

Food waste

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How many of our mothers reminded us of the hungry kids in Africa when we left the table with food on our plate? This adage still rings true, but it is now hitting closer to home. While traveling across North Dakota, it's hard to imagine that there's not enough food, when more than 95 percent of the land is dedicated to farming. But one in 11 people in the state were forced to seek emergency food assistance last year. Forty percent of these were children. While a half-eaten sandwich here or a forgotten apple there may not appear like much, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that wealthy countries waste 222 million tons of food annually. In the U.S. alone, we waste enough food in one day to fill the 90,000-seat Rose Bowl. Fortunately, a number of initiatives in North Dakota are making a difference.

The Great Plains Food Bank recovers more than 6 million pounds of surplus food and grocery products each year from food industry partners such as supermarkets and restaurants, as well as from community food drives. This food is then distributed to more than 240 charitable feeding programs in 90 communities, feeding more than 61,000 people each day.

The Daily Bread Hunger Relief Network also plays an important role in food recovery and distribution in Cass County and in Clay County in Minnesota. The organization collects food from area businesses and distributes it to more than 40 charitable food programs, which then share it with approximately 16,000 people. Each year, roughly 1.8 million pounds of food is redirected from the landfill.

The University of North Dakota's dining services recycles used cooking oil for biodiesel production, runs student and consumer education programs on reducing waste and donates excess food to the Grand Forks Mission and is credited with diverting nearly 500 tons of waste material, both food and other products, from the landfill each year. Reducing the amount of food being thrown away can help both our hungry and our environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reported that foodstuffs are the largest ingredient of solid waste that ends up in city dumps. When food rots away in landfills, it turns into methane, a greenhouse gas that is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

According to Fargo's solid waste utility manager, large-scale food composting systems, such as those helping to reduce the amount of food going into landfills in other places in the country, are difficult to implement in cold climates. But instead of writing off the landfill as a detriment to the city, Fargo has harnessed it for environmental good. In 2008, Fargo captured the methane gas being emitted from its landfill and sold it on the Chicago Climate Exchange, the largest greenhouse gas emission reduction program in North America. Fargo was one of eight municipalities on the continent to take part in the program, and sold \$700,000 worth of climate credits that year.

Making use of what we already produce is important if we are to adequately feed a population that has reached 7 billion. Simple lifestyle changes, like keeping track of leftovers and donating surplus to food recovery programs, can have profound effects.

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