

Wasted food is wasted potential, it means no energy for a good education, a healthy body, or a successful life. According to a report made by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, the amount of food consumed per capita has increased in the US since 1974. As a consequence, the US also consumes 1/4 of the world's freshwater and 300 million barrels of oil every year as of 2009 (Hall 1). This unprecedented amount of food consumed per year has led to the numerous problems that exist in the US and the world: hunger in developing countries, obesity crisis, and food deserts among others (Hall 1). America's food waste problem is both an environmental and public health crisis and it is the product of decades of unrestrained consumerism on the part of the American people and American food market. To undo the culture of waste that has been built by the US would require generations of education, policy making, and smart implementation of technology. The purpose of this paper is to propose a series of simple and cost-effective policy and educational solutions to America's culture of waste problem. These solutions are not designed to be the decisive solution in reversing this cultural norm but serve as a foundation that will gradually shape society overtime in order to allow policy makers to implement more intensive food waste management policies.

One solution to America's food waste problem is a very basic one, revising the wording on FDA food labels for additional clarification and information. One recurring myth amongst American consumers and supermarkets is the idea that any products that are past the expiration date are automatically unsafe to eat and must be disposed of. This myth has lead to many tons of otherwise fresh and edible food into landfills nationwide, drastically increasing the amount of methane the US produces on a per-capita basis and

by extension-pollution (Chrobog-The Big Waste). The easy solution would be to rename the "expires on" tag on US food to something more general such as "best used by" as well as additional instructions that highlight the importance of proper cooking and preparation procedures. Other important pieces of information on these new labels could include reminders on how to prepare the food properly, for example cook to a peak temperature or recommending whether the food should be frozen or refrigerated at what temperature. As American consumers learn to read these new labels overtime, they become more informed on how to better reduce their food waste and alter economic trends in the American food market.

Another solution that this researcher suggests is the start of a massive media campaign designed to inform businesses and consumers alike on food waste. The education campaign can be lead by organizations who manage the food and nutrition in the US such as the Food and Drug Administration and will use a variety of media outlets such as television, social media, and YouTube. These educational announcements can be in the form of video ads, public service announcements, and social media messages. The purpose of using multiple outlets of media is to spread the word on dangerous misconceptions among American businesses and consumers. For example, one common misconception in the American food industry is the myth donating food that is considered "inedible" due to temperature or cosmetic reasons is liable for litigation and many businesses believe that the only solution would be to throw the food away. According to an article written by Pulitzer Center reporter Karim Chrobog, however, there has been a law that classifies donating rejected food not as a liability since the Clinton administration (Chrobog-Wasted USA). This law is known as the Good Samaritan Act

The Culture of Waste: Food Waste in the United States

and it stipulates that as long as the food is donated with good intent, than there is no fear of litigation. By incorporating information such as the Good Samaritan Act, the myths that permeate American consumers and businesses can be cleared out to allow for more informed decisions to be made by both parties. The effect of boosting the awareness of the Good Samaritan Act via education media would have an astounding effect on reducing food waste in America.

In summary, the purpose of this strategy is to propose a series of key policy changes and education initiatives to help kick start the food waste reduction process. As generations pass and as American businesses and consumers become more cognizant of how much food they waste every year, more intensive and technology based solutions can become more practical. The revision of food labels and educational PSAs placed on various sources will increase awareness on alternative methods of food distribution in the USA. Overtime, these changes when enforced properly can alter consumer and business behavior when it comes to managing food waste. One future solution to implement after revising food labels and starting a food waste management PSA would be to enact policy that requires businesses and households to dump their trash into specialized bins that track how much is thrown away. This policy is similar to a series of reforms being made in South Korea to address their food waste problem (Chrobog-In South Korea), where an extensive series of regulations meant to measure how much food is being wasted by households and businesses. This combined with policy that reuses waste efficiently and bans the use of landfills means that South Korea is well on its way to reducing its food waste problem. The US should follow their example on reducing food waste but to do so

The Culture of Waste: Food Waste in the United States

first requires adjusting the long entrenched cultural norms that have inhabited the American people.

Works Cited

Hall, D. K., et al. (2009). *The Progressive Increase in Food Waste in America and Its Environmental Impact*. PloS ONE 4(11):e7940.

Chrobog, K (2015, 6 20). Wasted USA. Pulitzer Center. Retrieved from

<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/america-united-states-washington-food-waste-union-florida-market>

Chrobog, K (2014, 6 18). Wasted. Pulitzer Center. Retrieved from

<http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/asia-south-korea-united-states-food-security-waste-recycle>

Chrobog, K (2015, 6 18). The Big Waste: Why Do We Throw Away So Much Food?. Pulitzer Center. Retrieved from

<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/north-america-united-states-food-waste-insecurity-dc-central-kitchen-environment>

Chrobog, K (2015, 6 18). In South Korea, an Innovative Push to Cut Back on Food Waste. Pulitzer Center. Retrieved from

<http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/asia-south-korea-seoul-food-waste-environment-technology-landfill>