

National Environmental Youth Advisory Council

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Addressing Food Waste at Home and Abroad: A Case for Circular and Sustainable Materials Management Systems

EPA Program Offices:

Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA)

Office of Land and Emergency Management (OLEM)/Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery (ORCR)

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EPA Program Office Background

The **Office of International and Tribal Affairs** (OITA) leads and coordinates EPA's work with international partners and sovereign nations, including Tribal governments in the United States. By sharing U.S. best practices and knowledge, putting in place agreements, projects, and programs to enhance environmental governance and foster action, we can achieve a cleaner, healthier environment for the American public. For more information on EPA's international cooperation, please see www.epa.gov/international

The **Office of Resource Conservation and Recovery** (ORCR) is primarily responsible for implementing EPA's resource conservation, recovery, and waste management goals under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). ORCR is responsible for promoting sustainability and safe materials management and fostering waste reduction and responsible management practices that will conserve natural resources, prevent future problems, and clean up problems from the past.

Background on Charge Topic

Food loss and waste (FLW) is a global environmental, social, and economic problem. FLW accounts for approximately [8% of global greenhouse gas emissions](#) and is responsible for wasting [25% of all water and fertilizer](#) used in the production of food. An estimated 1/3 of all food produced for human consumption is wasted even though approximately [690 to 780 million people](#) around the world face

hunger. Reducing food loss and waste, whether at the farm or table, not only reduces our environmental footprint and saves precious resources, but it can also help reduce food insecurity. EPA Administrator Regan recognized the important linkage between EPA's mission to reduce food waste and enhancing food security, especially among the most vulnerable populations, in [his remarks](#) to the U.N. Security Council on February 13, 2024.

Tackling food waste through more circular approaches is one way the United States and other countries can meet the Paris Agreement's objectives of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. Better yet, more sustainable management of food systems and prevention of food waste would also boost resilience to the impacts of climate change. From increased crop failures to water scarcity to increasingly extreme weather events, the impacts of climate change can exacerbate food insecurity. More information on the linkages between food systems and climate can be found in [the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) special report on climate change and land](#).

EPA has engaged in several projects with international partners to promote more circular, efficient, and sustainable practices to reduce wasted food. This includes raising awareness of the multiple benefits of reducing food waste among high level officials and stakeholders in the [G7](#) and at the [United Nations Environment Program \(UNEP\)](#). EPA has implemented projects with our North American partners in Canada and Mexico through the Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to create youth-oriented tools such as the [Food Matters Action Kit](#). Other activities include efforts to improve knowledge on the sources of wasted food and improving how we can [quantify the benefits](#) of reduction, recycling and proper disposal.

EPA supports a [circular economy](#) that keeps materials and products in circulation for as long possible. A circular economy reduces material use, redesigns materials and products to be less resource intensive, and recaptures "waste" as a resource to manufacture new materials and products. EPA has also developed a [Sustainable Management of Food](#) approach, which seeks to reduce wasted food and its associated impacts over the entire life cycle, starting with the use of natural resources, manufacturing, sales, consumption, and ending with decisions on recovery or final disposal. As part of this approach, EPA released for public comment in December 2023 the [Draft National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics](#). The strategy outlines specific EPA actions to prevent the loss and waste of food and other organic wastes and reduce associated environmental impacts such as methane pollution. Furthermore, the strategy highlights how opportunities to incentivize and encourage food loss and waste prevention will help mitigate the effects of climate change with the reduction of greenhouse gases. Additionally, as many landfills, manufacturing and processing facilities are in close proximity to low-income communities, the strategy aims to address environmental justice concerns with reducing the amount of waste that these facilities intake. The actions detailed in this Strategy will help the United States meet its [National Food Loss and Waste Reduction Goal](#), to halve food loss and waste by 2030 and contribute to achieving the [National Recycling Goal](#) to achieve a 50% recycling rate by 2030, as well as contribute to global achievement of the [United Nations SDG Target 12.3](#).

Charge Questions

Using bullet points please include 3-4 charge questions that you would like the NEYAC to consider and provide their comments and recommendations.

1. Food loss and waste accounts for 8% of global man-made greenhouse gas emissions and if food wastage were a country, it would be the third largest emitting country in the world, In 2022, according to USDA's Economic Research Service, an estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide are food insecure. Food insecure means that at times during the year, these households were uncertain of having or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food. **How can EPA and its partners** (e.g., state or local governments, non-profit organizations, industry groups or academia) **more effectively engage young people to help reduce food waste at home and abroad?** For example:
 - What types of outreach (platforms, messengers, messages, etc.) would motivate you and your peers to take action to prevent food from going to waste at home and at school?
 - Is there a need for additional tools to connect youth action to reduce food loss and waste with organizations working to reduce hunger in U.S. communities?

2. As EPA continues to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and other forms of pollution, through building a circular economy, it has taken several actions to encourage the reduction of food loss and waste and increase organics recycling. Food loss and waste (FLW) happens when food intended for human consumption is not ultimately consumed by humans. Food loss happens when food leaves the human food supply chain on the farm, following harvest, or in the processing or distribution sector. Food waste leaves the human food supply chain in the retail, food service or household sector. **How can EPA's efforts to manage food (as a material) in the most sustainable and efficient way be improved to benefit and work for youth?** Examples of recent EPA activity include:
 - Releasing a new draft strategy on reducing food loss and waste and recycling organics at the recent UN Climate Conference, COP28;
 - Participating in events, hosting webinars as well as facilitating peer networks on sustainable management of food topics;
 - Developing tools to help prevent and divert wasted food (e.g., the updated management pathways in the new Wasted Food Scale graphic, Excess Food Opportunities Map, community composting videos and social marketing toolkits).

3. In 2022, very low food security households in the United States increased (from 3.8% in 2021 to 5.1% in 2022) and roughly 36% of U.S. households with incomes below the federal poverty line were food insecure (*source: [USDA/ERS](#)*). The official poverty rate in 2022 was 11.5%, with 37.9 million people in poverty (*source: US Census Bureau*). Lower income families stand to benefit proportionally more economically from preventing wasted food at home. They may also face a different set of challenges with procuring and managing food (for example, relying on food distribution, living in food deserts, lack of transportation, lack of reliable refrigeration, etc.). **How can outreach and education on making the most of food and preventing food from going to waste at home be most effective in disadvantaged communities? What strategies would be most effective in disadvantaged communities?**

4. **What roles can food retailers and food service providers play in helping young people and those living in disadvantaged communities waste less at home?**