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In the midst of a [food crisis](#), with [grocery prices spiraling upwards](#) across the globe, there’s nothing worse than hearing that every day, a massive amount of food gets tossed in the trash.

But since we’re not here to obscure reality as an excuse to make everyone feel better, here’s the truth: According to a [new report](#)

by the Stockholm International Water Institute, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the International Water Management Institute, about [half of all the food produced worldwide](#) goes to waste. The report states that the amount of food we produce is more than enough to feed the world’s population, but between our inefficient (or nonexistent) distribution systems and our ridiculous practice of tossing out perfectly good food, a big chunk of humanity goes hungry while another [eats itself into an epidemic](#).

More depressing highlights:

The U.S. throws away as much as 30 percent of its food, worth some \$48.3 billion. And where do all those all-you-can-eat buffet leftovers go? Straight into landfills, where, adding insult to injury, they [generate methane](#) as they rot.

Meanwhile, in poorer countries, most uneaten food bites the big one before it has a chance to be consumed. An estimated 15 to 35 percent of food may be lost in the fields, while another 10 to 15 percent is spoiled during processing, transport, and storage.

But the real problem isn’t even food—it’s water. The authors estimate that about half of the H₂O used to produce all this food also goes to waste, since agriculture is the largest human use of water. As Treehugger [points out](#), that’s ten trillion gallons of water wasted to produce that whopping \$48 billion of uneaten food in the U.S.—enough to meet the needs of 500 million families.

So what can we do to put the kibosh on all this horrific waste? (And we use “horrific” as a euphemism here.) On the barest micro level, we can watch our individual consumption and be sure to minimize what we throw away. And there’s always room for ideas like [this one](#).

August 26th, 2008 Tags: [food](#), [water](#)

by [Melissa Lafsky](#) in [Climate Change](#), [Nutrition & Obesity](#) | 1 comments | [RSS feed](#) | [Trackback >](#)

One Response to “How Much Food Do Humans Waste? Try Half”

1. [The food buffet: Not a bad idea](#) « [TKBB](#) Says:

[August 26th, 2008 at 10:27 pm](#)

[...] Wasted food: Our eyes are bigger than our stomachs. Apparently the U.S. throws away upwards of 30% of our food [...]

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• About the Blog

Reality Base



is a blog about the interplay between science and politics, and the tricky tasks of letting each help the other without compromising them both.

Melissa Lafsky is DISCOVER's deputy Web editor. A former practicing attorney in New York City, she has been an associate editor at [The Huffington Post](#) and the editor of *The New York Times's* [Freakonomics blog](#). She has written for *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, and other publications.

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