

You Can Help Reduce Food Waste in Los Alamos! (494 words)

Los Alamos Zero Waste Team

On April 1st, our President declared April as “Winning on Reducing Food Waste Month.” Have you heard about the problem of wasted food? The EPA estimates that 40% of food that is grown in the U.S. is discarded, uneaten. This costs the average American household \$1,350 to \$2,275 per year, wastes 25% of our fresh water supply, is a major contributor to climate change, and nationally uses more land than all of New Mexico covers to grow food that isn’t eaten (National Resources Defense Council data and other sources). All while 40 million Americans are food insecure.

But surely, our Los Alamos community doesn’t waste that much food? We’re educated, aware, concerned about our budgets and the problem of hunger in our area. Yet, the data say otherwise. Waste sorts conducted by the Environmental Sustainability Board on residential trash in 2016 found that food comprises 17% of what we send to the Rio Rancho landfill. That’s higher than the national average of 15% reported by the EPA, and accounted for an astounding 1,740,000 pounds of waste from Los Alamos residents in 2018. Food waste is also generated by our grocery and retail stores, restaurants, schools, offices, churches, municipal services, tourists, and other sources.

As food is part of nearly every aspect of our lives and community, so is food waste. In 2019, the Zero Waste Team recognized the scope of the problem, and the tremendous opportunity it presents to help Los Alamos reduce waste, save money, and feed those in need. We will be focusing for the next year or so on reducing waste at all levels in the County, and have organized focus groups to work with residents, restaurants, grocers/retail, food banks, and K-12 schools. We will also be educating the community on how to compost food scraps at home, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make compost for gardening.

Food waste in America has increased by 50% since 1978. This is clearly a recent problem, and with the help of the community, we can reverse it. You can help! At home, work, school, church, in restaurants or while shopping, keep food waste reduction in mind. If food is being wasted, ask: How could this waste have been prevented? How could this food be reused? What can we do differently next time?

- Talk to others about food waste. Discuss the issue with family, friends and coworkers, and brainstorm ways to reduce discarded food. Does your church, office, or community group have events where food is served? These are great opportunities to raise awareness and take action!
- Let local businesses (stores, restaurants) know that you care about food waste. Find out what they are doing to reduce wasted food, congratulate them, and ask them to do more.
- If you encounter food being wasted, and want help, reach out to our Zero Waste Team at zerowaste@lacnm.us. Please let us know about opportunities in the community for food waste reduction and education. We’re here to help!

