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J.B.: Yes, sadly.

J.P.: *Why is that?*

J.B.: Well, primarily because nowhere is food less expensive as a percentage of a household's budget. No other nation spends as little on food as we do, and that impacts how we value it or, in many cases, don't value it. And then we have a real abundance of food in America. We produce about twice the amount of food that we need per person on a calorie level. We overeat, and we also waste a whole lot of food. Additionally, we expect food to look perfect, and anything that's the wrong shape, size or color will be cast aside at some point in the food chain. And I would say, anecdotally, that American standards are higher or at least as high as any other nations — the superficial standards for food at the end.

J.P.: *That last point reminds me of a documentary I heard about. I listened to an NPR interview with the two documentarians. They were a Canadian couple who for six months ate only discarded food. Did you get a chance to see that. It was called "Just Eat It."*

J.B.: Yeah, I'm actually in it.

J.P.: *Oh, you're in it! Well, what did you think of the finished product?*

J.B.: It was great. They did a fabulous job highlighting the issues and doing so in an entertaining way. I would highly recommend that film as a great way to learn as much as you can about it.

J.P.: *To ask the opposite of the question I asked earlier: Is there anything that America does better than other countries when it comes to food waste and nutrition issues?*

J.B.: Yeah, America leads the way in recovering food, rescuing food that would otherwise go to waste at supermarkets, restaurants, wholesalers and caterers. Partly that's a reflection of the sheer level of excess. In addition, it's a reflection of tax benefits that most companies can receive. And actually they just extended that. It used to be that only C Corporations could receive tax benefits for donating food, but as of December, that's applicable to everyone, even small businesses. So that's great. Our abundance of food recovery is great for the most part, except when the kinds of foods being donated are not so healthy. There's room for improvement in trying to get the healthier, unprocessed foods to those in need. Often that means either increased labor that's needed to, say, glean the food from a farm setting. Or it would mean restaurants and supermarkets will have to donate their more perishable foods, which they should be doing because they're protected from liability under the Good Samaritan Act. But, in practice, everyone wants to donate their shelf-stable foods, their day-old baked goods and so forth, but food banks and pantries don't necessarily need more loaves of bread and they certainly don't need more cupcakes or pie.

J.P.: *I've heard that healthy proteins are difficult for food banks to get.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FOOD RECOVERY NETWORK

J.B.: Proteins, fresh produce and dairy tend to be the kinds of foods that food banks and pantries need most, and unfortunately, there's a real reluctance to donate those foods, partly because there's this urban myth of donors getting sued or found liable for donating something that gets someone sick. But from what I've seen and heard and researched, there's never been a case where someone receiving food aid has turned around and sued the hand that is figuratively feeding them. It's a fallacy. And there is that 1996 Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act that protects donors from liability when they give food in good faith.

J.P.: *If we lead the way in food rescue and we have such overproduction in calories, where is the gap that there are still hungry people?*

J.B.: That's a good question. Unfortunately, a lot of that excess food is located on farms and is unharvested and usually tends to be plowed under or composted. Channeling that excess food supply to those in need will require some capital and also effort. Capital would compensate the farmers for harvesting food to then donate, food that they would otherwise plow under. Or even pay laborers to pick, if it's handpicked crops. In terms of effort, that might mean expending actual physical labor to pick the crops, but it also might just mean thinking outside the box and doing something differently. There was a green bean producer in Tennessee who

had all kinds of culls on his farm, because there are always going to be green beans that don't look quite right or are the wrong size for certain packages. And he actually got a grant to build another packing line to process and pack green beans for donation to the major food bank in Tennessee. It's pretty cool.

J.P.: *I saw the Environmental Protection Agency came out recently with a goal of halving food waste. Do you get the sense that Americans, in general, are becoming more aware of issues like food waste because of the EPA's announcement and because more media are reporting on it?*

J.B.: Awareness of wasted food is certainly growing, and every day I see more and more articles on the topic. It's driven by many factors, but it's great to see such a rising tide of food waste awareness. Now the real next step is converting that attention to action.

J.P.: *Is this an issue that you've heard any of the presidential hopefuls address at all?*

J.B.: No.

J.P.: *Did you have any other final thoughts that you wanted to share, either on the Food Recovery Act or just the issue of food waste in general?*

J.B.: There's so much to say. Most people seem to be surprised that wasting food has an environmental impact so I'd want to

219 POUNDS OF WASTE

On Oct. 14, Willamette University's Food Recovery Network collected the food discarded from students' plates and weighed the results: 219 pounds of food wasted.

It was one of several similar events the network conducts at the university to demonstrate how much food is thrown in the trash. The Willamette University chapter is part of the national nonprofit Food Recovery Network, an organization that helps colleges recover surplus unsold food from their campuses that would otherwise go to waste and deliver it to hungry Americans.

To date, the Willamette chapter has donated more than 14,000 pounds of leftovers to the Union Gospel Mission and Women at the Well Grace House, organizations combating homelessness and hunger in Salem.

The university has also created Trayless Tuesday, which eliminates trays for the day and has been shown to reduce the amount of food waste at the end of the meal.

— Source: Iris Dowd, president of Willamette University's Food Recovery Network

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JONATHAN BLOOM

communicate that food waste does lead to harmful greenhouse gas emissions when it's sent to the landfill. Also, the food we're wasting represents a squandering of the energy and the water that we're investing in producing that food. And then, of course, you can't ignore the economic impact: roughly \$260 billion that we're wasting through food waste every year. And then as we've discussed in depth, there's the ethical component of the paradox of hunger and waste coexisting. Those are three main factors why we should pay attention to wasted food. I will leave it up to folks to figure out which rationale speaks to them loudest. I do think that everyone should pay attention to food waste for one — if not all three — of those reasons.

J.P.: *Do you think corporate America is starting to pay more attention to these issues, as well?*

J.B.: Yes. Multinational companies and domestic ones are becoming more attuned to the sheer loss of resources through wasted food. The World Economic Forum, the elite of the elite, in their most recent meeting in Davos, Switzerland, just launched this initiative to tackle food waste. Whether it's for increasing their own profit margins or the public good, or some combination of the two, it's encouraging to see this issue gain traction at all levels of society.