

Small Habits, Big Impact: Tackling Food Waste Together

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Food waste may not be perceived as problematic; many of us don't even pay attention to how much waste we generate. However, it turns out the food we throw away, whether mindlessly or consciously, has detrimental impacts on our planet. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, nearly one-third of food produced globally is wasted every year and a large proportion of that waste is the result of household or consumer food waste.



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One major reason food waste can be harmful is because it ends up in land-fill sites where substantial quantities of waste accumulate over time. Subsequently, this waste decomposes, emitting the highly potent greenhouse gas, methane (a gas roughly 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat) which significantly contributes to global warming and climate change. Food waste also has other environmental consequences. Land is cleared, leading to deforestation and habitat destruction to make room for more land-fills and also to grow the food that ultimately goes to waste. Additionally, energy is spent on the transport and collection of discarded food, and in the production process itself, which typically relies on energy derived from fossil fuels. Burning these fossil fuels releases harmful

pollutants into the atmosphere. In other words, the food wasted would have unnecessarily undergone production which gave rise to pollution. Further, food waste doesn't only impact the environment; it affects us financially, as we purchase excess food that we don't even consume creating a financial loss. Minimizing food waste, therefore, benefits both the environment and our budgets.



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Food wastage occurs at various stages of the food supply chain. For instance, food can be discarded by retailers or during production if standards aren't met. Household waste is an important aspect to focus on, because it's within the control of the vast majority of us. In a survey I conducted on the food waste behaviours of university students in Melbourne, food waste at the household level was mainly driven by poor-planning, over-buying food and inadequate storage. The tendency to waste food arises as a result of busy lifestyles, constraining people to choose convenience over environmental well-being.

There are numerous sustainable practices that we can implement to address these causes. Given that poor planning and over-buying were identified as key drivers of household waste, meal planning is an effective strategy to minimize waste through simply purchasing adequate amounts of food rather than excess. Another practice is composting, which involves collecting waste into a separate bin known as a composting bin to be

converted into useful compost for gardening. Paying close attention to “best before” or “expiry” dates is also an important habit, as overlooking them leads to tremendous waste in households. Simply keeping an eye on these dates helps prevent spoilage of food. Moreover, many throw away leftovers without realizing the number of different approaches they could have taken to use them. Leftovers can be refrigerated or frozen for extended periods of time, preventing spoilage and they can be repurposed creatively like turning rice into fried rice or fruit into smoothies limiting unnecessary waste.

In conclusion, reducing food waste can start with the adoption of simple habits, and as more people begin to practise these sustainable behaviours, they can collectively create a strong impact. Together, these habits can minimize damage to the environment as well as household spending. Every time you save food, you take a step towards creating a more sustainable environment.



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