Disrupting Food Waste

Mazel tov! We’ve made it to our Thanksgiving meals, coming together to share food and conversation with family, friends, neighbors, or strangers. Think about what brought you here tonight. Who invited you? How did you prepare? How far did you travel? How many people did you interact with along the way? The food in front of you made a similarly complicated journey to arrive at the table. Tonight, let’s delve into the process of our food, from seed to landfill, particularly focusing on the food we waste along the chain.

Stepping onto the Food Production Chain

Choose an ingredient within a dish on your Thanksgiving table; for example, a potato, tomato, or apple. Break into pairs and use the cards to trace the ingredient through every step in the food production chain. In your pairs, discuss the following questions: Who was involved in each step? Who put care and time into the process? How much were they paid? What was the relationship to the ingredient? To the land? What waste is generated? Notice when you do know the answers and when you don’t know the answers.

Come back together and debrief. How did the ingredient you chose end up on your table? How was this process for your pair? Go around the circle and share moment of gratitude for one person along that chain who helped bring your food in front of you today.

processing image source: http://www.sanmiguelproduce.com
Not all food ends up as a delicious Thanksgiving dinner. At every point in the production chain, food that is or was at some point fit for human consumption is lost, discarded and disposed. Food is the largest category of waste in America’s landfill; it contributes more to climate pollution than all of the cars in Georgia. Food waste has implications on hunger; in the United States, 1 in 7 people are hungry. According to the United Nations, if we recover all the food that is lost or wasted, we will have enough to feed all those who are hungry, four times over.\(^1\)

One organization in Pittsburgh was founded as a direct response to the disconnect between food waste, hunger and environmental sustainability. 412 Food Rescue’s mission is to prevent perfectly viable food from entering the waste stream by partnering with food retailers (grocery stores, food distributors, restaurants, farms, etc.) and a growing network of #FoodRescueHeroes (volunteers) to rescue surplus food and redirect it to nonprofits that serve those who are food insecure.

To date, 412 Food Rescue has rescued over 2 million pounds of surplus food from entering the waste stream. Instead, this surplus food has reached individuals and families who struggle with food insecurity and has eradicated hunger in some housing communities.

Statistics only get us part of the way there in understanding food insecurity, food waste and 412 Food Rescue's approach to redirecting that waste to address insecurity, turning harm into help.

Look over the texts on the following two pages. Then, turn to the person sitting next to you at the dinner table and discuss any interesting guiding questions. When you're ready, come back together as a larger group to share takeaways.

412 Food Rescue's Impact

Of the 1.7 million pounds rescued, 974,623 lbs (46% of all food rescued) is fresh, healthy produce, 302,016 lbs (14%) is bread, 196,435 lbs (9%) is meat & protein, and 175,987 lbs (8%) is dairy, all of which healthily nourish neighbors in need.
GUIDING QUESTIONS

Where do you see waste, literal or metaphorical, in your community, city or country?

What kind of assumptions does society have about people who struggle with hunger?

What does it mean to talk about hunger in the context of Thanksgiving, a holiday that is filled with overabundance?

How can Leah, Floyd, and the Torah’s strategies for taking action to address hunger be applied to your personal and communal practices around food waste?

"Meet The App That’s Saved 1.5 Million Pounds of Food to Date,” Interview with Leah Lizarondo²

Marissa Dubecky interviews Leah Lizarondo, co-founder and CEO of 412 Food Rescue, for BUST Magazine. Working at the intersection of social good and technology, Leah co-created 412’s app that connects retailers with excess food to community organizations and notifies volunteers to make the delivery.

The difficult thing about food waste is almost half of it happens at the retail level, where each instance of waste is small and unpredictable. So it’s difficult to recover this using traditional trucking logistics. Couple that with the fact that waste management costs are so low (it’s very cheap to dump things in landfills), and the easiest option is to just throw things out.

That’s where 412 Food Rescue comes in. We developed an app that aggregates food retailers who have surplus food, nonprofits that need the food, and most importantly, people who want to do something about hunger and the environment...The social growth of our app has made us one of the fastest-growing food recovery organizations in the US, which I think is reflective of the fact that all of us want to act. We just need to be shown how we can do it, and even better, how we can do it in the context of our everyday lives.

Q:

How has Leah effectively mobilized people into taking action around hunger and the environment? What does she identify as barriers to action?

² "Meet The App That’s Saved 1.5 Million Pounds of Food to Date,” Marissa Dubecky. Bust.
On 412 Food Rescue’s Blog, #FoodRescueHero Floyd Hughes shares his experiences volunteering with the organization and passion for ending food waste and hunger in Pittsburgh. He learned about 412 through social media and mobilized his congregation to get involved.

Generosity is infectious. One time we were unloading a van of bread and the manager of the organization had a line of people helping us as we passed bread from the van to their building. Someone on the street walked by and asked if we were giving away bread. One of the people helping to unload said “I don’t think so.” The manager of the organization quickly responded “Oh, we most definitely are” and began passing out bread to people on the street; some of those who received it began giving their bread to others (I would have to say this was one of the highlights as well). When people donate their time, which is one of the most valuable things we have since it cannot be earned back, it inspires others to be generous as well.

What does Floyd mean when he says generosity is infectious? Have you seen examples in your own experience?

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Exodus 16:16-20

At this point in Exodus, the second book in the Bible (Torah), the Israelites are wandering, hungry and hopeless, in the desert. They complain to their leaders, Moses and Aaron, that they would rather God killed them in Egypt, where at least they had food, than starve in the wilderness. In response, God decides to both test the Israelites and feed them.

God will rain down bread from the sky and have Moses give the people very specific instructions on how to gather it.

(16) This is what the LORD has commanded: “Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent.” (17) The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little. (18) But when they measured it by the omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency: they had gathered as much as they needed to eat. (19) And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.” (20) But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

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Translation by Sefaria.

A biblical unit of measurement for dry goods.

CONCLUSION
THANKS AFTER A MEAL

In Jewish tradition, a meal concludes with Birkat Hamazon, “blessing of thanks,” giving thanks to God for the food you have just consumed. As one of the many thanks offered to God, the prayer contains the following line:

We thank you, God...for the food by which you constantly feed and sustain us every day, in every season, and every hour.

In English:

We thank you, God...for the food by which you constantly feed and sustain us every day, in every season, and every hour.

In Hebrew:

נוֹדֶה לְּךָ ה' אֱלֹקינוּ...עַל אֲכִילַת מַעֲשָׂהָךָּ וּמְפַרְנֵס אוֹתָנוּ תָּמִיד, בְּכָל יוֹם בְּכָל עֵת וּבְכָל שָׁעָה.

Reflecting on this prayer of thanks and holding it against the reality that there are hungry people in our families, communities, and societies, what do you need to feed and sustain you in a commitment to acting to address food waste?

Practical Steps you can take to minimize food waste:

At the Grocery Store

- Make a list and stick to it.
- Buy fresh veggies that you know you will use and use them first, and augment with frozen veggies so you know they won’t go to waste if you can’t get to them right away.
- Before you go to a warehouse club, ask yourself if you will really eat that 5 pound bag of whatever it is.
- Only buy food you know you will eat.

At Home

- Have one day of the week (maybe the day before your weekly grocery trip) where you use everything up in the fridge.
- If you take home leftovers from a restaurant, don’t forget about them - explore how to repurpose them and be sure to use them within a few days!
- If a recipe says it serves four, but there are only two people, halve every ingredient.
- Only cut fruits and veggies right before you cook or eat them.
- Remove rotten apples right away! They will make all other fruits go bad.
- Do not wash grapes or other fruits until you are ready to eat them.
- Sour milk can be used in recipes for baked goods and cottage cheese.
- Freeze fresh meat unless you plan to use it within a couple of days.
- To revive limp broccoli or greens, plunge them into an ice bath.
- Cracked eggs should be used within 2 days.

6 | 412 Food Rescue facts from savethefood.com
7 | “Meet The App That’s Saved 1.5 Million Pounds of Food to date,” Marissa Dubocky. Bust.