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Exploring Food Waste Issues Summer 2024

## Grocery Stores Report Significant Progress In Reducing Food Waste, New Study Finds

The Four-Year Analysis From The Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment Represents The "Best-In-Class" Dataset For Tracking Retail Food Waste

[ReFED Blog April 4, 2024] – A [new study](#) from the [Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment](#) shows that grocery retailers made the most significant progress ever reported in the United States on reducing food waste in the retail sector. The analysis shows that over the four-year period from 2019 to 2022 (the latest year for which data is available), grocery retailers decreased the number of tons of unsold food in their regional operations by 25%—nearly 190,000 tons of food valued at \$311 million—which represents a decrease in the amount of food at risk of going to waste. Most unsold food typically ends up going to waste destinations like landfill, where it decomposes and generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Yet in addition to the decrease in the amount of unsold food, the study also identified positive trends for where that unsold food ended up, including a 20% increase in the rate of unsold food being donated and a 28% increase in the rate of unsold food getting composted. Significantly, the analysis found that the four-year decline in unsold food led to an estimated 30% decrease in the total carbon footprint of unsold food in the region—the equivalent to taking nearly 270,000 passenger vehicles off the road annually.

In the United States, 38% of food goes unsold or uneaten throughout the food system, with the majority of this becoming food waste. Across the country, the grocery retail sector generates nearly six million tons of unsold food, which includes all food that went unsold in each grocery store food department, including both edible food and inedible scraps (pits, peels, etc.). The data in this study serves as the most recent analysis of retail food waste, as well as the longest year-over-year aggregated dataset in the country, making it "best in class" for benchmarking and tracking progress for food waste reduction initiatives in the U.S. grocery retail sector. (Access the full analysis [here](#).)

"This is hands down the largest progress in reducing food waste we've ever seen reported. It demonstrates that the national goal to cut food waste in half by 2030 may, in fact, be possible—but we would need dramatically more action across all food system sectors for that to happen," said Dana Gunders, Executive Director at ReFED. "It's also particularly exciting to see the holistic nature of this progress. We're not only seeing prevention numbers that far exceeded our expectations, but we're also seeing increases in donations and composting. I really applaud our retail partners for the enormous effort they've put in—individually and as part of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment—to achieve this win for people and the planet."

Using anonymized data provided by reporting retail signatories of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment—a public-private partnership between food businesses and jurisdictions along the Pacific Coast of the U.S.—the study determined Unsold Food Rates, Tons of Unsold Food, and the subsequent impacts, including lost sales and meal equivalents, as well as footprints for carbon and water usage. The study's reported decline in unsold food occurred alongside many operational changes within the retail sector during the study period due to the Covid pandemic, global supply chain disruptions, and significant inflation that raised food prices. In addition, many of the retailers in the study implemented specific strategies to reduce their waste—including sharing best practices with their peers in working groups hosted by the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment and testing food waste solutions in their operations. (See all pilot projects and case studies [here](#).)

"Reducing food waste throughout our supply chain has been a long-standing priority for Albertsons Companies, which is why we're proud to partner with the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment on this important issue to our industry and society," said Suzanne Long, Chief Sustainability and Transformation Officer for Albertsons Cos. "As part of our Recipe for Change framework, we're working to eliminate food waste going to landfill in our operations. In addition to donating unsold food, we've implemented several tactics to reach this goal such as working with Afresh to implement their artificial intelligence-based technology to help us order the right produce in the right quantities; partnering with Uber to address local donation pickup challenges through sponsored delivery at select stores; and for food that can't be sold or donated, diverting that food to animal feed, anaerobic digestion or composting. By working together with our suppliers and our industry, we can make significant strides to reduce food waste in our country."

According to the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment study, the food departments with the most unsold food were Prepared Foods (8.33% of total) and Breads & Bakery (8.06%). The high retail value of food from these departments represents an important opportunity for retailers to save money through food waste reduction; indeed, Prepared Foods accounted for 22.4% and Breads & Bakery for 15.8% of the total retail value of unsold food. The study's analysis of unsold food destinations identified a 20% increase in the amount of unsold food being donated, which suggests an encouraging trend—that even as the overall amount of unsold food decreases, donations have remained an important priority for retailers. Also encouraging is the decrease in the amount of food reported as going to an "unknown" destination rate, which indicates that retailers are becoming more accurate in tracking and reporting waste within their operations.

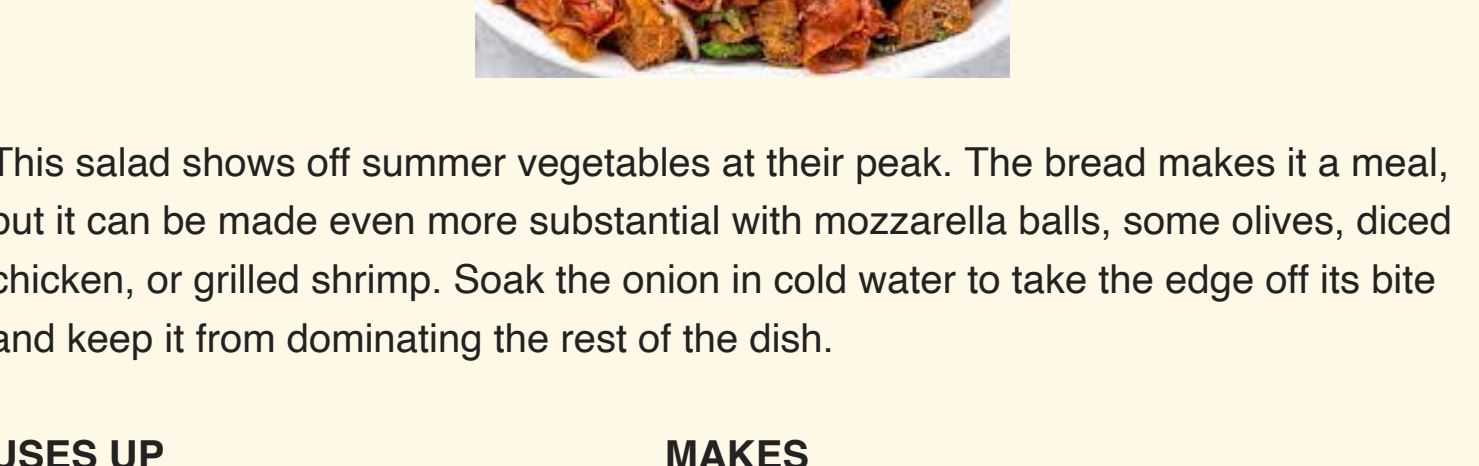
At the heart of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment's mission is the conviction that robust data collection is indispensable for any successful food waste reduction strategy. Understanding the dynamics of food waste—its origins, causes, and trends—allows for more effective, targeted, and efficient interventions. Using the "Target-Measure-Act" framework for global food waste reduction initiatives, the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment supports participating retailers in tracking and reporting their waste, then uses the aggregated and anonymized data to identify where attention is needed the most.

"Since its inception, the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment has operated under the belief that pre-competitive collaboration among food businesses is essential for overcoming barriers to reducing food waste and accelerating solutions adoption," said Jackie Suggitt, ReFED's Director of Capital, Innovation, & Engagement. "The data shared in this report represents a collaborative effort among businesses to identify food waste hotspots to address, as well as a celebration of progress they are making. It's a benefit not only for signatories of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment, but for retailers across the country who can learn from this publicly released information."

Nongroups ReFED, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and WRAP serve as resource partners for the effort, with Cascadia Policy Solutions serving as facilitator. Through robust data tracking and analysis, working groups, and intervention projects, the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment—an initiative of the [Pacific Coast Collaborative](#)—is collaborating with food businesses operating on the West Coast to reduce food waste in the region by 50% by 2030, a success metric aligned with other global, national, and regional commitments. Building on the success of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment, the recently launched [U.S. Food Waste Pact](#) uses a similar pre-competitive model to drive food waste progress on a national level.

"When the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment launched, these are exactly the type of results we envisioned," said Alex Nichols-Vinueza, Program Manager, Food Loss and Waste at World Wildlife Fund. "Our retail partners have provided a roadmap for success by tackling their own food waste footprint while sharing best practices to ensure others—often their competitors—also succeed. With meaningful progress on the Pacific Coast, we now have a blueprint that can be replicated across the country."

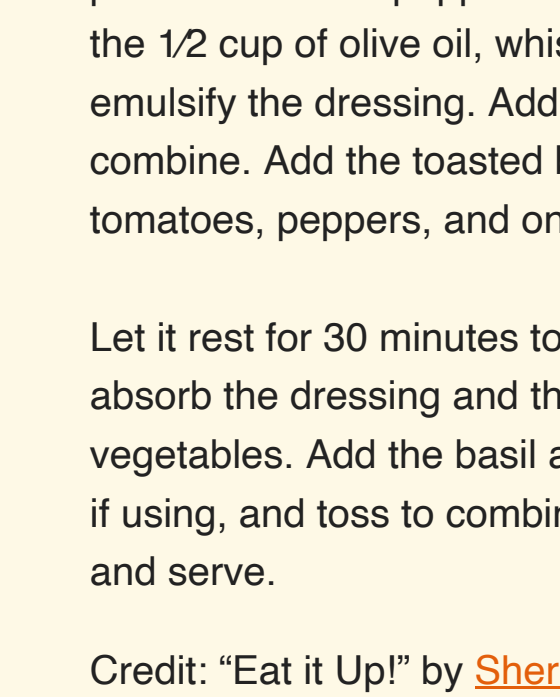
Current Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment retail signatories are Albertsons Companies, ALDI, The Kroger Co., New Seasons Market, PCC Community Markets, Raley's, Sprouts, and Walmart. Participating Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment jurisdictions include the U.S. states of California, Oregon, and Washington, along with British Columbia, Canada; plus the cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, as well as Alameda County in California and King County in Washington.



Shopping your fridge first is an important strategy for reducing food waste. Here's a recipe idea that will help you use what you have before buying more!

### Panzanella

THE SECRET INGREDIENT TO THIS BRIGHT DISH? STALE BREAD.



This salad shows off summer vegetables at their peak. The bread makes it a meal, but it can be made even more substantial with mozzarella balls, some olives, diced chicken, or grilled shrimp. Soak the onion in cold water to take the edge off its bite and keep it from dominating the rest of the dish.

**USES UP** Stale Bread and Summer Veggies  
**MAKES** 8-10 servings

- INGREDIENTS**
- 1 loaf stale bread (cut into 1-in cubes)
  - 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons olive oil
  - 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
  - 2 Tbsp red wine vinegar
  - Salt and freshly ground black pepper
  - 1 Tbsp capers
  - 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and cut into 1-inch dice
  - 2 large tomatoes, seeded and cut into 1-inch dice
  - 1 green bell pepper, seeds and ribs removed, cut into 1-inch dice
  - 1 yellow bell pepper (or another green pepper), seeds and ribs removed, cut into 1-inch dice
  - 1 small red onion, thinly sliced, soaked in cold water for 5 minutes, and drained
  - 1 handful of basil leaves, torn
  - Additional ingredients, such as olives, fresh mozzarella cut into cubes, diced grilled chicken, or grilled shrimp (optional)

**DIRECTIONS**

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Drizzle the bread cubes with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until beginning to brown. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely.

In a large bowl, whisk the mustard, vinegar, and a pinch of salt and pepper to combine. Slowly drizzle in the 1/2 cup of olive oil, whisking constantly to emulsify the dressing. Add the capers and stir to combine. Add the toasted bread cubes, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, and onion and toss to combine.

Let it rest for 30 minutes to allow the bread cubes to absorb the dressing and the water from the vegetables. Add the basil and additional ingredients, if using, and toss to combine. Adjust the seasoning and serve.

Credit: "Eat It Up!" by [Sherri Brooks-Vinton](#), Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2016

## FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVE THE FOOD.COM

**DAIRY, EGGS**

**EGGS**

**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes

**AT FRESHEST:** Fresh, 3 to 5 weeks after sell-by date; freezer, 12 months; hard-boiled, 1 week.

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Keep in a cold part of the refrigerator in their original carton (not in the door, even if there's a space for them—it is too warm).

**FREEZING:** Eggs should not be frozen in their shells. Lightly beaten eggs can be frozen in an airtight container, with 1-in/2.5-cm headspace, or sealed in a zip-top bag with as much air removed as possible. Yolks can be frozen alone if mixed with 1 tsp salt per 1 pt/480 ml, and whites can be frozen without salt.

**USE IT UP/REIVAL:** Cracked eggs should be placed into a clean, airtight container and used within 2 days. If you're not sure when it cracked, it's best to discard the egg. As eggs age, the whites will thin and the yolks will flatten, but the nutritional value will not diminish. Older egg whites are actually better for whipping up into a voluminous meringue than fresh egg whites. Egg grades (such as A and AA) are a reflection of how well the yolk and white hold together and the appearance of the shells, not size or flavor. Frittatas make quick work of extra eggs (and anything else in your fridge).

**EGG SUBSTITUTES**

**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes

**AT FRESHEST:** Fresh, unopened, 10 days; opened, 3 days; frozen, 12 months; thawed, 7 days

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Store in a cold part of the refrigerator, sealed in the original container. If the original container is not airtight once opened, transfer to an airtight container to extend life.

**FREEZING:** Freeze in the original unopened package. Freeze portions in zip-top bags with the air removed. Once thawed, do not refreeze.

**USE IT UP/REIVAL:** Egg substitutes can be used just as you'd use traditional eggs, so if you're nearing the expiration of your egg substitute, bake up some cookies or make a seasonal fritata.

**MILK**

**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes (if in a shelf-stable carton, refrigerate after opening)

**AT FRESHEST:** Pasteurized, 1 week beyond sell-by date; freezer, 3 months; shelf-stable carton, unopened, 6 months; opened, 7 to 10 days

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Keep milk in a cold part of the refrigerator (not the door), closed in its original container. It keeps its flavor better in opaque, sealable containers. Milk that comes in a shelf-stable carton has gone through ultrahigh-temperature pasteurization and can be stored in the pantry until opened, then refrigerated.

**FREEZING:** Milk can be frozen, but it will separate if left frozen for long periods. Low-fat and nonfat milk separate less than whole milk. Thawed milk is best for cooking or baking purposes. Freeze in airtight containers, leaving 1-in/2.5-cm headspace. You can also freeze it in ice-cube trays, then seal the frozen cubes in a zip-top freezer bag. Thaw in the refrigerator. Do not freeze again once thawed.

**USE IT UP/REIVAL:** Sour milk can still be used in all sorts of recipes, such as baked goods, pancakes, homemade cottage cheese, cream fillings, etc. Milk will smell or taste bad before it would make you sick, making a sniff test a good method for evaluation. Do not return unused milk to the original container. Store it in its own airtight container instead. Nomadic Asian people used to ferment milk into an alcoholic drink called koumiss, described by Marco Polo as having "the qualities and flavor of white wine."

**MILK SUBSTITUTES**

**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes. If in shelf-stable carton, refrigerate only once opened.

**AT FRESHEST:** Shelf-stable carton, unopened, up to 12 months; refrigerated packaging, unopened, 7 to 10 days; opened, once opened, 5 to 7 days

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** In the pantry, store in a cool, dry spot. Once in the refrigerator, store sealed in the original carton in the middle of the refrigerator, where the temperatures are not too warm or too cold.

**FREEZING:** Freeze for cooking or baking purposes. Freeze in airtight containers, leaving 1-in/2.5-cm headspace. You can also freeze in ice-cube trays, then seal the frozen cubes into a zip-top freezer bag. Thaw in the refrigerator. Do not freeze again once thawed.

**USE IT UP/REIVAL:** Milk substitutes are great in place of milk in most recipes, so if you're nearing or just past the expiration date, make a smoothie or pancakes or pudding.

## Quick Tricks! Brought To You By: NEBRASKA EXTENSION

**QUICK TRICKS**

Food tossed is money lost. One way to add new life to still edible foods is to repurpose leftovers and reuse them in new ways and new recipes. This booklet will get you started with simple tips and recipes. You'll find "recycled" can taste just as good, maybe even better than the original recipe.

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN Extension Educator

**QUICK TRICKS**

**GRAINS**

Use older bread to make croutons, bread crumbs, bread pudding, stratas and French toast.

Use leftover rice in stir-fried rice, pudding and rice bowls.

Heat leftover pasta in a pan over medium heat with some olive oil. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Add a little extra pizzazz by topping the pasta with fresh herbs.

**FRUITS**

Freeze lemon or lime juice in ice cube trays. Transfer to freezer bags. Pop into water for flavored water. NOTE: It's easier to remove frozen food from silicone ice cube trays and muffin pans than plastic trays or metal pans as silicon is more flexible.

Roll citrus fruits with your hand on a hard surface before juicing to get more juice from them.

Refrigerate ripe bananas to make them last a few days longer. They may be brown on the outside, but still a good color on the inside.

Freeze lemon slices in water in cupcake pans for large, flavored ice cubes.

Freeze washed, peeled, bite-size pieces of fruit for smoothies. Place on a baking sheet with sides and cover with plastic wrap. Transfer frozen pieces to freezer bags. Toss into smoothies.

For more waste reducing tips, go to: [www.food.usd.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf](http://www.food.usd.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf)

