the environmental center

February 18, 2025

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 3018 - Support

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Levy, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of The Environmental Center in Bend, Oregon in support of HB 3018, the composting and food labeling bill.

For over 30 years, The Environmental Center has worked to embed sustainability into daily life in Central Oregon. Currently, through our program areas of climate solutions, youth education, school gardens, materials and waste, and advocacy. The Environmental Center's Rethink Waste Project conducts education and engagement, and implements innovative solutions throughout Deschutes County to first prevent and reduce waste, then recover as much as possible.

Here's why we enthusiastically support composting at large commercial food waste generators:

Largest source of waste
Here in Deschutes County, food waste makes up the largest category of waste at Knott Landfill, estimated at around 34,000 tons a year.[1] If helpful to visualize, that's equal to 18,000 Subarus!

Climate consequences
Food generates 58% of fugitive methane emissions in landfills.[2] Since methane is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide, landfilled food has the impact of 15 coal-fired power plants.[3] Composting food results in 38 to 84 percent fewer emissions than tossing it in landfills.[4]

[1] https://ktvz.com/news/environment/2023/04/10/how-much-food-are-you-throwing-away-take-note-during-food-waste-prevention-week/
[2] U.S. EPA: Quantifying Methane Emissions from Landfilled Food Waste, October 2023. EPA-600-R-23-064.
[3] https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-06/epa_usda_methane_and_food_waste_fact_sheet.pdf
[4] Pérez, T., Vergara, S.E. & Silver, W.L. Assessing the climate change mitigation potential from food waste composting. Sci Rep 13, 7608 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-34174-z

Outsized impact
We have more than 600 food service establishments, but to our knowledge, less than 50 commercial composting accounts. Even with 200,000 residents, those 600 food service establishments likely still contribute an outsized 34% of food waste to our landfill.[5]

Costly
Knott Landfill is expected to be full in 2029.[6] Just the "initial development" costs for the new site are estimated at $50 to $64 million.[7] These are directly and indirectly paid by ratepayers and residents. Here's an opportunity to slow down filling up our landfills *and* save folks money.

In addition, we were also glad to see the food labeling standardization included in the bill.

In our Food Waste Prevention Workshops, we have a section specifically dedicated to "Deciphering Dates" (see attachment). Sell By, Best By, and Use By dates all mean different things – but NONE of them mean, as most people believe, that the food is no longer safe to eat. More clear & standardized labeling would prevent food waste, save folks money (food waste costs the average Oregon family $1,800 a year), and make it less confusing for all.

We urge you to support HB 3018 to prevent food waste, reduce methane emissions, save folks money, and help sequester carbon by employing nature's cycle to turn it into nutrient-rich soil.

Sincerely,

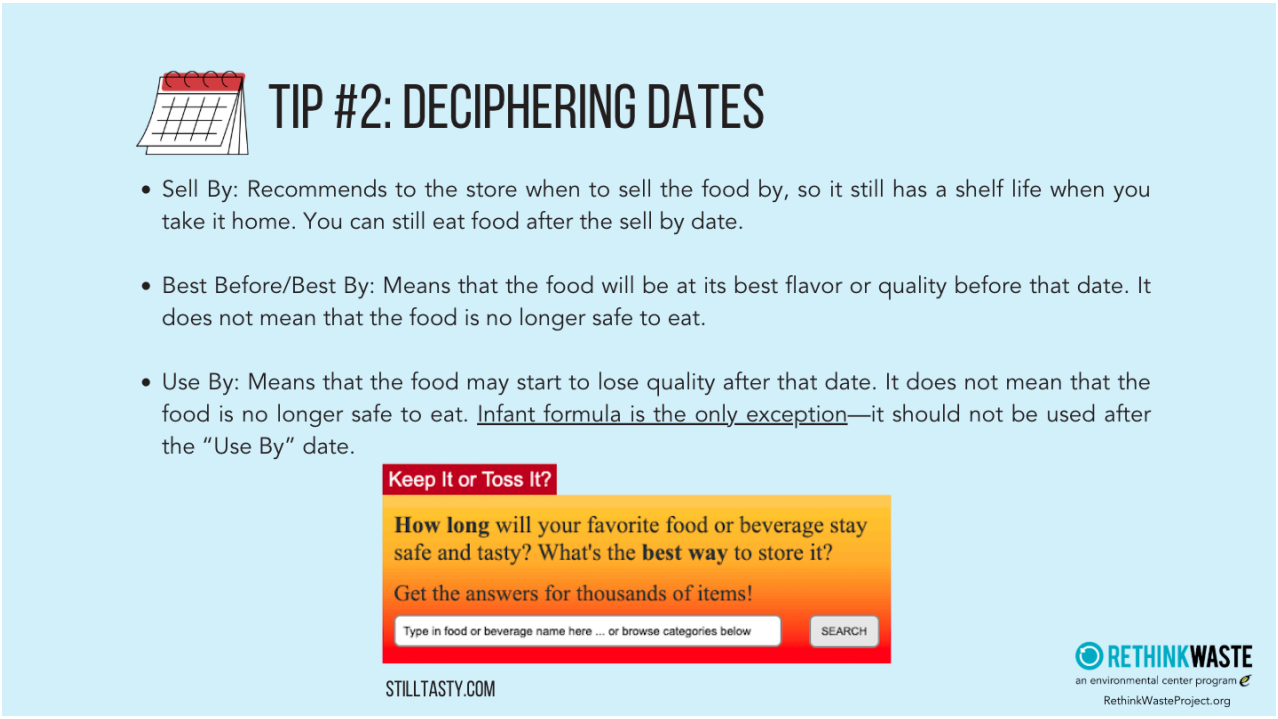
Kavi Chokshi *(he/him)*
Rethink Waste Program Manager
The Environmental Center

P.S. Attached are a few sample educational materials and some additional relevant supporting information from the USDA and EPA.

[5] Venkat K. The Climate Change and Economic Impacts of Food Waste in the United States. Int. J. Food Syst. Dyn. 2011;2:431–446. doi: 10.18461/ijfsd.v2i4.247.
[6] https://www.deschutes.org/solidwaste
[7] https://www.opb.org/article/2024/07/10/landfill-deschutes-county-trash-recycling-central-oregon-waste-environment-pollution/

Samples of "Deciphering Dates" Education Materials

Food Waste Prevention Workshop



Rethink Food Waste Challenge

Deciphering Food Date Labels

Food date labels have little to do with safety and are only loosely related to quality. Many foods will still be good to eat well after those dates. None of these dates mean that something should necessarily be thrown out. The best thing to do? Use your nose and your eyes!

A few exceptions are infant formula and things labeled as nutritional supplements have federally regulated dates and should not be used after their use by dates.

- **Sell By:** Recommends to the store when to sell the food by, so it still has a shelf life when you take it home. You can still eat food after the sell by date.
- **Best Before/Best By:** Means that the food will be at its best flavor or quality before that date. It does not mean that the food is no longer safe to eat.
- **Use By:** Means that the food may start to lose quality after that date. It does not mean that the food is no longer safe to eat.

LOVE FOOD, NOT WASTE

Did you know 1/3 of all food is wasted?

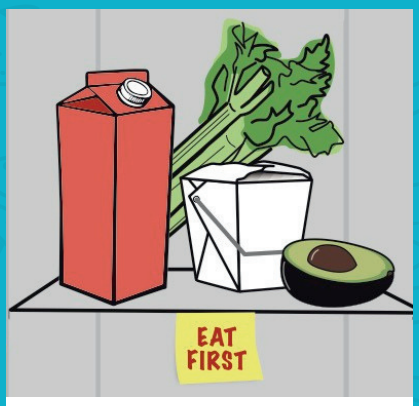
Wasted food uses the same energy and water as 50 million homes

Food makes up the most waste at Knott Landfill = 34,000 tons/yr (~18,000 Subarus!)

Food waste costs average family $1,800/yr

Food waste emits more greenhouse gases than 42 coal-fired power plants

Reduce food waste with these tips!

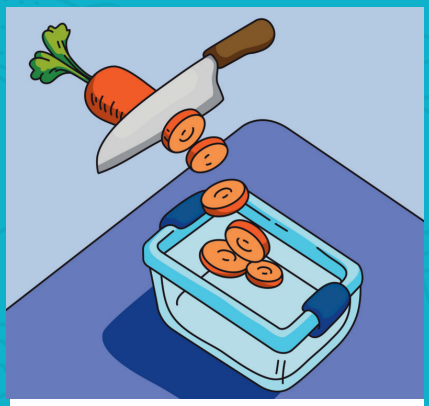


Eat First

Have an "eat first" area in your fridge or pantry. Shop what you have before buying new!

Plan Ahead

Make a meal plan and a list before you head to the store... then stick to it!



Prep + Store

Store your food properly to make it last longer, and freeze what you can for later.

Prevent what you can... and Compost the Rest!

If you live in Bend, Redmond, or Sisters, you can add food waste to your curbside yard debris bin. Contact your hauler to sign up. If you live elsewhere, or have the means, consider backyard composting.

Learn more and take the Food Waste Challenge!

RethinkWasteProject.org

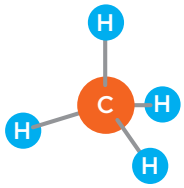
RETHINKWASTE

an environmental center program

USDA U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Food Waste and Methane: What's the Connection?



What is methane and why is it important?

Methane (CH_4) is a greenhouse gas (GHG) and its presence in the atmosphere affects the earth's temperature and climate system. Both natural and human activities produce methane emissions. For example, agricultural activities (e.g., ruminants, manure, and rice), waste management (e.g., landfills and wastewater treatment), fossil fuel extraction and transport, wetlands, and open biomass burning all produce methane.[1] Methane is also a primary component of natural gas.

Methane is 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO_2) at trapping heat in the atmosphere and is responsible for approximately 30% of the increase in global temperature since the Industrial Revolution.[2,3] Over the last two centuries, atmospheric methane concentrations have more than doubled, largely due to human-related activities.

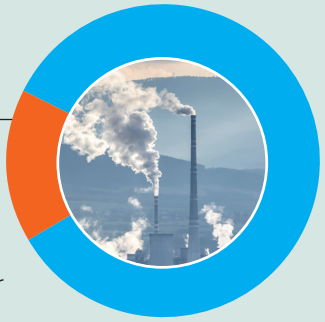
Because methane is a powerful GHG and short-lived compared to carbon dioxide, rapidly reducing methane emissions is a key component in efforts to avoid catastrophic global warming. Recognizing this, the Global Methane Pledge was launched to reduce collective human-related methane emissions 30% from 2020 levels by the year 2030, and is now supported by about 150 countries, including the United States.[4]

Methane accounts for about

16%

of global GHG emissions.

It is 28X more powerful than CO_2 (over a 100 year timespan).



What is the connection between food waste and methane?

Roughly one-third of all food available for human consumption goes uneaten, both domestically and globally. In the United States, much of this uneaten food ends up in landfills and sewers where it decays over time in the absence of oxygen, producing methane.

According to the EPA, municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills are the third-largest source of methane emissions from human activities in the U.S. Food waste is the number one component in U.S. MSW landfills (24% in 2018).

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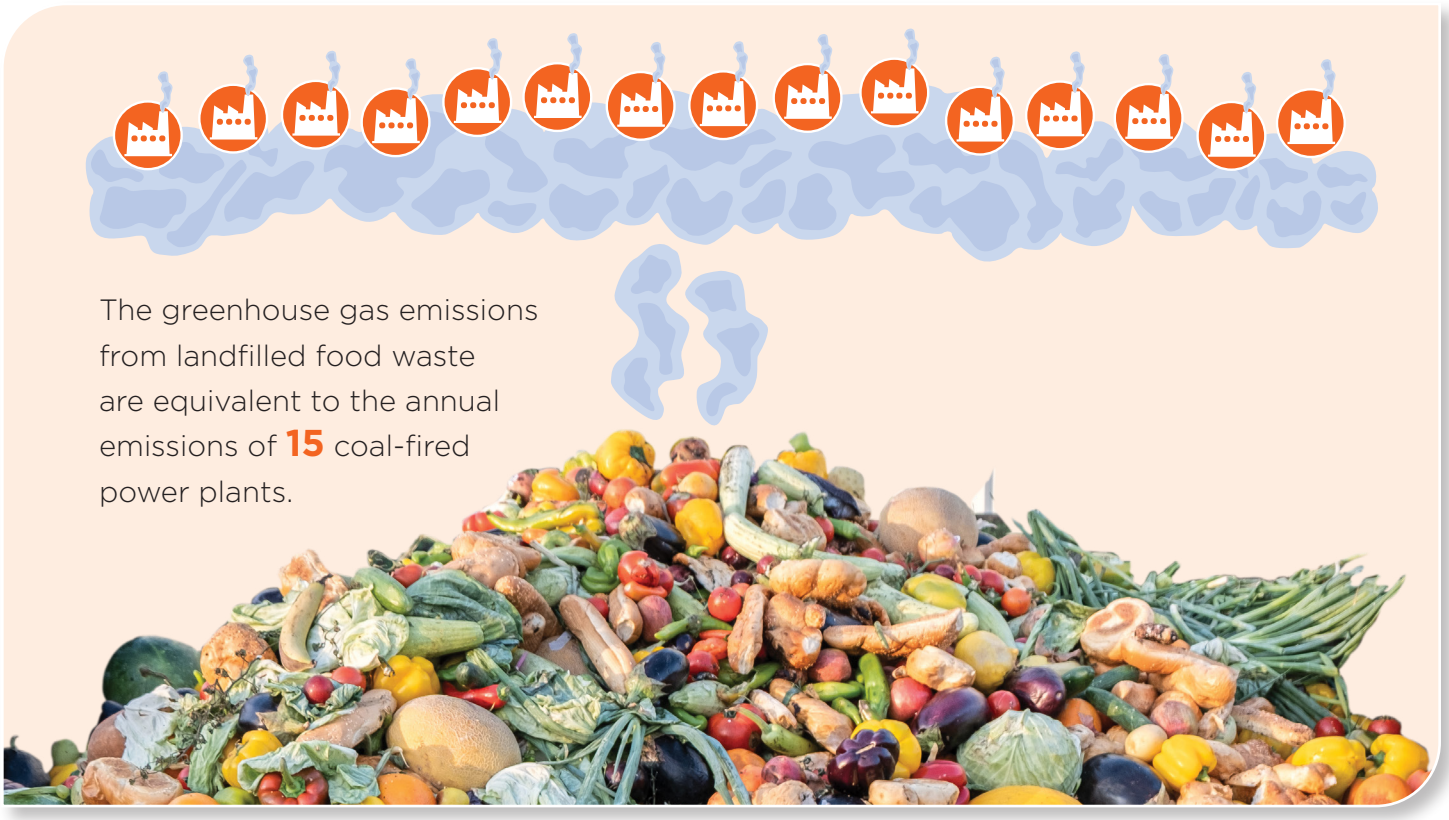
Most U.S. landfills install systems to capture landfill gas, which includes methane. However, food waste decays more quickly than many other organic wastes, often before gas collection systems are installed or expanded at the landfill.

In 2020, food waste was responsible for approximately 58 percent of the fugitive methane emissions from MSW landfills, emitting approximately 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO_2e) based on a 100-year global warming potential (GWP). The greenhouse gas emissions from landfilled food waste are equivalent to the annual emissions of 15 coal-fired power plants (or 7 million homes' energy use).

For every 1,000 short tons (907 metric tons) of food waste that was disposed of in a landfill in 2020, 838 million metric tons CO_2e were emitted (over a 30-year time span) into the atmosphere, which is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions of burning five railcars' worth of coal.

Tackling food waste presents a critical opportunity to address climate change by reducing methane emissions. Reducing food waste also ensures the inputs needed to produce food, such as water, land, and fertilizer, are not wasted.



[1] UN Environment Programme and Climate and Clean Air Coalition (2022). "Global Methane Assessment: 2030 Baseline Report."
[2] International Energy Agency (2023). "Global Methane Tracker 2023."
[3] Measured over a 100-year time horizon
[4] The White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy (2021). "U.S. Methane Emissions Reduction Action Plan."

Learn about how to reduce food loss and waste at www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste and www.epa.gov/reducefoodwaste

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

IS THIS STILL GOOD TO EAT?

THREE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FOOD DATE LABELING

There are a variety of phrases used on food date labels in the U.S. to describe quality dates such as “Best if Used By/Before”, “Sell-By”, “Use-By”, and “Freeze-By”.

This can be confusing and may result in discarding perfectly wholesome food, which is costly to consumers and harms the environment.

So here are three things you need to know about date labeling to avoid throwing away food that is still safe to consume:

#1 Except for infant formula, food date labels are not indicators of food safety and are not required by Federal law. Manufacturers provide dating to help consumers and retailers decide when food is of peak quality.

#2 Becoming more commonly used is the USDA-recommended “Best if Used By” label to signal when the product is at its best flavor or quality.

#3 If the food date label passes during home storage, the food product (except for infant formula) should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off-odor, flavor, or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten.

Learn more about USDA’s “Food Product Dating” at:
Food Product Dating | Food Safety and Inspection Service (usda.gov)