

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Tips to Preventing Excess Food Waste”

Food waste is common in households after the holidays, but also happens year around. Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee says that in almost 32% of average households, that leftover food, along with forgotten food, is wasted. That is insane! According to Blakeslee of all food waste sources, residential homes make up 37.2% of surplus food waste. Many studies have shown that wasted food fills up landfills and causes more damage to the environment than other factors. If we utilize leftovers and food already in our home before purchasing new food, this is a major step in minimizing food waste.

Blakeslee suggests labeling and dating leftovers, so you know what they are and when they were made. It is also recommended to repurpose leftovers into other meals such as soup, stir-fry or casserole. Take a day each week for the purposeful use of leftovers. Many foods will lose quality over time, but many may still be safe to consume. Be sure to always inspect packages for damage, leaks, color changes, off-odors or other signals that the food may not be good or safe to consume. If refrigerated leftovers are not used within 3-4 days, then they should be frozen and used within a few months of that point.

Blakeslee’s recommended K-State Research and Extension publications are: “Safe food Storage: The Refrigerator and Freezer” and “Safe Food Storage: The Cupboard”. These can serve as guides to store your food properly. For most shelf stable foods, the shelf life dates are an indicator of best quality. If you have some foods past those dates, they may have reduced quality but still be safe to eat.

Blakeslee recommends looking at your kitchen management plan:

- * Make a shopping list before going to the grocery store.
- * Take an inventory of what food you have in your refrigerator, freezer and pantry.
- * Create a meal plan to utilize what you have before you buy more food.
- * Prepare meals at home. This helps you use the food you have, save money, and increase family time.
- * Freeze leftovers to use later.
- * Don’t forget about leftovers from restaurants. They make a quick and easy lunch the next day.
- * Challenge family members with incentives to help encourage smart food use. Start a recipe challenge to create ways to use up leftovers or other foods on hand.
- * Start a compost plan if possible. This can utilize food scraps to become nutrition for your garden or landscape.

Information comes from K-State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee.

For more information regarding upcoming programs, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.