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...Upfront

FoodReview (ISSN1056-327X) is published three times a year by the Food and Consumer Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Send questions, requests, and editorial comments to *FoodReview*, Room 237 USDA, 1301 New York Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20005-4788.

Annual subscriptions are $17.00 to U.S. addresses ($21.25 foreign). Multiyear subscriptions are also available. Call toll free 1-800-999-6779 (weekdays, 8:30-5:00 ET) to subscribe (callers outside the United States or Canada, please dial 703-834-0125). Sorry, but refunds cannot be issued.

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Determining the Amount of Food Loss in America

The United States is a land of immense agricultural abundance. We, as Americans, take great pride in the fact that our farmers and ranchers feed the Nation—and the world.

Yet most Americans would be shocked to learn just how much of the food that America produces goes to waste. Caused by a combination of economic, cultural, logistical, and seasonal factors, food gets wasted throughout the production and distribution system:

...It lies on fields unharvested or in storage bins undistributed.
...It gets discarded by wholesale markets, restaurants, and supermarkets.
...It gets reduced in the manufacturing and transportation processes.
...And, of course, it gets thrown out by families.

The good news is that USDA, in partnership with nonprofit groups such as Food Chain, Second Harvest, and the Congressional Hunger Center, is leading a national movement to dramatically expand the amount of wholesome and nutritious food that is recovered and gleaned and then distributed to Americans in need.

Such food recovery efforts will never be a replacement for a strong Federal safety net, but recovered food can be a critical and nutritious addition to the diets of millions of low-income Americans.

However, to succeed in a comprehensive effort to boost food recovery, we need a better understanding of just how much food is wasted, and at which points in the food system there is the most waste.

This issue of *FoodReview* contains an article that does just that—providing the best estimates in decades of how much food is wasted in America. Even without including losses on farms and orchards and losses in wholesaling and manufacturing, over 96 billion pounds of food is discarded each year. Yes, that's *billion*. Not only is this a tragic loss in terms of the number of hungry Americans who could benefit from this food, but such waste also increases disposal costs by an estimated $1 billion a year for municipalities across the Nation.

This issue of *FoodReview* also has important articles on the related topic of food safety. USDA is dedicated to using the most up-to-date science available to detect and reduce foodborne illnesses.

Together, these articles provide important information about how to ensure that America's food supply continues to be the best—as well as the most abundant—in the world.

Dan Glickman
Secretary of Agriculture