

The logo for the Mercy Earth Challenge features the words "MERCY", "EARTH", and "CHALLENGE" stacked vertically in a bold, green, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a colorful, stylized flower or sunburst icon with six petals in shades of green, yellow, orange, blue, purple, and red, with a small globe of the Earth at its center. The entire logo is set against a white background with green triangular accents in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

MERCY EARTH CHALLENGE

Reducing Food Waste at Home

It is a cruel, unjust and paradoxical reality that, today, there is food for everyone and yet not everyone has access to it, and that in some areas of the world food is wasted, discarded and consumed in excess, or destined for other purposes than nutrition. -- Pope Francis World Food Day Message, October 16, 2019

September 29, 2020 the world will observe the First International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste (IDAFLW). In December 2019 the United Nations General Assembly designated this day to call attention to UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: Responsible Production and Consumption which includes cutting (by 2030) per capita global food waste in half at the retail and consumer level, and reducing food losses along production and supply chains including post-harvest losses.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 1.3 billion tons (2,600,000,000,000 pounds) of food are lost or wasted every year. At the same time, almost two billion people are malnourished or go hungry. The food sector accounts for about 22 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, mainly because of the conversion of forests to farm land.

While we may think of food waste and loss just in terms of the food itself, large amounts of energy (for fertilizer production and transportation) and water are also wasted. Food loss and food waste are often used interchangeably but they do not mean the same thing. Food loss refers to food lost in the earlier stages of production including harvest, storage and transportation. Food waste, on the other hand, refers to foods that are edible but that are thrown out by supermarkets or consumers.

A factor that contributes significantly to the waste of fruits and vegetables is aesthetics. United States consumers in particular are very demanding in when it comes to produce. Fruit or vegetables that are bruised (even slightly), discolored or imperfect in any way are rejected even though there is no problem with these foods nutritionally.

One company in Mercy Investment Services' Environmental Solutions Fund portfolio is connecting farmers with imperfect produce to food and beverage companies, preventing it from going to waste. The company is partnering with others to provide 32,000 boxes of produce – the equivalent of 300 tons of produce – to families in need in the Oakland school district during this time of pandemic.

Reflection questions:

- How can I be more conscious of the potential for waste when I purchase food?
- What can I do to encourage the places where I shop to be less wasteful in dealing with food?
- What policies might be contributing to food loss during production and distribution? What policies make it more difficult to reduce that food loss?

ACTION: While reducing food loss is a systemic issue, reducing food waste is up to each of us. This week, focus on one of nine steps for reducing food waste from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.