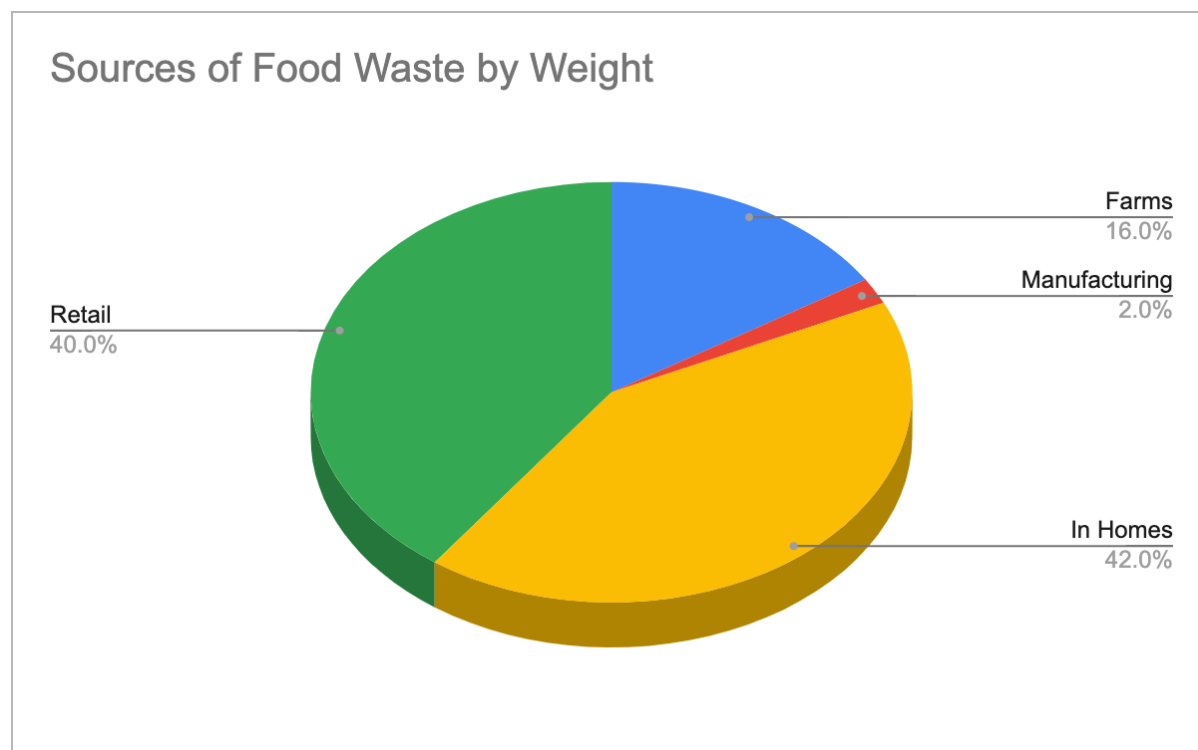# Food Waste
By Gene Jonas

Ever since I can remember, I have hated to see food being wasted. I remember when I was in grammar school being upset at my brothers when they would make themselves a pbj sandwich, take 3 bites and then throw the rest away. For some reason that really annoyed me even back then.

In the US today, it is reported that between 30-40% of all food produced gets wasted. When I first read that statistic I wondered, could it really be that high? Then I thought back to days when I worked in restaurants, where much of the food on people's plates came back to the kitchen to get thrown away. Recalling this made these numbers more believable.

According to Sustainable Food Trust's 2016 report, food waste levels this high "represent 25% of the total water use in the country, 31% of cropland, 30% of fertilizer use, greenhouse gas emissions worth 33 million cars and 21% of landfill volume." These statistics clearly point out that when analyzing our food system holistically, a more accurate picture is obtained, one in which the true cost of wasting 30-40% of food produced in this country can be accounted for.
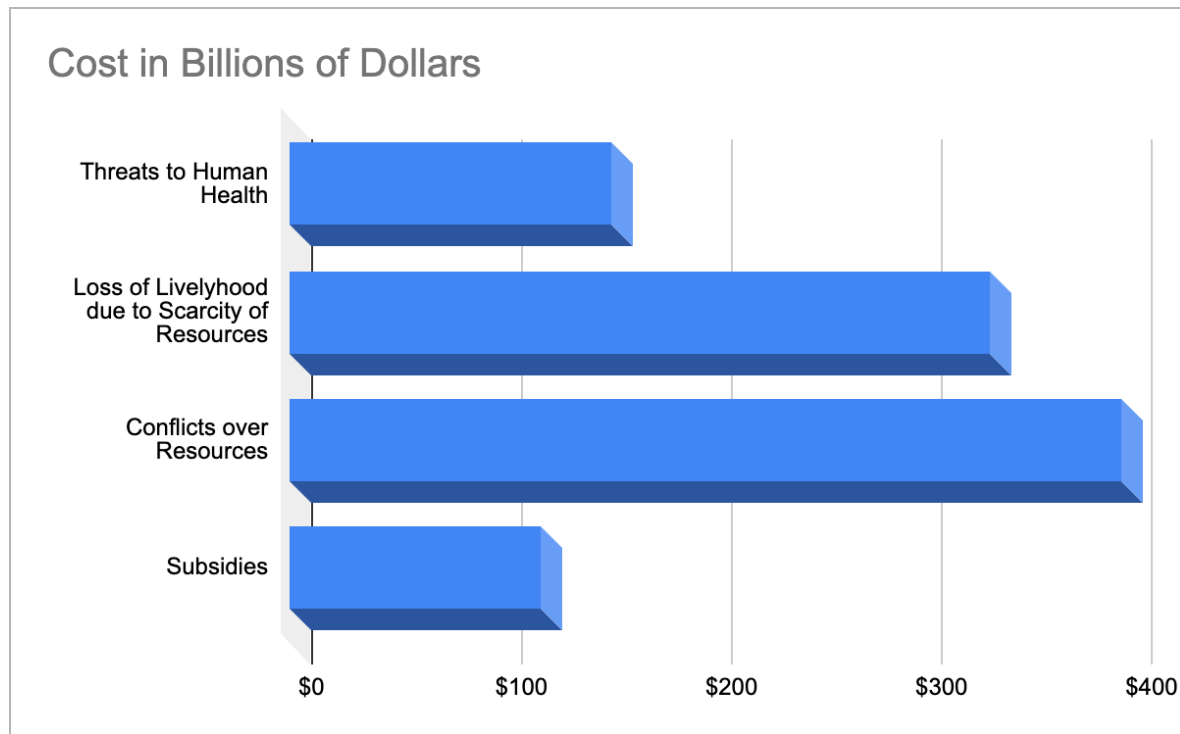
So where does this waste occur?

Sources of Food Waste by Weight

Farms 16.0%
Manufacturing 2.0%
Retail 40.0%
In Homes 42.0%

And what are our costs? In terms of carbon footprint, wasted food is responsible for carbon emissions that are the equivalent to 87% of global road transport. In terms of natural resources,

the water use is equivalent to 3 times the volume of Lake Geneva. In 2007 about *28% of the world's* agricultural land was taken up by wasted food.

In addition to environmental costs, the economic costs are measured in the billions:

Cost in Billions of Dollars

Category	Cost
Threats to Human Health	~$150
Loss of Livelyhood due to Scarcity of Resources	~$330
Conflicts over Resources	~$400
Subsidies	~$120

So what has been done recently to address the food waste issue? In recent years the FDA adopted standardized food-expiration labels that read "best if used by" rather than the confusing "sell by" or "use before" language that can lead to greater food waste. Then there are organizations like ReThink Food NYC (https://www.rethinkfood.org/), that for years now have picked up food from restaurants which had been destined to be thrown out and created delicious meals from them for distribution. Also, laws were passed in some states a few years back that provided tax incentives to encourage stores to donate their excess food rather than throwing it away.

It's unconscionable that this much food waste occurs when so many are still food insecure. Clearly more work needs to be done. So what can we do to help alleviate this massive problem? Could supermarkets develop a system that reduces the price of each product the closer it gets to it's "best if used by" date? Could some of our existing Food Hubs in the state start to take in food from stores and restaurants and perform a similar function to what ReThink Food NYC is doing?

On our farm over the past 12 years, we have tried our best to minimize waste by having the NH gleaners come to our field and take away any excess produce and deliver it to those in need. We have also taken the time to deliver this produce ourselves to food pantries throughout the area. In addition, some of our customers are happy to take extra "seconds" and we have learned to process and preserve our seconds for use in our own home. In both our home and our field I can honestly tell you that we have tried to utilize excess produce as efficiently as we can.

What are your ideas about how we can all help reduce food waste and what are you willing to do to tackle this systemic problem?

<u>Sources</u>
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