

Tackling Food Waste to Fight Hunger and Climate Change



ICCR's food group members advocate for sustainable food production policies that minimize environmental and social impacts, and respect the universal right to food. Each year, approximately 40% of food produced in the U.S. — nearly 133 billion pounds, or \$165 billion dollars' worth — goes uneaten. These are troubling figures when you consider that nearly 50 million Americans, (including 16 million children) go to bed hungry each night and that a 15% reduction in industrial food waste could generate enough food to feed 25 million people each year.

Beyond the lost opportunity to feed the hungry, most food waste goes directly into landfills where, through decomposition, it produces dangerous greenhouses gas emissions responsible for driving climate change. In fact, food waste in landfills is responsible for 23% of all methane emissions and 4.5% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Food waste also includes precious natural resources, accounting for 25% of water, 30% of fertilizer, and 31% of cropland wastage in the U.S.

This fall, ICCR members began tackling food waste by sending letters to thirteen companies, including Brinker International, Buffalo Wild Wings, Costco, Cracker Barrel, Healthcare Services Group, Hilton Worldwide, McDonald's, Papa John's, Restaurant Brands, Supervalu, Texas Roadhouse, and the Wendy's Company, inviting them to discuss the issue and begin to develop strategies to reduce these inefficiencies. The work is being done in collaboration with Trillium Asset Management and Ceres.

Separately, ICCR members that are large, institutional purchasers of food, such as hospital systems, have begun to educate their procurement departments about these concerns and are using their influence as customers by bringing food service companies like Aramark into the conversation.

Pending food waste regulation should

also serve as an impetus for companies to proactively address the issue. California, Massachusetts and Vermont already have laws requiring large producers of organic waste to divert it from landfills, creating potential regulatory risk for retailers who lack formal food waste programs. At the federal level, Maine Congresswoman Chellie Pingree is currently drafting a bill targeting food waste at the consumer level, in schools, grocery stores and restaurants, and throughout federal government. And in September, the USDA and EPA announced the first national food waste reduction target calling for a 50% reduction by 2030.

"Food waste is a complex and far-reaching issue that poses significant business and regulatory risks," said Nadira Narine, ICCR Program Director. "And yet, there are numerous, measurable ways that companies can reduce food waste within their operations, and in doing so, realize significant cost savings and enhanced profitability with meaningful impact on society and the environment."

There are a number of practical steps companies can take immediately to reduce food waste within their supply chains, including:

- Conducting audits to determine the causes, quantity and destination of food waste
- Composting as a part of waste minimization
- Recycling organic waste and rotisserie oil, if applicable

Several companies are already reaping financial rewards from enhanced efficiency efforts. The Stop & Shop supermarket chain has reportedly saved \$100 million annually by reducing losses of perishables while providing items that were 3 days fresher. Similarly, Price Chopper reduced bakery item losses by \$2 million in one year, while increasing sales by 3%.

Said Noah Klein-Markman, Senior Associate for Sustainable Agriculture at Ceres, "Measuring and setting goals to reduce food waste is an important way for companies to reduce emissions, save money, and help feed those in need."

Momentum to address food waste is building among companies across multiple sectors. A number of companies are pursuing comprehensive action to reduce food waste and others are committing to waste reduction targets. The 400 corporate members of the Consumer Goods Forum including brands such as Danone, Facebook and Hershey's, have committed to halving food waste by 2025. And Safeway, Target, and Kroger have joined top brands such as Campbell's, ConAgra, Darden and General Mills as members of the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, a collaborative industry effort representing food and beverage manufacturers, food retailers and food service companies, to develop industry best practices to combat food waste.