

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.



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. It can also help the environment.

Helping Hand

Throwing away food is wasteful in many ways. For one, 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 their cafeteria. Students place items like unpeeled bananas and unopened yogurt on it. Then they pack the food into coolers. They donate the items 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.

GO
ONLINE!

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

On average, elementary school students in the U.S. toss about

37 cartons of milk
each per year.



more food than they need. Then they end up throwing away leftovers.

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. That trapped heat warms the planet.

Tossing an uneaten apple in the trash isn't just wasting food. It also wasting other resources.

For example, it wastes the water used to grow the apple. It also wastes the fuel used by the truck that delivered it to a store.

Make a Change

Lincoln Elementary began its program in January. Each day, more than 150 items are given to the Frederick Rescue Mission. These items include sandwiches, milk, and fruit. 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



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 that 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 that food is likely to go to waste.

Who's mainly to blame for all the wasted food? Individual consumers, even though we may not realize it. People often buy



WORDS TO KNOW

landfill *noun*. an area where waste is buried

edible *adjective*. safe to eat

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.

