

FIGHTING FOOD WASTE

Students at a school in Maryland are cutting down on food waste—and giving back to those in need.



Students at Lincoln Elementary collect uneaten food in their cafeteria.

Then a local rescue mission picks it up.



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ONLINE!

Find out what else goes to waste in the U.S.



They inspect, log, and pack the food.

AS YOU READ

How can you reduce food waste in your own life?

Think about the last meal you had in your school cafeteria. Did you finish all the food on your tray? If not, a juicy apple or a container of milk likely ended up in the trash.

The students and staff at Lincoln Elementary School in Frederick, Maryland, are trying to stop that from happening in their cafeteria. They learned that their uneaten food could be used to help people in need—and the environment.

Helping Hand

Throwing away food is wasteful in many ways. For one thing, that food could help the hungry. In 2018, more than 37 million Americans didn't always have access to food they could afford.

That's why the staff at Lincoln started a share table in the school cafeteria. Students place items like unpeeled bananas and unopened yogurt on it. Then they pack the food into coolers and donate it to a local organization that provides meals for the homeless.

"You just feel happy inside because you're helping other people," says Lincoln fifth-grader Eliseo Sanchez.

On average, elementary school students in the U.S. toss about
37 cartons of milk
each per year.



Wasteful Ways

The students at Lincoln are also helping to prevent more food waste from ending up in a **landfill**.

"Every year, we throw away about 40 percent of all the food grown in the U.S.," explains Roni Neff. She's a food waste expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.

There are many reasons why food gets tossed. Farmers often dump fruits and veggies that are bruised or oddly shaped. Customers aren't as likely to buy these "ugly" foods.

Supermarkets also play a role. Many stores throw away damaged cans and boxes that contain perfectly **edible** food. Or they sell oversized packages of food, some of which is likely to go to waste.

But who's mainly to blame for all the wasted food? It's individual consumers—even though we may not realize it.

WORDS TO KNOW

landfill *noun*. an area where waste is buried

edible *adjective*. safe to eat

A Big Problem

All this food waste equals bad news for the planet. When food rots in landfills, it releases methane. This gas traps some of the sun's heat in Earth's atmosphere, which warms the planet.

Tossing an uneaten apple in the trash isn't just wasting food.

It also wasting other resources—from the water used to grow it to fuel used by the truck that delivered it to the grocery store.



Make a Change

Lincoln Elementary began its program in January. Each day, more than 150 items, such as packaged sandwiches, milk, fruit cups, and more, are given to the Frederick Rescue Mission. The group uses the food to provide free breakfast to people in need in the community.

The program has made students more aware of what they eat—and don't eat. Eleven-year-old Lily Frizen now avoids

overloading her plate, both in school and at home.

"I know it changed me a lot," Lily says. "It'll change you too."

—by Alessandra Potenza



What YOU Can Do

Track your food. If you realize you often put more on your plate than you eat, change that habit.

Enjoy today's leftovers for tomorrow's lunch or dinner.

Talk to the adults in your family about donating extra packaged food to a food bank or homeless shelter.

Recycle natural foods, like fruits or veggies that have gone bad, by composting. When composted food decays, it turns into a natural fertilizer that helps plants grow.