

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Wasted Food is Paychecks in the Garbage

Can you afford to throw one third of your paycheck in the garbage every week? Probably not! But that's what we're doing as a country with all the food we waste! Years ago a common order around many homes was "Stop wasting ...!" It might have been stop wasting water, or electricity, or food. We were told to not waste the food on our plates because "there were starving children in China." (What that had to do with food I didn't want to eat I never did figure out!) But our parents were much more aware of waste, maybe because they had to live through many tough years.

As the economics of the country improved we've become a lot less concerned about wasted food. Between 30% and 40% of the food in this country is never eaten! If you're not eating almost half of what you buy, that's a huge dent in your pocket book! Eat all of what you buy and you'll need to buy a lot less. You'll have money to spend on whatever else you'd like but can't afford right now. Here are some tips that might help.

Know what the dates on food packages mean. Those 'Best by...' or 'Sell by...' dates are NOT about food safety! They're the manufacturer's idea of how long the food will *taste and look* its best. The food is usually **safe** long after those dates. But a 'Use by...' date does refer to safety. Meat, fish and poultry can be cooked up to that date and frozen if you can't eat right away. By Florida law, **milk must be good for at least 4 days after the date on the carton**. Don't dump it down the drain on the carton date, drink it! Cook with it! Use it up!

If you can, stop at the supermarket on your way home from work more often. Yes, *more often*. You're more likely to have a good idea of what's going on tonight and tomorrow than the middle of next week. If you only buy what you know you'll need and eat in the next 2 days you're more likely to buy just enough, not too much.

Buy smaller amounts of fresh milk, produce and meats each time you shop. About 1/3 of all the meat, poultry and fish we bought last year was wasted. About 30% of the vegetables and fruits, and 17% of the milk and dairy products we bought never made it into our mouths. Just get a little each time, and use them quickly.

When you can, buy frozen or canned fruits and veggies. Choose those that don't have added salt, sugar or fats. Frozen or canned will keep if you don't get around to eating it when you planned. Fresh produce that's too old ends up in the garbage can.

When you eat out, order smaller portions or fewer items. Share a plate with your dining companions. Or get the take-out box right away so you can box untouched food to take home. Then get it home and refrigerated quickly.

Check your refrigerator. If you don't have a thermometer in it, get one. Adjust the controls so that it holds the temperature to 37°F to 40°F. If food is warmer than 40°F it will spoil faster. Milk will sour, produce will rot, meat will get slimy. But if it's too cold then some produce will be damaged. Lettuce will turn brown, pears and pineapple will get dark and mushy inside. These are signs of too-cold storage. And some things, such as tomatoes and bananas, don't belong in the refrigerator at all.

Keep an eye on what goes into your refrigerator, and get it used up. Some families have 'leftover days'. Each person can choose what they want of the leftovers in the 'fridge, and everyone has a different dinner. Or the cook looks at what's there and creates a dinner from whatever is available. Get creative. Or use one of the recipe apps that will give you ideas for your list of ingredients.

Here's a delicious way to use up some stray vegetables. Add chopped cooked chicken if you want to make it a full meal. Enjoy!

Veggie Casserole

1 pound yellow squash, sliced	1 (10-oz) can cream of chicken soup
1 pound zucchini, sliced	1 cup light or fat free sour cream
1 pound carrots, shredded	½ cup low fat milk
1 onion, finely chopped	½ cup (1 stick) margarine, melted
¼ cup water	½ cup shredded Cheddar cheese
1 (8-oz) pkg seasoned stuffing mix	salt, pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°F. Combine vegetables and water in 4-qt microwave-safe dish. Microwave 4-8 minutes, until tender. Drain. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside 1 cup of stuffing mix. Combine rest of stuffing and all remaining ingredients in bowl. Stir into vegetables. Sprinkle saved stuffing over top and bake 30-40 minutes until browned and bubbly. Serves 16.

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