

FOOD WASTE BUFFET

About 40 percent of food produced for people to eat in the United States today goes uneaten, which is more than 20 pounds of food per person every month. That means Americans are throwing out the equivalent of \$165 billion in food each year. The food we throw out also uses huge amounts of water, chemicals, energy and land. Food is wasted for many reasons, such as buying too much, poor planning, spoilage and lack of awareness of how much is thrown away. In this activity, participants will take food waste and display it on a table like a dinner buffet to create a visual statement about food waste.

Outcome

Participants will visualize the amount of food that is regularly put into a garbage container by taking the waste out of the garbage can and displaying it on a table at an event.

Audience

Youth (ages 8+), adults

Time

30 - 90 minutes

Concepts

- Americans waste about 40 percent of the food that is produced in the United States for human consumption each year.
- Wasted food is wasted resources – water, fuel, and energy. It also contributes to pollution, soil erosion and deforestation.
- Displaying food waste at an event can help participants visualize how much food is wasted every day.

Supplies

- 1-2 long rectangular “banquet” tables
- Tablecloth(s)
- White board or chalkboard
- Marker or chalk



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Preparation

- Choose an event for the food waste buffet. Make sure there will be food served at the event so attendees can use their leftover food for the food waste buffet. Choose a location for the buffet in a space that is highly visible but not obtrusive for the flow of traffic; for example near the trash containers, dish room or room exits.
- Recruit two to four volunteers (depending on the length of time for the event) to direct event attendees with their plates of leftover food.

Procedure

- Before the event, set up one or two tables, depending on the number of attendees, covered with a tablecloth. Position the dry-erase board or chalkboard near the table facing in a direction that makes it easy to read. Write a description such as “measuring our food waste” on the board.
- As the event is taking place, have the volunteers take peoples’ plates of leftover food and place the food on the food waste “buffet” tables. Food can be combined with other food to create full plates. Be prepared to answer questions about the purpose of doing this exercise (raising awareness about food waste by making it visible).
- After the event, calculate the amount of food waste by weighing or counting the number of plates of food, and report the results to the event’s attendees or organizer. Another possibility is to calculate the amount of leftover or wasted food generated in the kitchen, such as if the event takes place at a church, school or person’s house.
- Challenge event attendees to reduce their food waste at future events by only taking what they think they will eat and knowing they can go back for more food if they wish. Compare the results of this food waste “buffet” with those of the next event.

Discussion questions

- What new things did you learn?
- What was your reaction to seeing the leftover food? Did you expect to see more? Less?
- Was there any item in particular that people seemed to throw away a lot?
- Thinking about food waste in your household, overall how much food would you say you throw away in general?
- What reasons do you think lead to food getting wasted?
- Thinking about when you throw food away, to what extent does it bother you? A great deal, a fair amount, a little, not very much, not at all.
- What do you want to learn more about?

Additional activity ideas

Volunteer at a food shelf

- Volunteering at a food shelf can put a face on those who are hungry. One in nine Minnesotans struggles with hunger. You can help by volunteering at a food shelf. To find a food shelf near you, go to www.2harvest.org/get-involved/volunteer/ or salvationarmynorth.org/community/twin-cities-metro/community-pages/volunteering-21/.