What is food waste?

Did you know that approximately 1,200 calories of food per capita are wasted daily in the United States? That equates to roughly 300 pounds of food per year for the average American.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), food waste occurs when an edible item goes unconsumed. This can happen for many reasons. Retailers, like grocery stores, may throw out foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, due to how they look; or consumers may leave food on their plates and it winds up in the trash. Other examples include buying too much produce, which causes it to spoil before being used, or not using foods before their “best by” dates and throwing them out as a result.
Does eating a more sustainable diet need to be expensive?

We often hear terms such as organic, or sustainably caught seafood, and buy fresh, buy local...but aren't these all costly measures? Is there a way to eat a more sustainable diet that can be both nutritious and affordable? The short answer is yes, there are many ways to “Go Further with Food” and consider all aspects of sustainability in our diets and in fact, some of the top methods of eating a more sustainable diet are very cost effective.

A first option to consider when thinking about a sustainable diet is to eat more plant based proteins over animal proteins. This strategy favors beans, pulses, or plant based dairy alternatives as primary protein sources over beef, pork, or dairy. Not only are plant based proteins often more affordable, but traditional meat and dairy proteins are also the leading contributors to Green House Gas emissions (GHG) negatively impacting our environment, so swapping out these plant based alternatives will help to reduce the overall environmental impact (and cost).

Next tip, waste less food...and save money, too! The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the amount of food wasted annually could feed every hungry person in the world --four times over! Try making that age old strategy, “Cook once, eat twice” a regular practice in your house. For instance, prepare a roast chicken (or purchase a rotisserie chicken) for dinner one evening, then remove leftover chicken immediately after the meal and use in sandwiches, tacos, salad or soup the following day. Using leftovers in different ways keeps interest up and waste (and possibly waist!) down.

Buy only the groceries you need, use smaller plates or place less food onto your plate. Understand what food date labels mean- we often throw out perfectly good food to early which contributes to food waste. Before tossing food, check an online source such as FoodKeeper developed by USDA and Cornell University, to help you determine if food can still safely be eaten. FoodKeeper is also available as an app.
Do your part to help the environment, your diet, and your budget. Wasting less food not only contributes to a more sustainable and a healthy planet, but it also helps us spend less on groceries each and every month!

Quick recipe ideas:
- Leftover chickpeas? Use as a salad topper, make your own hummus, try cookie hummus dip (you heard us right)!
- Leftover spinach or other greens? Add to omelets or frittatas, combine in a smoothie for added fiber, or add them to delicious chocolate muffins.

Resources and References:
- FoodKeeper: https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp
- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: eatright.org
- Further with Food: The Center for Food Loss and Waste Solutions: https://furtherwithfood.org/

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