** A Sustainable Choice: Food Waste**

Did you know that annual emissions from food in U.S. landfills are estimated to equal the emissions of 42 coal-fired power plants? Food waste is a climate issue. A recent study estimates that in 2017 roughly a third of food was lost during harvest, storage and transportation or wasted by consumers; this wasted food released greenhouse gases equivalent to 9.3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, about half the global food system's total emissions. Food waste also affects our pocketbooks: the average American consumer throws away about $1300 a year in wasted food. So, help the planet and your pocketbook.

What steps can you take to reduce food waste?

* Purchase only what you need! Try to use what’s in your refrigerator or freezer before going to the grocery store.
* Recognize that “best by”, “best if used before”, etc. dates on foods are not to be taken literally. Except for infant formula, the U.S. Government does not require dates on food. Use your senses – smell, sight, taste, to determine if an item is ok. The USDA says that canned goods can last for years no matter the “best by” date, unless the can is opened, dented or rusty.
* Unsafe storage and contamination of food is most likely to occur after a purchase (ex: hot cars or unsanitary countertops). But as long as food doesn’t have pathogens to begin with the pathogens won’t suddenly appear after the expiration date.
* DO pay attention to expiration dates on deli meats, non-pasteurized cheeses, smoked seafood, and any premade sandwiches with those ingredients.
* If you’re unsure of something, look up reliable sources online. Is there mold on your cheese? Depending on the type of cheese, you can eat it, or cut the moldy area off. Is your milk curdled? If it’s pasteurized, it’s still usable – bake a sour cream cake, perhaps.
* Is there a bad spot on a vegetable or fruit? In some produce that means the entire item is bad; in other vegetables or fruits, you can just cut the rotten area off.
* Freeze leftovers that you don’t plan to eat in 2-3 days.
* If you cannot compost, perhaps subscribe to a food waste pickup service such as Back to Earth composting services.
* Related Fact: Vegans emit 1/15 the methane of meat eaters.
* Much food waste happens when produce doesn’t meet consumer expectations – perhaps abnormally shaped, or with surface damage. If available, seek these fruits and veggies.
* Have fun!

*Deb Faulkner, Sustainability Committee*