



MAKE FOOD FAIR

FEBRUARY 2013

Why the Waste when People are Hungry?

“Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost” Jesus – **John 6:12b**

When it comes to good stewardship, it is clear we're still learning. With as many as one billion people chronically hungry in our world, the quantity of food wasted comes as quite a shock. A recent report by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers estimated that 30–50% (1.2-2 billion tonnes) of all food produced globally never reaches a human stomach.¹ This suggests that land, energy, fertiliser and water are regularly wasted to produce food that no one will eat despite desperate need. It is a tragedy.

How does this come to be, and how does New Zealand fare?

Food waste occurs at multiple points in the supply chain. In developing countries, much is lost due to poor practices in harvesting, storage and transportation as well as difficulty accessing markets. In developed countries consumers and retailers play a larger role. New Zealand

follows the global pattern. By one estimate, New Zealand sends 258,886 tonnes of food to landfill per year.² That's 64kg per person, roughly one third of what we buy. For example, one local supermarket used to throw away up to seven trolleys of bread every day, literally hundreds of loaves. Thank goodness they are now sending it to a food bank.

Consumer preferences about the size and shape of produce mean some crops are never harvested. Further down the supply chain, supermarkets crunch numbers and make calculations that incentivise food waste. They discard older produce which would have to be marked down to make room for fresh produce which can be sold at full price. According to the report between 30% and 50% of food bought in developed countries is thrown away by the purchaser.

Evidence of New Zealand food waste ►►



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“All people have a God-given right to have enough to eat each day, and our world produces more than enough food to feed us all. But hunger exists in both developing and developed countries and for all people to have access to food, we must, individually and together, tackle food waste and eliminate loss.

Lenten Pledge



¹ Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Global Food, Waste Not, Want Not, 2012. <http://www.imeche.org/Libraries/Reports/Global_Food_Report.sflb.ashx>

² Waiheke Resources Trust, “Reducing Household Food Waste”, 2011. <<http://wrt.org.nz/take-action/homes/food/reducing-household-food-was>>



▶▶ is easy to find. Some is the result of retailers' management techniques, discarding damaged products to save time or appearance, or to ensure customers buy full-priced items. Does your local supermarket have a 'marked down produce' bin? What do they do with yesterday's bread? What about dented cans, separated multi-packs, or damaged packets with contents still intact?

Some retailers and restaurants redistribute items responsibly. 'Inevitable' food waste, such as plate scraps or unsold vegetables can go to pig farmers or compost. Useable items (such as dented cans) are often passed on to charities. Even catering leftovers can sometimes be diverted. The growth of organisations that redistribute excess food, such as Fair Food in West Auckland, stop companies sending so much waste to landfill.

In our homes, preventing food waste could save up to one third of the grocery bill. There are simple tips for doing this: rotating food in the fridge, using older food first, planning menus as well as taking care with portion sizes and shopping. Understanding labeling helps too. A UK study found that 55% of people throw out food that has passed its 'best before' date, despite this food

still being safe to eat.³ 'Best before' dates refer to product quality, and food past this date can be eaten and legally sold. 'Use by' dates refer to food safety. Food past its use by date is illegal to sell, and may be unsafe.

Becoming a good steward of food is one way we can be responsible for what we have been given. This covers all manner of resources: money, the natural environment and our food. If we're trying to love our neighbours then 'responsible use' means taking their needs into account. In fact, how we steward our resources becomes a very clear demonstration of our attitude towards them. If we pour unnecessary money, energy and oil into food that is wasted instead of redirecting these resources where we can, we haven't got it right. What does this say about our concern for our neighbour who is hungry? What would these neighbours say if they saw what we throw away?

When we see hunger in our neighbourhoods and around the world we should be grateful for what we have and carefully consider how we use it. By reducing waste

3 Tom Kelly, 'Best-before labels face axe to cut the amount of food we waste', Daily Mail Online, 18 April 2011. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1377752/Best-labels-face-axe-cut-food-waste.html>>



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we will not necessarily put food on others' tables, but it will help us to be grateful and more mindful of others. This may well be the starting point for new action to change the structures that keep people hungry. We can share what we save on our grocery bills with organisations campaigning for food security as a step towards ensuring there is enough for everyone. ●

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REDUCE FOOD WASTE:

- » **Serve small amounts. Ask to take restaurant leftovers home.**
- » **Rotate things in the fridge - use older produce first.**
- » **Buy seconds fruit and vegetables. Consumer pickiness is one reason non-perfect produce is thrown away.**
- » **Use common sense about 'best before' dates, which indicate food quality.⁴**
- » **Ask your supermarket what they are doing to reduce food waste.**
- » **Find out which charities accept good quality surplus food.**

4. Consumer Affairs New Zealand, 'Food labelling - What to look out for' <<http://www.consumeraffairs.govt.nz/news-1/word-of-advice/2008/food-labelling-2013-what-to-look-out-for>>

FOR REFLECTION

1. **Think about how you use the food resources that you have. Are there ways you can cut down on waste? Can you share your blessings?**
2. **Who in your community struggles to find food and water? Why? Can you do something to help?**
3. **What can you do to make sure that more people have enough good food to eat? Discuss with others ways to support groups like CEPAD helping people grow their own food and why this is important.**