

Study suggests up to 60 per cent of food is wasted

About eight per cent of annual global greenhouse gas emissions are from food waste



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Almost 60 per cent of all the food produced in Canada is wasted. That was the finding of a study by consultant Value Chain Management International released earlier this year.

While some of this waste is unavoidable (bone, vegetable peelings, coffee grounds), the total financial value of the potentially rescuable wasted food is a staggering \$50 billion in Canada according to the report which was commissioned by Second Harvest, a Toronto-based group working to reduce food waste.

The problem of food waste was the topic of a panel discussion held in New Hamburg and hosted by community group, Nith Valley Ecoboosters. The three speakers on the panel were: Jennifer Pfenning, Director of Human Resources, Operations and Marketing at Pfenning's Organic Farms in New Hamburg, Dr. Alison Blay-Palmer, Director of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at Wilfrid Laurier University, and Dr. Mike von Massow, OAC Chair in Food System Leadership at the University of Guelph.

The award-winning food waste documentary, *Just Eat It*, was also shown at the event.

The good news is that dealing with food waste can help us deal with climate change, said Blay-Palmer. About 8% of annual global greenhouse gas emissions are from food waste, she said. "If food waste were a country, it would come in third after the United States and China in terms of impact on global warming."

The panelists noted that there can be social justice issues around food and food waste. It's not that we don't have enough food to feed the world, said Blay-Palmer. We can do more with what we have, she said.

The Stop, a community food hub in Toronto, has pioneered a new food bank model, said Blay-Palmer. It strives to serve all people in the community

healthy food. The organization, which offers a drop-in meal program, healthy food bank, good food markets, and community kitchen, encourages active involvement in growing produce, cooking, sharing recipes and connecting through food.

The Stop's model is being replicated in other cities and towns across Canada.

Pfenning shared an example from her family's organic vegetable operation which illustrated the complexity of the food waste problem. While campaigns to sell "ugly fruits and vegetables" - those that are less than ideal in appearance - sound good in principle, it can be problematic from the producers' perspective.

Misshapen carrots cost just as much to grow, wash, bag, and truck as carrots that meet the Grade A standards but if the farmer receives only half of the full price, they would be better off left in the field or fed to animals, she said. However, she urged consumers to continue the conversation to drive change.

Von Massow shed light on the food waste problem at the household level. He conducted a food waste research project in Guelph which studied the contents of residents' organic waste bins. On average, single dwelling households were throwing out 5.4 kg of food waste per week in their green bins. (Von Massow noted that some food waste was likely missed since some people throw food in the garbage or flush it down the toilet.)

The waste audit showed that there is no typical household when it comes to food waste which varies considerably between households, said Von Massow. Surveys conducted as part of the study, determined that food awareness, waste awareness, family lifestyles, and convenience lifestyles were related to food waste production.

In the Guelph study, fruits and vegetables made up the bulk of the food waste but there was also some meat. Surprisingly, a lot of the food that was thrown out appeared to be in good condition.

It was also evident that residents were treating Best Before dates on packages as expiry dates.

While the organic waste in Guelph's green bins is composted, von Massow pointed out that it would be a much better use of resources if that food was eaten instead. He also noted that



Organic farmer, Jennifer Pfenning, Wilfrid Laurier University professor, Dr. Alison Blay-Palmer, and University of Guelph professor, Dr. Mike von Massow, participated in a panel discussion on food waste (PHOTO BY LARRY KRYSKI)

green bins can cause people to waste more food since they feel less guilty about throwing it in the green bin than the garbage.

Pfenning urged people to change the way they think about food. We should stop choosing what to eat based on "What am I in the mood for?" and instead think, "What do I have?" She'd also like to see cooking skills taught in schools again. "We need to value home cooking skills," she said.

The Nith Valley Ecoboosters shared some tips for combating food waste in home kitchens.

"Shop your kitchen" first. Check your cupboards, fridge and freezer before you go grocery shopping. This will help you to plan meals and use up all the food and leftovers that you already have. Plan your meals for the week, take a grocery shopping list with you, and stick to it so you only buy what you need.

Have an 'Eat Me First' shelf, bin or basket in the fridge where you put "older" food, leftovers, and foods with a short shelf life that need to be eaten quickly.



A sample of the food waste collected from green bins for the Guelph Food Waste Project (PHOTO SUPPLIED BY THE GUELPH FOOD WASTE PROJECT)

When you buy new food, bring older items to the front of the fridge and put the new food at the back.

Don't overfill your fridge, as air needs to circulate in order to keep your food cold. If your fridge is too full, put some things in the freezer to extend the life of what isn't getting

eaten right away.

Keep your fridge between 1 and 4°C. Up to 70 per cent of fridges are too warm, resulting in food not lasting as long as it should. Use a fridge thermometer to check if you are in doubt. The door is the warmest part of your fridge so don't use it to store milk or cheese.

La Coop fédérée calls for investment

Faced with the challenges and debates facing agriculture and the agri-food industry, La Coop fédérée firmly believes that a sustainable development that is more respectful of 21st century agriculture will require massive investments as well as greater coherence in our daily gestures and actions.

This was the message delivered recently by La Coop fédérée's Chief Executive Officer, Gaétan Desroches, to the Chambre de commerce du

Montréal métropolitain (CCMM). "Our fellow citizens are increasingly concerned about the quality of the food they consume, about sustainable development and preserving the environment. And we should be happy about that."

"The big question is: how to feed ourselves within a sustainable agriculture and agri-food ecosystem? Profound changes will have to happen out in the field and also in the coherence of the consumer's discourse,"

Desroches told the business people and industry players in attendance.

The chief executive officer also cautioned his audience about the culture of mistrust that has developed in recent times towards researchers and research. "This...could put a damper on research. It would be a shame to remain complacent when we need, more than ever, to develop vocations, especially among the younger generation," said Desroches.