

ZERO FOOD WASTE COALITION'S TOP FARM BILL PRIORITIES

In the U.S., approximately 38 percent of all food goes unsold or uneaten. We use 22 percent of our fresh water and 16 percent of our cropland to produce just this wasted food, which releases greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 389 million metric tons of carbon dioxide across its lifecycle. We also spend \$473 billion annually to grow, process, store, distribute, and dispose of it. Despite the surplus of food produced—and the fact that much of it is safe to eat—12.8 percent of American households face food insecurity?

In 2015, the EPA, USDA, and FDA announced a federal goal of reducing food waste by 50 percent by 2030. The Zero Food Waste Coalition (ZFWC)—led by Harvard Law School Food Law & Policy Clinic, Natural Resources Defense Council, ReFED, and the World Wildlife Fund—was formed to help drive progress toward that goal by informing and influencing U.S. food waste policy at the federal, state, and local levels.

The ZFWC report, *Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill*, details a suite of effective levers for promoting long-lasting solutions to the problem of food waste.³ Here, we highlight our top four recommendations for the 2024 Farm Bill: improve federal coordination through the creation of a Food Loss and Waste Reduction Office within the USDA;

fund food waste prevention, surplus food recovery, and food waste recycling planning and infrastructure; support research in food waste prevention; and standardize the food date labeling system.

CREATE A FOOD LOSS AND WASTE REDUCTION OFFICE WITHIN THE USDA AND AUTHORIZE FUNDING FOR IT TO OFFER GRANTS AND SUPPORT FOOD WASTE REDUCTION EFFORTS

The 2018 Farm Bill took an important first step of establishing a Food Loss and Waste Reduction Liaison to coordinate federal food waste reduction efforts at the USDA. To build on these efforts, the 2024 Farm Bill should create an office to enhance this work and better position the federal government to meet the nation's food waste reduction goal. Congress should:

- Authorize up to \$100 million in annual appropriations and provide \$20 million a year in mandatory funding, for a total of \$120 million in annual funding to support the activities of the office for the following purposes:
 - Improve federal coordination of the Federal Interagency Food Loss and Waste Collaboration;
 - Administer grants and cooperative agreements to support food waste reduction and surplus food recovery efforts as well as food waste reduction infrastructure for states, local governments, tribes, businesses, and food banks and other nonprofits;
 - Collaborate with USDA research agencies to address food loss challenges and develop new strategies to reduce food waste;



- Collaborate with the EPA to maintain a database of successful local food waste reduction policies; and
- Promote, manage, and coordinate national outreach and education to reduce food waste both for consumers and in schools.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE AND ENHANCE FOOD RECOVERY

Greater federal investment is required for planning and implementing policies with demonstrated efficacy in reducing food waste (such as organic waste disposal bans, landfill taxes on food waste, food donation requirements, or mandatory diversion laws), as well as for building the surplus food recovery capacity and food scrap recycling infrastructure needed to reduce food waste going to landfills and incinerators. To support local innovation and build the infrastructure needed, Congress should:

- Authorize \$50 million per year to the Community Compost and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements program, and expand the program by increasing the per-project funding, including states as eligible recipients, and broadening the funding opportunity to include both planning and implementation grants, in order to better support a broader range of food waste reduction policy implementation and infrastructure projects.
- Create and fund new programs, and designate a portion of existing grant and loan funding to support the necessary infrastructure, staffing, and supply chain upgrades of both businesses and nonprofits to prevent and recycle food waste and enhance surplus food recovery.

FUND RESEARCH IN FOOD WASTE PREVENTION, UPCYCLING, AND RECYCLING SOLUTIONS

Food waste prevention efforts focus on the root causes of food waste, locating and addressing inefficiencies in the food system and food-related practices and prioritizing solutions in line with the EPA Wasted Food Scale.⁴

Upcycling creates new consumer food products from food previously considered waste, such as using surplus bread to make beer. Separately, food scraps can be recycled into animal feed or compost. Research is needed to identify new ways to upcycle food by-products and recycle food scraps and to prevent food waste across food product categories. To advance this critical research, Congress should:

- Authorize \$50 million a year in additional mandatory funding with the Research Title for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, and direct the USDA to prioritize projects targeting food waste reduction, including technology to reduce on-farm and transportation related food loss.
- Create a food waste reduction research priority within the Agriculture Food and Research Initiative to support work on new technologies to extend the shelf life of dairy, meat, poultry, and fish and to develop, test, and scale opportunities for new upcycled food products for human consumption and recycled food scrap products for animal feed.

STANDARDIZE AND CLARIFY DATE LABELS

Date label confusion accounts for 7.4 percent of consumer food waste, costing \$32.3 billion per year.⁵ There is no federal regulation of date labels used on food. Instead, a patchwork of inconsistent state regulations and myriad date labeling terms, such as “sell by,” “best by,” “expires on,” and “use by,” exists across the country, creating confusion and making it difficult to donate safe, surplus, past-date food. Standardizing and clarifying date labels is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce food waste nationally. To achieve this, Congress should:

- Establish a dual date-labeling scheme that applies to limits date labeling language to one of two options: either a label to indicate *food quality* with the phrase “BEST If Used By” or a label to indicate a discard date using the term “USE By.”
- Require consumer education and outreach on the meaning of date labels. This could be carried out by the USDA, EPA, FDA, and/or a newly created USDA Office of Food Loss and Waste.

Find additional details about these and other policy solutions in the full [Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill report](#).

Resources

- 1 ReFED, accessed June 5, 2024, insights-engine.refed.org/food-waste-monitor?break_by=food_type, “Food Waste Monitor.”
- 2 ReFED, accessed June 5, 2024, <https://refed.org/food-waste/the-problem>; U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Food Security and Nutrition Assistance,” last updated October 18, 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%2089.8%20percent%20of,from%2010.5%20percent%20in%202020>.
- 3 Emily M. Broad Leib et al., *Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2023 Farm Bill*, Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, NRDC, ReFED, and WWF, April 2022, <https://chlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/2023-Farm-Bill-Food-Waste.pdf>.
- 4 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Wasted Food Scale” last updated April 24, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-recovery-hierarchy>.
- 5 ReFED, Insights Engine, accessed April 20, 2023, https://insights-engine.refed.org/food-waste-monitor?break_by=cause&indicator=us-dollars-surplus&view=detail&year=2021.