

# Every year, 133 billion pounds of food is wasted

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The gleaners could keep up to 50 percent of what they collected; the nonprofit donated the other half to the area food bank, Marion-Polk Food Share, something Bauman stresses with the children.

"It's amazing to see the difference in kids' eyes," she said. "Suddenly they're like, 'Let's go pick more. I want to donate all my blueberries.'"

## Billions wasted

Every year, 133 billion pounds of food at the consumer and retail level is never consumed, a \$161.6 billion write-off at retail prices, according to a 2014 USDA study. The Natural Resources Defense Council estimates that 40 percent of the food grown in the U.S. — enough to fill the Rose Bowl every day — is never eaten. The waste includes 20 percent of the nation's milk production and 52 percent of the fruit and vegetables grown, according to the NRDC.

Despite an abundance of food, however, many do without. In 2013, some 49.1 million Americans lived in food-insecure households, where a good meal is inaccessible at least part of the time, according to the USDA's Economic Research Service. About 33 percent of all emergency food recipients are children. Recovering just 30 percent of wasted U.S. food could feed all food-insecure Americans, according to the NRDC.

John Burt, executive director of the nonprofit Farmers Ending Hunger in Salem, Ore., said that after a family finishes paying for rent, transportation and utilities, food is often the only expense that can be cut.

"That last thing you don't have to spend money on, incredibly, is food," he said. "Nobody's going to make you."

From tractor to table, inefficiencies exist all along the supply chain. Grocery stores, restaurants and food service institutions are responsible for 50 percent of the food wasted in the U.S., said JoAnne Berkenkamp, a senior advocate with NRDC's Food & Agriculture Program.

In a presentation to a National Press Foundation



Oregon Food Bank employee Bill Dart ensures that all sorted food is properly labeled before being distributed to partner agencies.

fellowship group in July, Berkenkamp said grocery store waste is the result of "hyper-stocked" shelves, too much variety, poor handling, overly strict pull dates and too much emphasis on cosmetic appearance.

Restaurants provide portions that are too large, and the "kitchen culture," with its emphasis on speed and appearance, pays little attention to waste, she said.

Berkenkamp said producers account for 7 percent of waste and processors just 1 percent. "That segment of the food system is quite efficient," she said.

Consumers, on the other hand, are responsible for 42 percent of the waste, Berkenkamp said. We buy too much and cook too much, she said. "Then we have leftovers, and we don't like leftovers."

Consumers also are hyper-aware of date labeling on food products, often mistaking them for safety warnings rather than freshness advisories. Many people throw food away rather than examine it themselves and give it a sniff test, she said.

## Cutting waste

Reducing waste is a complicated matter. Experts say consumers' preferences, where every fruit or vegetable must be "just so," ensure selective harvests that overlook some edible but aesthetically unpleasing food.

Produce with minor bumps and blemishes is sometimes left unharvested. Food can even be disqualified for being too big, which was the case at a recent Salem Harvest event.

"All these cucumbers were left in the field because they were too long or too fat or

## More information

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To see a YouTube video interview with food waste expert JoAnne Berkenkamp of the Natural Resources Defense Council, go to:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqPVLimfgr8#t=43>

had a little yellow on them," Bauman said. "The grocery store says the consumers are driving it, and the consumer says the grocery store isn't giving them the option. It's just blame, blame, blame and nothing gets done."

At the farm level, producers sometimes plow under unpicked food, renewing the soil with nutrients, but the unnecessary crop has a cost in energy, labor and water.

Experts say some farmers are squeezed by rigid contracts with processors that reward overproduction and ignore variable yields.

Farmers use 10 percent of the nation's energy, 50 percent of the land and 80 percent of the available fresh water. According to an NRDC research paper, about 25 percent of that water is wasted on food that never makes it to the plate.

"(Farmers) are victims of certain situations, whether it's the pickiness of the market or the price of the good not justifying harvest," said Jonathan Bloom, an author, journalist and frequent speaker on food waste. "Orders get canceled at the last minute, and (farmers) eat that product."

Picking crews, transportation and storage are expensive. Most farmers would rather swallow the cost of an unharvested crop than spend more harvesting what the market will not pay for, Bloom says. This practice, typically called a "walk-by," is common for contracted acres as well.

Farmers often agree to produce a set volume of crop for processors, and these contracts can stipulate fines or other harsh penalties for farmers who fail to fulfill them. Farmers who work primarily with one or two large buyers face additional pressure to please the market.

But because nature is inherently unpredictable, and drought, pests or labor shortages can shrink yields, some farmers plant more than they can reasonably hope to sell.

"I feel for them," said Dana Gunders, a NRDC scientist and author of the white paper. "Having a system where customers buy X number of fancy grade apples, rather than a share of the overall crop ... leads to waste."

But the problem is also cultural, according to Gunders.

"Littering is totally unacceptable in our society. If you throw an empty potato chip bag on the street, people look at you like you're crazy," she said. "But if you throw a full bag of potatoes in the trash, no one thinks a thing of it."



Zane Sparling/Capital Press  
Carole Boliou, a program coordinator for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, popularly known by the initials WIC, takes a break from picking blueberries at Beilke Family Farm in Brooks, Ore., on Aug. 8. Boliou often refers her clients to participate in Salem Harvest gleaners events.

## Donations feed needy

Long imagined as the collectors of dusty tin cans scrounged from the back of the pantry, food banks have evolved in the last two decades, putting a new emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables. As their relationship with processors has changed, farmers themselves have become even more crucial to the fight to end hunger.

Farmers Ending Hunger, which encourages farmers to "donate an acre" of crops, last year helped growers give over 2.5 million pounds of wheat, onions, carrots, potatoes, beef, sweet corn and green beans to hungry families across Oregon.

It doesn't hurt that farmers in Oregon can apply for a tax credit worth 15 percent of the donated food's value. Similar credits exist in Colorado, California and Arizona.

Burt, the executive director, said he works with food processor NORPAC to find free time on its processing line. A mining company will often donate the raw metal for the cans at a reduced price as well.

"The sad fact of life is that the can costs more than the beans that come in it," he said.

To divert excess crops to feed the needy, gleaner groups have sprouted around the West. In California, the Farm to Family gleaners recover more than 120 million pounds of food a year. Its "concurrent picking" system directs farm workers to harvest healthy but unmarketable produce alongside the higher-grade product. The California Association of Food Banks pays for the additional labor, packing and transportation costs.

"Hunger is a problem of distribution, not supply," Bloom, the author, said. "We have more than enough food

in this country to feed everyone. It's really a question of finding the social and political will to eliminate hunger."

## Gleaners help

At the blueberry farm, Bauman stops to chat with Carole Boliou, a Marion County, Ore., coordinator for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, popularly known by the initials WIC.

Boliou says Salem Harvest can help overcome the "shame factor" some clients feel when asking for aid.

"You have people out here who may not qualify for any benefits working alongside people who may not have any income coming in at all. And there's no stigma," she said. "They're working together to give back to the community."

That's Salem Harvest's goal, too. The nonprofit yielded 294,000 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables to the Marion-Polk network of food banks last year.

The 41 gleaners present were there because the farmers, who employ an automated over-the-row harvester on most of the blueberry crop, cannot use the machine on the rows planted between the poles that support bird-proof netting.

"It's sad. From farm to table — the amount of food that gets wasted — it's an astoundingly high number. It doesn't even leave the farm before getting tossed," Bauman said. "So often we'll go out there with as much manpower as we can muster, and not touch even half or a quarter of what's out there."

Staff writer Eric Mortenson contributed to this story. He reported from St. Louis, Mo., and Portland.

# GMO growers required to notify Josephine County sheriff

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"We believe we'll be validated," said DiLorenzo.

Oregonians for Safe Farms and Families, a group that supports the GMO ban, is reviewing whether it has a "legal leg to stand on" before seeking to intervene in the case, said Stephanie Dolan, attorney for the group.

Normally, county ordinances are only pre-empted when

they conflict with state laws, Dolan said.

In this case, Oregon does not have any meaningful regulations for biotech crops, she said. "It's a pre-emption law without the state taking any real action."

Josephine County Commissioner Keith Heck said the county is "caught in this gray area" until the legal issues are settled.

Heck, the commission chair and a former pastor, said there

is strong public support for the ban, considering Josephine County's sharply divided political scene. He characterized debate in the county "quite opinionated and strongly voiced opinions."

"On any kind of issue, 53 percent of the vote is a massive landslide," Heck said. "This (ordinance) received 55 percent."

County Counsel Wally Hicks said the county com-

missioners will meet in executive session that's closed to the public to consider the county's next step. The board can discuss the issue privately because it involves pending litigation, one of the exceptions allowed under Oregon's public records and meetings law. The commissioners are not allowed to take action in private, however; any votes or decisions must be done in a public session.

When the county announced

the ordinance's effectiveness, it said anyone growing genetically engineered plants was required to notify Sheriff Dave Daniel by Sept. 4. Growers were supposed to notify the sheriff of the type of crop they were growing, its location and their proposed "phase-out plan."

Commissioner Keith Heck said he didn't know if any growers had supplied information to the sheriff's office, and

said he's not aware of any tangible enforcement action being taken.

Wally Hicks, Josephine County's attorney, said he knows of no one who grew GMO crops in the county this year.

Dolan, attorney for OSFF, said she believes farmers in the county have phased out their biotech crops since the ordinance was approved more than a year ago.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Cattlemen's Association Executive Vice President Jack Field, sitting right, talks during a meeting of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's wolf advisory group Sept. 3 in Tumwater while Stevens County rancher Dave Dashiell and Wolf Haven International Executive Director Diane Gallegos listen. The group agreed to consider supporting Dashiell returning his wolf-endangered sheep flock to northeast Washington.

# WDFW angered livestock producers by not shooting 3 wolves from pack

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"That's pretty gutsy of them. I don't know what kind of blowback they're going to get. I don't know what kind of blowback I'm going to get," he said.

Although other Washington ranchers have lost livestock to wolves, no rancher has reported more losses or received more attention than Dashiell.

While outraging environmentalists, WDFW also angered livestock producers by not following through on plans to shoot three more wolves from the Huckleberry pack. The same pack this summer seriously injured a dog guarding a small flock that Dashiell kept near his home, provoking a new round of debate about whether WDFW is too quick or too slow to shoot wolves that kill livestock.

The advisory group, led by conflict-resolution consultant Francine Madden, spent several hours Sept. 3 talking in generalities about human conflicts.

In the late afternoon, group member Dave Duncan of Washingtonians for Wildlife Conservation, a hunters' organization, urged the group to "get its hands dirty, trying to do something." He said the group could start by considering how it can help Dashiell.

Dashiell said the group could back his return to northeast Washington, showing corporate landowners that environmental organizations won't criticize them for leasing him grazing land. State grazing land is available, but it's more expensive, Dashiell said.

Some of the group's environmentalists seized on the idea as a chance to show they

can work with ranchers.

"It's a great step forward. It's a signal of getting over the divisiveness," said Paula Swedeen, a biologist who represents Conservation Northwest.

The collaboration could fail to come together. The diverse group, which includes the Humane Society of the United States and the Washington Cattlemen's Association, agreed any statement supporting Dashiell would have to be unanimous. Some worried the partnership would be misinterpreted as a special favor to a panel member.

WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said the risks were worth taking to heal the rift between environmentalists and ranchers. He said he couldn't have imagined talk of a collaboration a year ago. "It felt amazing," he said.