

by Paul van der Werf

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Love to Hate Food Waste

Welcoming a mini-renaissance involving the first 'R' and food waste

We waste a lot of food. While recently looking at the tipping floor of an anaerobic digestion facility, I was amazed at the recognizable foodstuffs disguised as food waste, waiting to enter the steel stomach of the digester.

An interesting estimate is that at least 40 per cent of what is in a typical garbage bag is food waste. Some 50 per cent of that was edible at

one point. There could be a big bright price sticker applied to the average garbage bag to say that about \$10 worth of edible food is crumpled up and thrown away each week.

So, why do we throw out so much food? In short, we are not always in tune with what we buy. We purchase too much. We do not really understand "best before" dates. And unfortunately many of us do not seem to like leftovers.

Obviously, this has significant economic, environmental and social impacts. For instance, an estimated 75 per cent of food's carbon impact occurs during its production and distribution, which is lost when food becomes waste, and then compounded by the additional carbon impacts of dealing with this food as a waste.

According to **HungerCount 2014**, prepared by **Foodbanks Canada**, more than 840,000 Canadians visit a food bank each month. While the food we waste cannot be linearly connected to overcoming these challenges, it is clear that there is an overabundance of food in one area and not enough to affordably put food in people's stomachs.

Fortunately there is some change in the air. There is currently the rustling of a mini-renaissance involving the first "R" and food waste. Waste reduction has always been there, talked about—a theoretical maxim that has been all but ignored. Through the confluence of some European ideas and some gathering carbon infused momentum to keep food waste out of Canadian landfills, the issue has been creeping out of the primordial soup of the industry presses to the dry land of the popular presses.

In the UK, most food waste is



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Food Savings Begins at Home

A Canadian food saving program should start at the household level and then work its way up the food supply chain with the twin aim of reducing food waste and creating a demand to make changes through the chain.

accumulated from fruits and vegetables (25 per cent), drinks (16 per cent) and baked goods (13 per cent). The UK's **Love Food Hate Waste** (LFHW) (www.lovefoodhatewaste.com) program, managed by the not-for-profit company and registered charity WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), has embraced this first R and provides educational resources and raises awareness for the need to reduce food waste and take action.

Launched in 2007, LFHW works with community groups, chefs, businesses, food retailers and brands, trade bodies, local authorities, government and individuals that are either providing and looking for practical advice to achieve food waste reduction targets. On a household level this includes the provision of practical/useful tools and tips to help

householders generate less food waste, save money, and reduce their environmental impact. On a retail level this includes providing advice to the grocery industry on how to package foods to better meet household needs.

From 2007 to 2012 the campaign resulted in the diversion of about 1.1 million tonnes of avoidable food and drink waste (i.e. that could have been consumed prior to disposal), saving consumers \$6.2 billion. It saved waste management authorities about \$160 million in landfill tax and gate fees in 2012, reduced GHG emissions by 4.4 million tonnes of e and avoided wasting a billion tonnes of water for agricultural use and other sources.

The LFHW campaign partners with more than 100 supporters, in part to produce awareness. For instance, in August 2014 the campaign was launched in '10 cities' around Greater Manchester. The event offered the public information on how households can save up to \$110 a month by reducing food waste and included such simple activities such as free cooking classes for leftovers.

LFHW costs about \$4 million to operate, or about 60 cents per resident.

The LFHW program, or something similar, should be developed in Canada. However, simply reducing food from becoming food waste is not enough. I would argue there is enough food in the system. It is our distribution system that needs to be overhauled. By that I don't mean the literal distribution system that moves food from the farm to the plate but the one that gets food to everyone's plate. Far from being an anti-

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Decadent Leftovers



Further away from home, in NYC, Blue Hill – Blue Hill at Stone Barns ran a pop-up restaurant through March where top chefs cooked with food waste. The pop-up was called wastED, devoted to the theme of food waste and re-use, and even the tabletops were slabs of mycelium, an all-natural and biodegradable plastics substitute.

Closer to home... Through the help of some of Ontario's top chefs, the Green Living Show showcased gourmet dishes made from discarded produce to convince people that delicious meals can be made from roots, stems, bones and other items typically thrown away.

To demonstrate the magnitude of Canada's food waste problem, Green Living Enterprises rallied together chefs, farmers, researchers and local government advocates around the "Mindful Plate" food feature at the 2015 Green Living Show in Toronto, which ran last week.

The Toronto Food Policy Council estimates that about \$27 billion worth of food produced and sold in Canada is wasted every year, and of that, approximately \$13 billion is discarded at the consumer level. A recent University of Guelph study on Food Waste estimates the average Canadian household wastes 4.5 kilograms of food per week.

The show also featured expert refrigerator organizing tips to ensure that fruits and vegetables do not spoil before their time.

Eat those leftovers!!

SWR Staff

capitalist diatribe, this is more a question of efficiency. For instance, if you know that 10 per cent of the price of food is used to pay for the disposal of unsold food, would you mind if some of the savings from improved efficiencies were used to improve food security? In other words, those of us who can, need to buy less, and those who sell need to have less stock.

As an example, you have the paradox of grocery stores throwing out copious amounts of perfectly edible food on the one hand, but then asking patrons to make a donation to the food bank at the till, or even worse, buying a pre-bagged parcel of food destined for the local food bank food from their shelves.

A Canadian food saving program should start at the household level and then work its way up the food supply chain with the twin aim of reducing food waste and creating a demand to make changes through the chain.

Save money. Reduce environmental impact. Feed people.

While the third "R" is absolutely necessary to capture the energy and benefit from inedible food wastes, it's just the wrong stomach for food. ♻️

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