Waste Not, Leftovers Wanted!

Reducing the amount of food waste you generate — and composting or donating the rest — benefits San Diego County residents and the environment.

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Change Your Habits

Simple steps to improve food waste habits can make a huge impact on San Diego County and around the world

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

When we think of how much food we consume or waste, it's often just a passing twinge as we navigate busy lives — packing school lunches, shopping for groceries, planning birthday parties. But what if we could make a significant impact simply by performing these important food-related tasks differently?

The Natural Resources Defense Council estimates that 40 percent of food is wasted in the United States, and most of it is perfectly edible. This food could go to hungry families, students and senior citizens. Or, food waste could feed farm animals in school agricultural programs or supply compost for gardens. One place it should not go is the landfill.

"The average family of four wastes up to $2,000 a year in food that is never consumed," said Jennifer Winfrey, a Recycling Specialist for San Diego County. "And it starts with good intentions: We buy healthier food than we actually want to eat. That broccoli is waiting for us at home, but we pass the neighborhood pizza place and that is very tempting — we don't want to go home and eat broccoli again."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, food waste makes up most of the material sent to landfills. But uneaten food does more than needlessly fill up a landfill, there are clear environmental costs associated with uneaten food, too.

"When food is wasted, you're not only wasting the money you used to purchase it, but you're also wasting all the resources that went into producing it — the land, the water, the greenhouse gases produced by farming and transporting it," said Winfrey.

For instance, throwing away one egg wastes 55 gallons of water. Tossing out that brown banana wastes 210 gallons of water. Forgot to cook that pound of hamburger you thawed? That's 1,850 gallons of water.

Then, of course, there is what happens after we throw food into the trash.

"Decomposing food waste produces methane," said Winfrey, noting that the greenhouse gas is 86 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

So what can residents do? Shop for only a few days at a time and in proper quantities, so food that is purchased actually gets eaten. And stick to the grocery list that gets made.

"If the kids want apples in their lunch, don't also buy nectarines because they're on sale," advised Winfrey.

Organize the refrigerator, putting leftovers and fresh food at eye level so these items get eaten first. Having a party? Plan on donating the uneaten food or sending it home with guests. Encourage local schools to start "Share Tables" in lunch rooms where unopened food can get picked up by hungry students and kept out of the trash.

"Take it one step at a time, you don't have to start by composting at home," Winfrey said. "Composting is great but reducing food waste is where we want to start, and where we can have the biggest impact."

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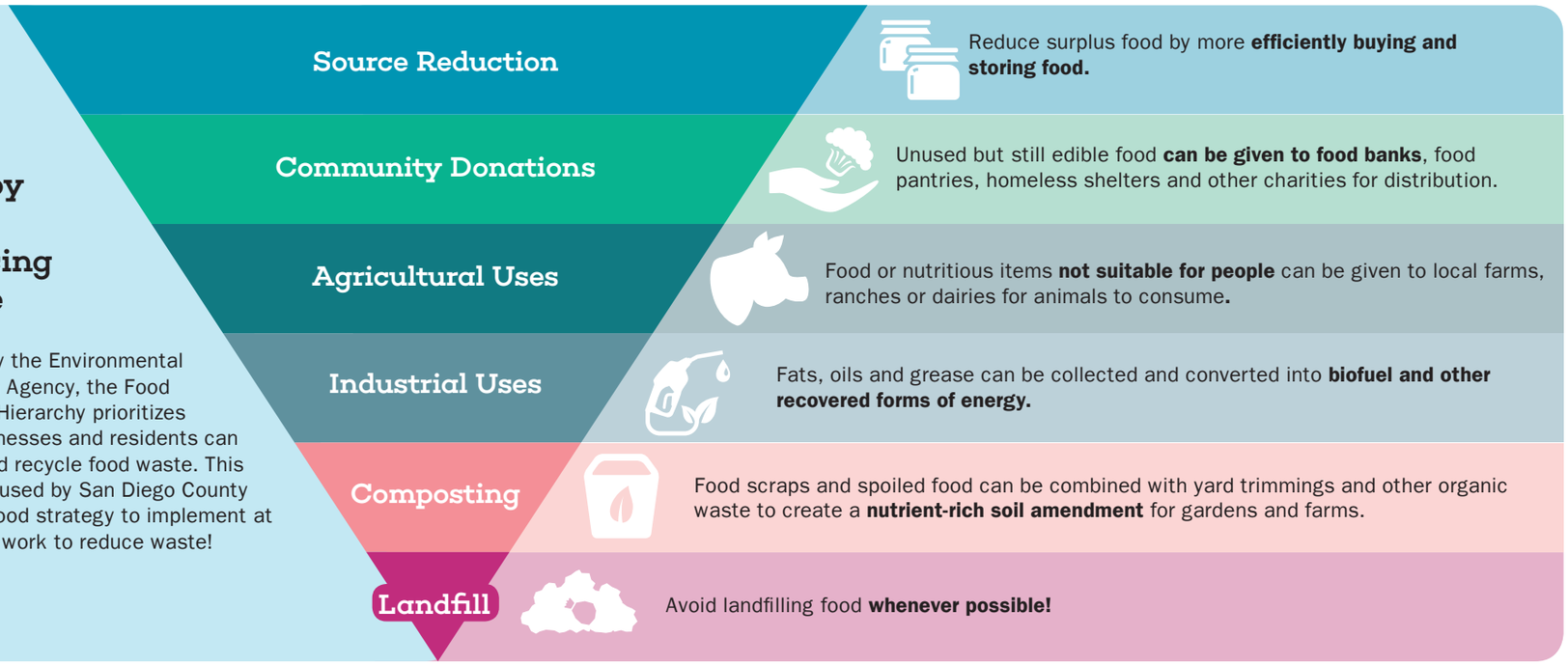
> **Jennifer Winfrey**
> Recycling Specialist 2, County of San Diego, Department of Public Works

Step by Step: Reducing Waste

Created by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food Recovery Hierarchy prioritizes ways businesses and residents can reduce and recycle food waste. This system is used by San Diego County and is a good strategy to implement at home and work to reduce waste!



Kimberly Blanche-Sebesta helps students manage an Earth Tub Unit at Ramona High School, where the district's food scraps are collected and turned into compost.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

Taking **Waste** Seriously

School district in San Diego County confronts food waste head on

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Reducing: At School

Cutting down on food waste at schools is easy! In addition to producing reusable compost or feeding leftovers to farm animals in the agricultural department, here are a few of the innovative ways San Diego County schools are making a difference.

Share Table
If a child has a food item they haven't touched and know they aren't going to eat — such as milk, juice, carrots or an apple — they can place it directly on the designated Share Table. Here, another classmate who likes that food or needs to fill their plate can pick it up.

Compost
Food that is left over on the Share Table after lunch is collected for compost, which is used to help grow tomorrow's vegetables.

Menus
Designing more kid-friendly menus and improving communication on inventory and daily food output ensures the right amount of food is used each day. For instance, if an entire grade is gone on a field trip, cafeterias only make lunch for the grades on campus.

Anyone who visits a school cafeteria at the lunch hour can see there is a stunning amount of food that doesn't get eaten. For school administrators in Ramona Unified School District in San Diego County, seeing that waste was a call to action.

"We had a lot of food material going directly to the landfill," said Kimberly Blanche-Sebesta, a paraeducator at Ramona High School who manages and oversees a student-run Earth Tub Unit on her campus, which turns the district's food waste into compost. "Since we started in 2014, 20,000 pounds have been diverted from landfills. We tell the kids that's more than 20 mature elephants."

In fact, there was so much waste, that it was too much for the tub to handle at the start of the district's food waste recovery program. So the district looked into where else its food waste could be useful.

"There are eight kitchens in the district with two main kitchens producing food, and all were collectively compiling 50 plus pounds of waste a day," Blanche-Sebesta said. "But we realized a lot of it was lettuce and fruits and vegetables that animals could consume at our onsite ag farm — which also reduced the amount of food the ag department had to buy and how much went into the tub."

There was also leftover food that was still edible and could go to good use, like unopened packaged pizza and sandwiches. "That all now goes to the Ramona Food and Clothes Closet that serves local families in need," she said.

The tub also gives students the opportunity to learn hands-on skills by weighing buckets of food waste, entering data into an iPad, adding proper amounts of bulking agents and controlling the machinery that powers the tub.

Students can also see the direct result of their actions. For example, compost produced by the tub is used in the high school's certified culinary garden, where vegetables grown are used for life skills cooking lessons in the classroom. Any leftover produce is available for students to take home, or sold to Ramona High staff so the proceeds can be used for new seeds or gardening tools. Olive Peirce Middle School's special education class recently began a garden project of its own with compost donated from Ramona High.

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>
> **Kimberly Blanche-Sebesta**
> Paraeducator, Ramona High School

"We also bag and sell the compost to staff, or donate it to school sites within the district," said Blanche-Sebesta. "So students have seen food waste go from 'trash,' as they've known it, to a beautiful product that grows vegetables you can eat and generates money."

This has created both interest and affection for the tub on campus, helping students form good environmental habits they can take with them out of the classroom.

"Now if a student sees a banana peel in the classroom's trash can, they say something: 'Hey, you want me to put that in the compost bucket?'" she said, laughing. "Kids will say, 'We need to feed the tub,' or 'She is cooking today.'"

Helpful Actions **Begin at Home**

Treating food scraps differently is easy and saves money

BY ELISSA EINHORN

Anais Rodriguez doesn't want her house to contribute to the statistics on wasted food, so she uses a couple simple steps to compost.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

While most people try to leave their work behind them at the end of each day, Anais Rodriguez is more than happy to bring hers home.

A Recycle Program Manager with I Love a Clean San Diego, Rodriguez's professional life is a reflection of her personal values.

I Love a Clean San Diego was founded to help keep the county clean by organizing community clean-up days and recycling programs to facilitate good recycling habits. In her role, Rodriguez guides approximately 500 residents and businesses on how to keep San Diego waste-free. She covers different diversion and disposal methods each month for items such as those old cans of paint in the garage or 7,000 feet of rubber tubing.

> **"The average San Diegan generates five pounds of waste each day. [I] realized I was part of the problem."**
>
> **Anais Rodriguez**
> San Diego resident and Recycle Program Manager, I Love a Clean San Diego

"The average San Diegan generates five pounds of waste each day," she said. "[Twenty] percent of that waste is food that goes into landfills. I saw my own food practices fall short and realized I was part of the problem."

These days, Rodriguez and her fiancée, Tim, are not what she calls "wishful buyers" — or people who purchase food thinking they will cook healthier meals only to find their vegetables rotting in the refrigerator alongside their best intentions. Nor are they spontaneous diners who decide on a night out at a restaurant rather than at home.

In addition to preventing food waste, Rodriguez practices simple methods of food waste diversion. She composts two ways at home. First, she uses a bokashi bin for all types of food scraps, including oils and cheeses.

She also has a worm bin for certain other items, making sure spicy or cooked items are not added as they can affect the compost generated from its contents.

If the couple is heading out of town, Rodriguez offers her unused food to family and colleagues. She also accepts food from others who have their own travel plans. Each Sunday, Rodriguez's house performs meal prep — purchasing and preparing only as much food as their weekly schedule calls for. If there are leftovers from dinner during the week, they show up as lunch the next day.

This system is obviously working. As Rodriguez brings her carts to the curb each week, she checks her garbage bin and finds mostly dog and cat waste. But her recycling cart is three-quarters full. Rodriguez is also saving money, but it is the impact on the environment that drives her.

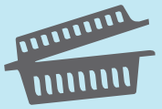
"We are not overusing or overconsuming," she said, proudly adding, "My existence isn't negatively impacting the world."

Reducing: At Home

Keeping food out of the landfill not only helps the environment, it's the right thing to do! Keeping San Diego County food waste free can be as easy as taking these few extra steps at home.

Organize your refrigerator

- Keep refrigerators at 40° F or lower, and freezers at 0° F.
- Place leftovers, ready-to-eat foods and highly perishable items, like herbs, on eye level shelves.
- Store condiments, juices and water in the door.
- Eggs, dairy and raw meat are best stored on lower shelves.
- Keep fruits and vegetables fresh by storing in the crisper.
- Frozen foods, stock, meats, tortillas, bread, pasta sauce and even eggs may be stored in the freezer to keep even longer.
- For more tips on how to extend the freshness of food you buy, visit eatfresh.org/discover-foods.



Donate food

- Almost anything you eat can be donated, such as canned and packaged food with expiration dates, produce and some prepared foods (prepared foods from a non-permitted food facility are generally not accepted for donation).
- Contact a local food bank or pantry for a complete list.

Repurposed and Delicious

Local restaurants get creative to avoid wasting food and money

BY ELISSA EINHORN

Move over, Tuesday's meatloaf — leftovers just got a lot more interesting thanks to these San Diego County residents and business owners — Jessica Waite and her husband, business partner and chef, Davin Waite.

The Waites are repurposing food in ways that are not only delicious, but also environmentally friendly. Rest assured that any food item which enters Chef Waite's kitchen will end up used, as promised by Jessica Waite's vow to minimize waste.

The Waites run and own two restaurants in Oceanside, the Wrench & Rodent Seabasstropub and The Whet Noodle. There, the duo serve up unparalleled dishes such as banana peel tacos, and carrot top and walnut pesto. Creative, yes, but also functional — these menu items are all made from food scraps.

Preventing food waste has been a way of life for Jessica Waite, who grew up composting and tending to a family garden.

"My parents didn't preach about it," she said, "we just always did it. It didn't make sense to me to throw things away."

And it doesn't make business sense either. Jessica Waite, who earned her MBA at Pepperdine University in Malibu while running her businesses, pointed out that National Public Radio reports restaurants discard 10 percent of their food — or a half-pound of food per guest. That adds up to significant economic losses, especially for small businesses.

> **"I wanted to put my soul into [my restaurants] and use them as a platform to respect food and not waste."**
>
> **Jessica Waite**
> Co-owner, Wrench & Rodent Seabasstropub and The Whet Noodle

The Waites use every part of an animal or vegetable in their two restaurants. And that philosophy is working for the community — the Waites are soon opening a third location, called The Plot, with a mission of "plant based and no waste."

"I wanted to put my soul into my restaurants and use them as a platform to respect food and not waste," she explained.

Jessica Waite advised that food waste management begins with purchasing only what is needed and serving appropriate portion sizes. Menu planning should be completed after perusing local seasonal foods.

For example, she recalled how cauliflower sprouted during a February heat wave one year, causing Davin Waite to purchase every head available and prepare what his wife called an "insanely delicious fish sauce" using the stems and leaves.

Culinary creativity notwithstanding, the Waites are also serious about feeding their community and not landfills. Leftover and unusable food scraps are often taken to local farms for livestock feed rather than going into the garbage cart.

Jessica Waite noted that many local restaurants seem skeptical of using locally grown food because they believe it will result in higher prices. These costs, she said, average out.

"It's about finding ways to minimize waste and our carbon footprint," she said. "Plus, the food tastes a million times better."

Davin and Jessica Waite don't let food scraps hinder their style. They use all parts of a food item to create a unique menu with little waste.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

Reducing: As a Business

Preventing food from becoming waste is the safest, easiest and most cost-effective way to help San Diego County. Use these tips to use food wisely in your business!

Conduct assessments

- Use tools developed by the Environmental Protection Agency and others to conduct a food waste audit.
- Track wasted food during a busy day and a less busy day, make adjustments based on results.

Implement strategies

- Adjust menus or sales inventory to reduce frequently wasted foods.
- Reduce portion sizes.
- Maximize use of food served: make croutons from leftover bread or use unserved vegetables and trimmings to make a soup stock or sauce.
- Store food in sealed, labeled containers and at proper temperatures to reduce spoilage.
- Serve leftover or surplus food to employees according to safety guidelines.
- Place items nearing expiration on sale or as a special. Or, donate these items to a local food bank.
- Rotate perishable stock.

Food Too Good to Waste

Donated food finds good use with community members who need it

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Angela Kretschmar and her staff at Heaven's Windows provide food to communities in need thanks to area donations.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

Food waste comes with a painful irony in the U.S. More unwanted food reaches landfills than any other type of material, but many children, college students, families and senior citizens go hungry. However, some food retailers are making sure they match up their surplus food to those in need.

"We pick up at seven stores four days a week," said Angela Kretschmar, Executive Director of Heaven's Windows, a nonprofit that connects resources with hungry communities in San Diego. "And 99 percent of the food has nothing wrong with it."

Kretschmar described, for example, bruised peaches or other produce that may not "look good," day-old bread or pastries (including unsold birthday cakes), and other items that are past a "sell-by" or "best if used by" date, but still usable — like dairy products or meat.

"That is not an expiration date issued by the USDA, but is determined by the store," she said. "The USDA publishes a shelf-stable list and you can, for example, look up milk — if it's been refrigerated — and see exactly how long it's good for."

Heaven's Windows partners with local grocery stores such as Ralphs, Vons, Big Lots and Walmart to collect unsellable but still usable food. This food — rescued from going into the landfill — is brought to the Heaven's Windows' warehouse for processing. From there, some of it goes to local food pantries, where it can supplement food from food banks and government assistance programs.

"Instead of going all the way to the San Diego Food Bank, people can go to a nearby pantry for produce and other fresh items," said Kretschmar, "and get plenty to see them through the month."

Heaven's Windows also takes some of this would-be food waste to a local, nonprofit catering company — staffed by people coming out of jail and foster kids aging out of the system — who learn useful culinary skills.

"We give them, say, 50 pounds of chicken and potatoes, and they cook it for us," she said. "We pick it up and take it to two churches we work with who serve meals to the homeless."

This catering company also creates individual meals on trays that can be frozen and microwaved so Heaven's Windows can provide food to after-school programs or make meal deliveries to mobile home parks. Residents of these parks include housebound seniors who depend heavily on accessible meals.

Kretschmar said that all of these actions wouldn't be possible if community members weren't mindful of preventing food waste.

"Last year, we rescued 283,842 pounds of food, keeping it from the landfill," said Kretschmar. "Our food pantries served 1,000–1,200 people a month, which resulted in 5,100 meals to seniors and 94,176 meals to children over 12 months."

> **"Our food pantries served ... 5,100 meals to seniors and 94,176 meals to children [over 12 months]."**
>
> **Angela Kretschmar**
> Executive Director, Heaven's Windows

Reducing: By Donating

Unwanted food doesn't have to go to waste, it can be consumed by someone else who needs it! Here are a few simple tips on donating your edible leftovers to those in need.

Have a plan

For a big event, like a wedding, let your caterers know beforehand you want unused food donated — they can take that into account and may already have an organization in mind. Also ask them to consider food safety in transporting items for donation.

Promote good habits

Have reusable take-out containers for guests to fill up at the end of a party or holiday meal. This is an easy (and fun!) way to send everyone home with a goody-bag and encourage mindful food practices.

Know where to go

If you have unexpected leftovers, your best bet is to try one of the three major San Diego food banks first (see the back page for locations). Smaller organizations often don't have the resources to handle large and unexpected donations, or may have limited hours.

Choose **Compost**

Businesses who save their food scraps for composting can have a big effect on the local environment

BY ELISSA EINHORN

Caring about food waste might seem like a new trend, but for people like Adam Hiner mindful food habits are old news.

"I've always had a natural inclination to eat organically and to go to farmers' markets," Hiner said, adding that he also grows food at home and used to raise chickens and bees.

Hiner has been turning food waste into more sustainable options for a decade. Initially, he was shocked when he learned that 40 percent of food in the U.S. goes to waste. This statistic was brought to life when a friend decided to go dumpster diving for two weeks and live off the bounty he found. Hiner recalled how his friend found such a surplus of edible food that he threw a picnic — complete with sealed containers of organic ice cream and untouched heads of lettuce.

"Food waste is almost one of those things you see and hear about, but don't know what to do," Hiner said. "That's why I got involved."

Hiner is the co-founder of Boochcraft, an alcoholic kombucha company that uses locally sourced ingredients. With two business partners who share his environmental values, he composts juice and tea scraps while also donating leftover food items to food banks. A recent contribution included 30 cases of carrots.

Boochcraft's compost travels to Chula Vista, where it is part of a commercial compost pilot project.

"We sent 80,000 pounds of food scraps for compost in 2017," Hiner said. "If the City of Chula Vista didn't offer this program and if we weren't aggressive in seeking it out, all of that would have ended up in the garbage."

Aside from perfectly edible food items going to waste, Hiner also knows that food sent to the landfill has a serious impact. Taking up limited space in already overflowing landfills, food items release methane gas into the atmosphere which contributes to global warming.

With these facts in mind, Hiner believes that composting will soon become the norm for businesses — for the good of local and global communities.

"Our 80,000 pounds will turn into 800,000 after a 10 times expansion of our business," said Hiner. "Imagine another expansion and that means 8 million pounds. Larger businesses already have millions of pounds of food waste. It would have a huge impact on the environment if businesses composted."

Hiner also believes in the power of consumer demand to drive policy change.

"If every consumer asked a restaurant if they compost food scraps, eventually every business would," said Hiner. "We are trying to lead by example."

Composting his business's leftover food items — like lime rinds — helps Adam Hiner feel good about his profession, while also keeping the environment clean.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

"If every consumer asked a restaurant if they compost food scraps, eventually every business would."

Adam Hiner
Owner, Boochcraft

Reducing: By Compost

Keeping food waste out of the landfill protects the environment from powerful greenhouse gases and can create a reusable product — compost! Here are some tips to follow no matter how you compost.

At home

- Food scraps, spoiled and leftover food items are perfect for composting in your own backyard.
- Solana Center offers six free composting workshops throughout the year, so you can learn the best ways to compost.
- Some local jurisdictions offer Compost Bin Voucher Programs to provide residents with a discounted compost bin.

Through area facilities

- The City of San Diego accepts commercial food scraps from pre-approved businesses to turn into compost at the Miramar Greenery. Residents can obtain two cubic yards of compost for free.
- The City of Oceanside's program locally composts all of the green waste it collects curbside at the El Corazon Compost Facility.
- The City of Chula Vista operates a pilot program that collects vegetative food waste from homes and businesses, and takes it to the Otay Mesa Landfill Compost Facility for processing.

Reducing Waste,
for the good of San Diego County

Got leftovers?

Go to WasteFreeSD.org or call 877-713-2784 to learn how to:

- Reduce waste
- Donate food
- Compost
- Access the county's commercial food donation guide

PLANNING A PARTY?

The San Diego Food System Alliance recommends using Save The Food's online Guest-imator to plan the amount of food you'll need for your next party so you can prevent extra food from being wasted.

The GUEST-IMATOR
A DINNER PARTY CALCULATOR THAT ESTIMATES HOW MUCH FOOD YOU NEED TO KEEP YOUR GUESTS FULL & HAPPY

SAVETHEFOOD.COM

Don't throw food waste in the trash!

Each year, residents and businesses in the county produce **500,000 tons** of food waste — so everyone needs to work together to adopt new and simple habits to dispose of food waste properly!

Food Bank Locations*

Feeding San Diego
9455 Waples St #135
San Diego, CA 92121
858-452-3663

North County Food Bank
680 Rancheros Dr #100
San Marcos, CA 92069
760-761-1140

San Diego Food Bank
9850 Distribution Ave
San Diego, CA 92121
858-527-1419

*Call locations for hours of operation and amount of donations they can accept.

Join the rest of the county and be proactive about food waste!

3,750
composting workshop attendees in 2016-2017

544
compost bins sold or donated since 2015

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