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OPINION

Junking Food is Bad for Everyone

Wasting food when people go hungry

BY JILL RICHARDSON
(COPY, ITALICS AT END)

Several years ago, I worked in a grocery store bakery. At the end of each day, we threw away piles of perfectly good food.



Before the store closed, employees walked down each aisle, checking the expiration dates of bread, bagels, and cookies to toss out whatever expired that day — whether the food was actually still good or not. Then we chucked all of the day's fresh-baked pastries, muffins, and bread. And those were definitely still good to eat.

As employees, we weren't allowed to take it home and eat it ourselves. The store worried that if we could, we'd start baking too much on purpose in order to secure a larger supply of excess food at the end of the day.

I found the waste offensive.

Sometimes I snuck a bit of it out with me at the end of the night to hand to homeless people. I could have been fired for that. The store feared the prospect of attracting a line of homeless people begging for free food. And what if someone ate expired food, got sick, and sued? The food had to go in the trash.

According to a new study, this kind of waste goes on even after the food goes home with customers. Americans trash 40 percent of the food we buy — \$165 billion worth per year — often because the food is past the expiration date.

"Best before" and "sell by" dates can be arbitrary, concluded the researchers with the Harvard University Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) who conducted the study. We shouldn't see them as indicative that food has spoiled. If a food looks rotten or smells bad, that's when you know it's time to toss it out — not just because a

date on the package has passed.

"Food from the farm to our fork eats up 10 percent of the total U.S. energy budget, uses 50 percent of U.S. land, and swallows 80 percent of all freshwater consumed in the United States," reads another NRDC report. Once in the landfill, wasted food yields methane, a greenhouse gas far worse than carbon dioxide.

But this wasted food doesn't have to be a problem — it can also be a solution. At a time when 33 million Americans are "food-insecure," and don't get enough to eat, diverting just a fraction of perfectly good food from the landfill would feed all of them.

In my household, we also have a solution for the food that is no longer good for humans to eat. We feed it to our chickens and worms. We live in the city and keep a few hens for eggs. They are low-maintenance little pets who serve a number of purposes, like eating bugs and producing fertilizer. And they are ravenous for food scraps.

Whatever the chickens don't take care of, we feed to the worms. We keep a worm

compost bin, one that has holes large enough for airflow but small enough to keep rodents out. If the chickens won't eat something, the worms certainly will. They turn rotting food scraps into black gold — worm compost — and we use it to grow strawberries, tomatoes, and salad greens. (Gardening also helps cut down on waste, since we can harvest highly perishable foods like lettuce as needed.)

What's more, sometimes food past its prime is even salvageable as human food. Stale bread makes for great bread crumbs, overripe bananas become banana bread, and other types of overripe fruit are best for jams and pies.

Wasting 40 percent of our food while so many Americans go hungry is a national disgrace. As the Environmental Protection Agency puts it, we should "feed people, not landfills."

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It.

The Power of a Shared Vision and Partnership

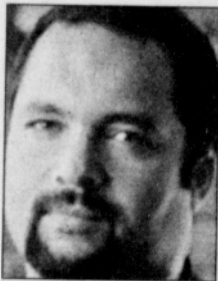
Our stronger, more inclusive America

BY BENJAMIN TODD JEALOUS

Two decades ago, as a young organizer in Mississippi, I learned that there are only two types of temporal power: organized people and organized money. I also learned that in a democracy, the people can win every time — but only if we are organized.

Today, when I reflect back on my half-decade at the helm of the NAACP, I am deeply proud of what we have accomplished together as we organized our communities.

We have abolished the death policy in five states, defended voting rights from coast to coast, freed multiple wrongfully incarcerated people, and shrunk prison systems. We have increased funding for health care, defended the rights of workers, held wayward mortgage companies accountable and curbed the school-to-prison-pipeline in multiple



states. We have built powerful bridges to help faith communities join the struggle for marriage equality and against the scourge of HIV, and come to the aid of our allies in the struggles for environmental protection and immigrants rights.

Through all this, we have dramatically expanded the ranks of those who would assist us in combating racial discrimination in the streets and at the ballot box.

Five years ago, the NAACP was what it had been for most of the past half century; the biggest civil rights organization in the streets. Today, we are that and also the biggest online, on mobile and at the ballot box as well.

All of this success is testament to the power of our shared vision and partnership to come together for a stronger, more inclusive America.

Things could have gone a different way. Since 2010, far-right wing extremists have repeatedly and simultaneously attacked the most basic civil rights protections of most Americans. They've attacked women's rights,

affirmative action, workers rights, immigration, LGBT equality, food security, health care, and even our right to drink clean water and breathe clean air.

One has to wonder whether their decision to attack all of us all at once was motivated by mere greed or by an even more devious design to ensure that we would Balkanize as we each retreated into a defensive posture.

However, together, we chose the courageous path. We have marched forward arm in arm, repeatedly embracing the motto of the three musketeers: all for one, and one for all.

As a result we have passed powerful anti-racial profiling legislation in New York City and even abolished the death penalty in Maryland with the help of leaders in the LGBT community; passed marriage equality bills from coast to coast with increased support from faith leaders and communities of color; and most recently we have built a powerful defense-and-offense-for-voting-rights by pulling the entire progressive family together in ways incomparable in recent memory. Occasionally, we

have even picked up new conservative friends and allies.

Today, as I prepare to leave my position at the NAACP, I am confident that there is a bright future for both the Association and the larger civil and human rights struggle.

We may have started this century like we started the last: fighting assaults on our voting rights and pushing back against attacks on our most basic civil and human rights. Nonetheless, this time we have a distinct advantage.

We know that no matter what happens in the courts, every year our ability to defend and expand civil and human rights protections at the ballot box, in statehouses and on city councils will increase. Moreover, as organizers, we understand that while the future will come no matter what, we have the power to make the future come faster.

Benjamin Todd Jealous is the outgoing president and chief executive officer of the national NAACP.

Letter to the Editor

SEI Model School

I read the Portland Observer story about the Self Enhancement Academy's outstanding achievements with African American students ("Model School," Nov. 6 issue). In the article, Tony Hopson, president and CEO of Self Enhancement, Inc., said the 9-year old academy has proven itself ... as a uniquely positive force for African-American students, and said "it is time for more financial support for the school."

As a retired teacher who taught in schools with diverse populations in San Francisco in the 1960s, I beg the Portland School District to give this fine school sufficient funding -- whatever it needs to continue and expand its wonderful work.

Marian Drake

The Portland Observer Established 1970

USPS 959-680
4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

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