Introduction

Food is perhaps one of our most valuable resources but, astoundingly, as much as 40% of it is discarded throughout the food system of the United States. Our aim is to better understand the underlying behaviors and attitudes related to domestic food waste, in this case specifically within the state of California.

Experimental Approach

Though food losses occur at all stages of the supply chain and some is unavoidable, the largest proportion of loss occurs at the consumer level [1]. We believe it is likely that the general public does not understand the full implications of wasteful behavior when it comes to food. We surveyed over 1000 California residents over the age of 18 through the internet survey service, Survey Monkey. We then used the results to craft a public awareness campaign to influence and inform the general public.

We wanted to identify the main reasons respondents might waste food. As the figure shows, the responses were fairly evenly distributed. This breakdown indicated that it would be beneficial to address all of the reasons for consumer food waste in our awareness campaign, instead of only highlighting a few.

Survey Results

We wanted to assess the how willing people were to adopt certain practices to help reduce their waste in order to identify any low-hanging fruit targets for our messaging. We asked respondents to indicate their willingness to adopt new behaviors or to indicate that they already practice these activities (and how consistently they do so). Our results indicate that very few respondents were unwilling to try these measures in order to reduce their food waste footprints.

Conclusions

We believe that addressing the problem of food waste will undoubtedly be in the best interest of the state of California as well as the entire country. Food waste has both indirect and direct influences on climate change, unsustainable use of water and other natural resources, food insecurity of individuals, and the amount of disposable income we retain. In light of growing environmental awareness and a tough economic climate, refining our food system to reduce food waste should be a feasible option to increase efficiency and reduce impacts.

Further Information

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Printout a copy of this poster from our website!

Acknowledgements

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Selected Sources

J. C. Burns, J. Hyman, Total and per capita value of food loss in the United States, Food Policy. 142-170 (2012).
D. Gunderson, Wasted: How America is Losing up to 40 Percent of its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill, National Resource Defense Council (2012).

We want to remind the public of the waste we generate. A new documentary film, I Am: The 40%, explores these issues and the need for a change. Through the 40% Initiative, we want to connect the public with film students to create media that connects the public with environmental issues. Our narrative film, entitled I Am The 40%, follows our main character, a two-legged carrot on a journey through the food supply chain.

Film

Through the Carsey-Wolf Center’s Environmental Media Initiative, we were selected to participate in the Green Screen Program: a collaboration between environmental and film students to create media that connects the public with environmental issues. Our narrative film, entitled I Am The 40%, follows our main character, a two-legged carrot on a journey through the food supply chain.

Campaign