Preventing Wasted Food through Source Reduction:”

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/prevent-wasted-food-through-source-reduction>

EPA. “Sustainable Food Management:”

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food>

USDA. “Food Waste FAQs:”

<https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/faqs>

MDE. “Food Scraps Management:”

<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/land/recyclingandoperationsprogram/pages/foodscraps.aspx>

Feeding America:

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/reduce-food-waste>

Feeding America. “Andrew Zimmern’s top 3 easy ways to reduce food waste at home:”

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/andrew-zimmerns-top-3-easy-ways-reduce-food-waste-home>

Food Rescue US:

<https://foodrescue.us/>

Food Waste Reduction Alliance:

<https://www.foodwastealliance.org/>

Harvard. T.H. Chan School of Public Health:

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/sustainability/food-waste/>

Carroll County Office of Recycling. “Composting: Nature’s Recycling:”

<https://www.carrollcountymd.gov/media/atrihnpm/composting-guide-2024-for-web.pdf>

Reduction in Motion, MD food waste laws:

<https://reductioninmotion.com/md-food-waste-law/#:~:text=Phase%20One%20%E2%80%93%20Starting%201%202F1,from%20the%20landfill%20or%20incineration.>

UN Environment Programme. Food Waste Index Report 2024:

<https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/food-waste-index-report-2024>

