

Agency: 1.3 billion tons of food wasted each year

By Lisa Singleton-Rickman
Staff Writer

Roughly one-third of all food produced for human consumption, about 1.3 billion tons, is lost or wasted each year, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Consumers in developed countries are responsible for 222 million tons of waste, according to the organization.

"With nearly a billion people going hungry in the world, including 17.2 million households within the United States, reducing the amount of food being wasted is incredibly important," said Danielle Nierenberg, director of the Washington, D.C.-based Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project. "We need to start focusing on diverting food from going into our trash cans and landfills and instead getting it into the hands of those who need it most."

The Worldwatch Institute is an independent research organization that works on energy, resource and environmental issues.

Myra Hickman, Tuscumbia City Schools' child nutrition program director, said she isn't surprised by the statistics and believes conserving food, and establishing such patterns, begins in the home.

"With the holidays upon us, we tend to cook too much, but there are simple things a family can do to prevent waste," she said. "Pay attention to the yield in a recipe and make recipes that feed a large number only when you are preparing for a large group. It sounds simple, but so often families, especially those that don't eat leftovers, throw away more food in the day or days after a meal than was consumed."

Hickman suggests getting a head count before planning the meal.

In the event too much food is left over, Hickman said, it's a good idea to remember the elderly or others in the community who would appreciate the food.

The statistics on food waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's is staggering, according to the Worldwatch Institute. Officials say that in the United States, an extra 5 million tons of household waste is generated each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's, including three times as much food waste as at other times of the year.

Hickman said it isn't difficult to curb those statistics.

"During holiday meals, you don't have to have 10-15 different dishes," she said. "That creates overeating. Four or five side dishes is a good number. It gives variety and doesn't encourage the piling up of food on your plate.

Likewise, when there is a vast variety of food items, get only a small portion of the items you like most. The sight of several items on a plate sends a strong message. We eat foods during the holidays we don't normally eat, so remember to be discriminating and stick with the traditional dishes in which you know the ingredients. Waste also is created when we try new recipes during the holidays that aren't accepted and thus get thrown away, Hickman said.

Lisa Singleton-Rickman can be reached at 256-740-5735 or lisa.singleton-rickman@TimesDaily.com.