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World Hunger with Emphasis on America's Wastage of Food

Walking through my school cafeteria after lunch one day, I felt like I was walking through a battlefield, with the food used as the ammunition to cannons made from spoons. Trash cans spilled over with uneaten tater tots, cookies and sandwiches, waiting to be taken away to a landfill to rot. It was food nobody had bothered to eat and just threw out because they "didn't feel like eating it" or "weren't hungry." People do not think that some starving child in a third world country would have gladly accepted the food. Americans need to be more vigilant about food wastage. They do not realize that their actions create such a hardship on the economy and the environment as well as on other human beings in their own communities, their own country and throughout the world. Their actions underlie some of the causes of hunger worldwide and influence the poverty worldwide. The real question is how can people take responsibility for their actions so resources can be saved? Americans do not realize that they are wasting food that potentially could have gone to feed thousands in their own country.

World Hunger

Did you know that about 3 billion people worldwide have live on less than two dollars per day? Two dollars is defiantly not enough to get three sufficient meals daily. In America alone there are 35.9 million people, including 12.9 million children, living below the poverty line (Siddiqi, par. 2). The weighted poverty threshold in 2006 for a four person family was \$20,615 (Poverty, 4 people). In 1960, 20 percent of the people from the world's richest countries had 30 times the income of the poorest 20 percent. Less than 40 years later in 1997, that gap more than doubled. From the world's richest countries, 20 percent of the people had a whopping 74 times the income of the world's poorest 20 percent (Shah², #10). Poorer countries have a harder time supporting their food systems because richer countries monopolize labor. Poor families do not have sufficient money to adequately feed themselves.

Around the world, 1.2 billion people suffer from hunger (Shah¹, bullet 2). In America, 30 million people go hungry on a regular basis (Rizvi, par. 8). Although food production has been increasing at a greater rate than the dietary needs of the population, there has been a greater increase in the people who suffer from hunger, partly because agricultural businesses are driven by profits (Rizvi, par. 12). Larger profits provide for increased production, which causes the cost of

groceries to increase. Low income families have an increasingly difficult time paying higher costs because their income increases slowly or hardly at all.

Interestingly, 1.2 billion people also suffer from obesity (Shah¹, bullet 4). Among the many reasons for obesity are poor dietary habits and over-consumption. Governments around the world need to establish responsible food and nutrition policies for its citizens to counter obesity. This could, in turn, help alleviate the food supply problems.

Food Wastage

The U.S. and Western Europe make up about 12 percent of the world population. Yet they are responsible for consuming approximately 60 percent of private consumer goods (Rizvi, par. 18). The remaining 88 percent of the world's people can only afford less than 50 percent of the private consumer goods. A total of 350 billion pounds of food is available for consumption in America and 100 billion pounds of it is wasted (Siddiqi, par. 15). According to Food Not Bombs, only 4 billion pounds of food is needed to meet the needs of the hungry (Rizvi, par. 8). America wastes 25 times the amount of food needed to feed hungry people around the world.

American households waste 14 percent of their food purchases (Siddiqi, par 12). That is a big waste of money to buy the food in the first place if it is just thrown out. Americans do not see that they are aimlessly throwing out 15 percent of the food products that are still within their expiration date (Siddiqi par. 13). Some Americans ignorantly waste consumable food that could have gone to a destitute body, struggling to stay alive.

Economically, food wastage in America results in loss revenue. The total food losses add up to approximately \$100 billion annually (Krebs, par. 2). American households waste \$40 billion (Krebs, par. 2). Not only do people need to be more cautious, but farm workers and food store employees need to be more wary too. During the farm and processing stage \$20 billion is lost (Krebs, par. 2). Food production can be affected by the weather, diseases, predation, mechanization, and poor grower decisions (Kantor, pg. 1). Crops are left in the field to be plowed under because the farmers will not realize a sufficient profit or because the quality of the crop is not good enough to be sold on the market. The inability to bring crops to the market adds up to a loss of \$7 billion.

Around \$30 to \$40 billion is lost during retail stage (Krebs, par. 2). Food that is substandard for sale is thrown out, such as bruised food (Kantor, pg. 1). The amount of food lost during the wholesaling

stage is equal to \$7 billion (Krebs, par. 9) This can be a result of an insufficient amount of storage space or because of poor handling and failed packaging (Kantor, pg. 1).

Food wastage negatively impacts the environment. Chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides, used on food crops are wasted when those crops fail to be consumed. This creates additional financial losses while adding pollutants to the earth (Shah¹, bullet 5). Transportation of food which is not eventually consumed wastes fuel. More pollution is added to the atmosphere from methane, a harmful greenhouse gas which comes from rotting food and contributes greatly to global warming (Shah¹, bullet 5). Not many people know that rotting food could harm the environment in such a detrimental way. Excessive food packaging further affects the environment, using up otherwise livable land for landfills (Krebs, par. 11).

Why are we Americans wasting food? A part of the problem is that people don't realize that they are wasting so much food. I contacted Journalist Jonathan Bloom, who is currently writing a book about wasted food in America. He replied that "Food is not something the past few generations have grown up treasuring. Food is seen as plentiful and cheap, because it is. The US produces enough food for every American to eat twice the daily recommended amount of calories and food has never been cheaper. If food cost more, maybe Americans

would be more careful not to waste it. We spend less on food than any other country" (Bloom¹).

Businesses contribute to food wastage because one of their main goals is to maximize profit. The public demands aesthetically appealing, undamaged products. Any rotting, bruised products or produce that simply has been left out overnight is thrown out because the produce is not physically appealing or does not look 'fresh' (Bloom², Day 1).

Restaurant businesses have more leftovers because of the increase in portion size. Their customers do not take their leftovers, instead leaving them to be thrown out. Because of food contamination concerns, leftovers can't be donated or eaten by anyone else (Bloom¹).

American corporations as well as individual Americans need to take responsibility for this issue. They take advantage of third world countries by paying those workers the lowest wages to produce food for American consumption (Day, par. 2).

Solving Hunger and Food Wastage

There is no real panacea for hunger or food wastage, but there are organizations that attempt to alleviate the situation for families. America's Second Harvest, a non-government agency, supports

approximately 50,000 charitable organizations in the United States (America's, par. 3). These groups include 940,000 charitable services such as food pantries, emergency shelters and soup kitchens (America's, par. 3). America's Second Harvest delivers nearly 2 billion pounds of food and grocery products annually, all donated and successfully delivered by volunteer workers (America's, par. 2).

Another non-government agency, the Organic Consumers Association, campaigns for health, justice and sustainability. They address many issues, including food safety. Currently they are running "Breaking the Chains" campaign, where they raise public awareness towards the wrongdoings of chain stores, such as Wal-Mart (Breaking the Chains, about). Laborers for chain stores are paid small wages to produce an abundance of cheap products for Americans to buy. The association wants people to support organic and locally produced products which can lead to a "safer, greener and more equitable society" (Breaking the Chains, about).

The Food Stamp Program, a government agency, was set up in 1939 (Food & Nutrition, #19). This program was intended as a "first line defense against hunger" (Food & Nutrition, #1). The food stamp program allows lower income American families to buy nutritious food (Food & Nutrition, #1). However, many families are not aware they are eligible. Fewer than half of the people who are eligible for the

stamps actually get them (Valentine, 4)! One factor that contributed to this problem was when the federal government in the early 1990's limited who was able to receive food stamps (Valentine, 4). Yet those people who received food stamps did use them. In 2006, 26.7 million people used food stamps each month (Bread, bullet 6). Approximately 1 million additional people were able to use and benefit from food stamps than in 2005 (Bread, bullet 6).

Some ways to resolve this issue are by raising public awareness. People realize that world hunger is an issue but they do not understand how they contribute to the problem. Americans waste enough food to feed 49 million people (Food Wastage, par. 5). If Americans collectively realized and took responsibility for their actions, their food wastage would have less of an impact on world hunger.

In my action plan, I would raise public awareness by creating a website with a helpful section for people to see where donation centers are in their particular community. I would also provide ways for them to support those organizations. Some organizations do fundraisers or canned food drives, which I could take part in. This action plan has the power to impact my issue as well as myself because I need food to survive, just like any other human being. Donating food to destitute people can make their life more comforting, because they know that other people care about them.

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Time Estimate</i>
Creating website	Computer, information on subject	2-3 weeks
Research about canned food drives	computer	1 day
Set up canned food drive	Telephone, grocery store	1 week
Canned food drive	Boxes, signs, people willing to donate canned food to the hungry	1 day

In conclusion, the U.S. is a powerful and rich country and has the ability to influence world hunger by reducing food wastage within its own borders. Americans have to ask themselves how they can take responsibility for their actions so resources can be saved. About 100 billion pounds of food is wasted per year (Siddiqi, par.3). This wasted food could have fed millions of hungry people not only in the U.S. but also around the globe. People need sufficient food to survive and spreading public awareness is one step closer to the final goal of a world without hunger.

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