

The Food Waste Opportunity



In 2019, 35% of the 229 million tons of food available went unsold or uneaten. We call this *surplus food*, and while a very small portion of it was donated to those in need and more was recycled, the vast majority became *food waste* which went straight to landfill, incineration, or down the drain, or was simply left in the fields to rot.

The good news? Food waste is a solvable problem. Here's what you need to know.

The Impacts

Environmental

Uneaten food is responsible for 4% of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. alone — equivalent to emissions from over 1/5 of total cars in the U.S.

It also depletes our natural resources and is the #1 material entering landfills.



4%
of U.S. GHG Emissions



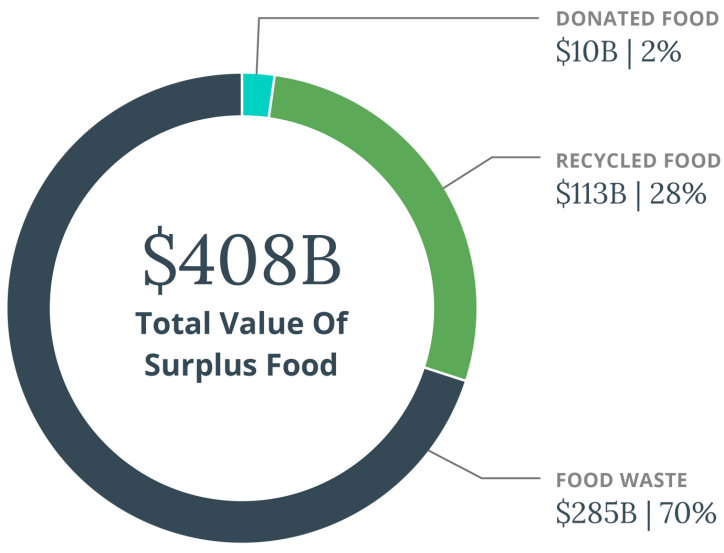
14%
of all Fresh Water Use



18%
of all Cropland Use



24%
of Landfill Inputs
#1 material (EPA Estimate)



Economic

Food that is never eaten is a huge drain on the economy, valuing roughly **2% of U.S. GDP**

While the financial cost of uneaten food is greatest for consumers overall – since they pay retail prices for food – it cost the food industry \$250B in 2019.

Social

Much uneaten food could go to help those in need. Meanwhile,

40M+ Americans

lack reliable access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food — a number that grew in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Solutions

A range of food waste reduction solutions already exist. Some are breakthrough innovations, some are basic best practices, and many have a strong potential for investment returns. ReFED analyzed more than 40 solutions – here's what adopting them would do.

45M

annual food waste diversion (tons)

50%

reduction in food waste by 2030

Impact Per Year



75M

metric tons CO₂e reduction



4T

gallons of water saved



4B

meals for people in need



51K

jobs created (over 10 years)

Investment Needed: A 5-to-1 Return

\$14B

in annual funding over the next decade is required for a



\$73B

net financial benefit — a five-to-one return