



**The Good Clean Nutrition Podcast
Episode 24 Transcript**

Episode 24: Dietitians Discuss: Reduce Your Household Food Waste with Dana Gunders

Dana Gunders:

It takes a ton of resources to get food to our tables. When you think about what it takes to grow, harvest, transport, store, cool, cook our food, it's just a huge resource commitment. And so, when we are throwing that food out, all of that is for naught. And on top of that, when that food goes to landfills, it decomposes and creates methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas.

Mary Purdy:

Welcome to the Good Clean Nutrition Podcast. I'm your host, Mary Purdy, integrative dietitian and nutrition educator. Before we get into today's interview, we want to remind you that this podcast is now also available to watch on YouTube. Simply visit [youtube.com/drinkorgain](https://www.youtube.com/drinkorgain) to watch this and past interviews.

Now for our episode! April is Earth month, and that means we are exploring the many ways that our actions affect our environment and we might owe the earth a bit of an apology. Now, you may or may not know that our food and agricultural system is one of the leading contributors to environmental degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss. It also has the potential to be a solution. And today's topic is food waste.

So back in my twenties, I did a bunch of catering in New York City and mostly for large corporate events. And at the end of every single shift there would be trays of food, and I mean gobs and gobs of food, of amazing, delicious stuff that would get completely thrown away. And this absolutely hurt my heart and soul to see this food just dumped when I would see dozens of hungry people on the streets every single day. So, I started bringing containers with me and boxing up the food to hand out to people on my subway ride home. However, sometimes there wasn't always somebody to give that food to, so I would often take it home and then try to eat it. But you can only eat so much fettuccine and green beans for breakfast, lunch and dinner every single day. So, I wound up throwing a lot out, which also really hurt my heart and soul.

But what I didn't realize then that I know now, is that this is also a huge environmental issue. So, we waste 40% of the food that we produce. That's 1200 calories per person per day, and it costs a lot of money as well. And food waste contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. It's a leading cause of freshwater contamination, and that's a heck of a lot of people that are not getting the food that could be perhaps redistributed.

The good news is that we can do something about it and 40% of food waste comes from consumers like us, you and me. So, there's a lot of opportunity here. Earth, are you listening? We got you. We're excited to be joined today by Dana Gunders, a national expert on food system and named the woman who helped start the Waste Free Movement by Consumer Reports. She is the executive director of ReFED, a nonprofit working to reduce food loss and waste. And prior to this, she was a senior scientist at the



Natural Resources Defense Council where she authored the landmark Wasted report about food waste. She's also the author of the Waste Free Kitchen Handbook. Dana, welcome. It's so good to have you.

Dana Gunders:

It's great to be here, Mary. Thanks so much for having me.

Mary Purdy:

And so, tell us a little bit about how you became interested in food waste.

Dana Gunders:

Well, I actually also worked for a caterer back in my twenties.

Mary Purdy:

Oh my gosh.

Dana Gunders:

So, I know that experience. I don't know that it struck me though. I certainly was not packing it up and taking it on the subway. Really where I came across this was, I was working on a sustainable agriculture project at the Natural Resources Defense Council, and there we were trying to get farmers to really be more careful about their water use and their energy use and their fuel use, things like that. And I was put in charge of the waste group, which was supposed to look at, there's a lot of plastics and stuff in farming, so we were looking at that. But I stumbled across these numbers on how much food was going to waste. And I went, wait a minute. Here we are trying to get farmers to be like 5 or 10% more efficient with their water, but we're throwing almost half the food that they grow out and what a waste.

And it struck me, it's a lot like energy efficiency in that we need to be more efficient with how we use the food we grow. Except in energy, there's a whole field around getting people to change out their light bulbs. Whereas in food, there wasn't even a discussion about it. I went back to the farmers and said, "Wait a minute. This is saying that like 40% of food goes to waste. Is that possible?" And they would go, "Yeah, that sounds about right." And I went, "Oh my gosh, how is nobody talking about this?" And so ultimately that led me to write a report, really kind of research what was out there, which was not much, but pull what I could find together in a report. Yeah, the report just got a huge media response because no one else could believe that 40% of food was going to waste in the country. And that's really what kicked me off into this issue. It was about 10 years ago. So, I've been working on it ever since.

Mary Purdy:

Excellent. Well, the work cannot happen fast enough. And I mentioned a couple of issues around why food waste is a problem upfront. Why is it a problem? Why should we be concerned about food waste? Aside from the fact that it's just sort of sad that a bunch of tomatoes rotted in our fridge. What's the real issue here?

Dana Gunders:

Yeah. Well, as you were mentioning, it takes a ton of resources to get food to our tables. When you think about what it takes to grow, harvest, transport, store, cool, cook our food, it's just a huge resource commitment. And so, when we are throwing that food out, all of that is for naught. And on top of that,



when that food goes to landfills, it decomposes and creates methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas. So, our estimates are that the footprint of waste of food is actually larger from a greenhouse gas perspective than the entire aviation industry. From a water perspective, it uses more water than the states of Ohio and Texas combined. If you were to picture a farm growing all of this food, it would be three quarters the size of California, and you'd be putting food into trucks, big semi-trucks, every 20 seconds. And those trucks would drive all around the country except instead of getting that food to people, they'd go straight to a landfill where they actually would make up the number one product going into landfills today.

Mary Purdy:

Wow. Those are huge numbers. And so, it's about the greenhouse gas emissions, but it's also about fresh water consumption, how much water you're saying is being used, and then the huge amount of resources that have gone into actually creating all of this food to begin with that winds up getting wasted.

Dana Gunders:

And beyond that, deforestation is happening because of land use pressures. So, we're taking a lot of land up to grow food that we're not eating, and then there's more land, more native ecosystems being kind of paved down to grow more food. So the more efficient we can be, we just kind of take the pressure off of that whole system. And then of course, there's where you started the conversation, which is that it's just kind of a moral tragedy that this is happening alongside all of the hunger that still exists in this country. And just this week, the benefits, there was a huge cut, the pandemic era kind of benefits for food assistance ended. And so, with food prices rising, we are really looking at a situation where we are going to have a lot more people having to make hard choices about where they spend their money and how much they can spend on food versus rent versus keeping lights on. So we're at this moment where just having part of our society throwing food out when there's another part that really needs it is just kind of a shame.

Mary Purdy:

And I think people don't realize the implications of this. I mean, even just in the beginning of the food growing process of deforestation and the implication that has in the environment, that we are cutting down trees that have the potential to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, and then we use all these resources to grow the food and then we wind up wasting the food. I mean, the implications are just huge. And the prevention feels like it is so necessary, especially when we're seeing food prices rise and people go hungry every single day when we're producing gobs and gobs and food. So why? Let's ask the big question, which is, what's the root cause of this? Why are we wasting so much food? Or why are we losing so much food?

Dana Gunders:

Yeah, I think a lot of times... I mean, it's very different if you're looking at why do tomatoes not get harvested on a field versus why are we scraping our potatoes off of our plates or whatnot? So it's a very different problem. I like to say people talk about it as if it's one problem, but it's really about fixing kind of the whole food system a different part. If you had to boil it down to a couple things, one is, it's invisible. We are not measuring it. No one knows how much food they're wasting. That is true if you're a restaurant, that is true if you're a grocery store. That is true if you are somebody in your own kitchen. So



because we're not measuring it's kind of difficult to see. One of my favorite statistics is that 75% of Americans say they waste less than the average American. If we had to stop and think about for a moment, we'd go, "Wait a minute, that's not possible."

Mary Purdy:
Hold on. Hold on.

Dana Gunders:
Which means that we think we're better than we are. And anyone who works with restaurants on this will tell you, no restaurant has any waste. That's the first, "Oh, we don't waste. No, no, no." So, I think that one is we don't see it. Another is that, and I think this is changing a little bit as food prices rise, but food is relatively inexpensive for many people. And certainly, if you're a food business, while you're aware of food costs, your bigger costs are labor and maybe rent. When you're optimizing, it may not be worth having somebody work an extra hour to make sure that you're donating your food or that you're trimming your broccoli to use all the parts or things like that. So, there are some trade off decisions that are made from an economic perspective that actually are rational, but that lead to waste in the end.

So those are some of the main causes at the highest level. I think when you dive in more specifically, and maybe, I mean we could talk about farms and manufacturers, but I think for your audience it's probably more interesting to just talk about what's happening in people's homes. And that really boils down to poor food management. So, we are very aspirational when we go to the grocery store. We like to walk down the aisles and think about how we are going to eat healthy and cook a lot this week and feed our children well and be adventurous or whatever it is. Then life happens for the rest of the week and we don't always kind of live out those aspirations. I think that's a big part of it.

Some people are scared of food, they don't really understand when it's okay to eat food and when it's not. And so there's the kind of, when in doubt throw it out, mentality. Certainly the date labels on food cause some of that confusion. They don't have the cooking skills to know, "Okay, I'm not sure about this spinach, I'll just cook it." Rather they just throw it out. And then I just think there's sort of a cultural apathy to it all where whatever we do our first clean out, we just throw it out it, we're pretty numb to it. So I think that relates as well.

Mary Purdy:
I want to acknowledge the fact that I have wasted food as well. So I'm not coming to this conversation thinking that I have somehow solved my own food waste issue. I am culpable and I have gone to the farmer's market with the best of intentions and bought like, "Oh, I'm going to buy this crazy looking vegetable like celeriac. This is the most crazy looking food I've ever seen. I'm going to buy it and I'm going to take it home and I'm going to cook it," and then I don't. And have had things in my refrigerator in the back shelf that you forget about and you think, "Oh shoot, I was going to make that dish and I didn't make it."

So, I'm hearing from you, there's the issue of just poor planning or maybe a lack of planning, a lack of ability to understand how to cook well, not understanding when food is still good to eat. And then you mentioned something really important, which I think people don't often think about, which is that we don't value food, we don't value food, and as a result, it doesn't feel like it matters if we somehow toss



something out because we haven't had that sense of actually valuing it. And I'm wondering how do we get people to value food and to think of food as this precious way of connecting with our bodies, our health, our families, our culture, our communities? How do we change that?

Dana Gunders:

It's like at one hand we don't value it. On the other hand, people have this love for farms. They're just this beautiful idea for people. And so I think it's in there somewhere. It doesn't always register when it's like 6:30 PM and your kids are screaming, you got to get dinner on the table and it's more transactional.

So, it's kind of like, how do you create the time to have that? And I think it's a challenge and it's not going to happen every day and every night and every meal. It is a mindset problem. So even if you don't have the time to sit there and cook a beautiful meal on a Wednesday, I do think if you have this mindset of food is important, I don't want to waste it, then you do start to look at your refrigerator a little bit differently and you think about dinner a little bit differently and you go more from like, "Okay, well what do I have and what needs to be used up and what can I make with that?" Rather than, "Oh my gosh, can we just get takeout tonight because I'm tired?" Right?

Mary Purdy:

It's a cultural shift. I mean, it is a difficult cultural shift to make happen. And I think it's going to take a lot of different avenues to get us there.

Dana Gunders:

You said you waste food. We all waste food. I waste food. My husband is totally sworn to secrecy. But it happens and it's not for mal intent and once it happens, it's too late. And I think that's so challenging about this. No one wakes up wanting to waste food. There's just a level of attention you need to pay to it that otherwise it kind of just sort of happens. And I think that asking people to pay that attention when there's so many other things going on in their lives is a challenge. And so that's part of it as well.

Mary Purdy:

And what would you say are the most commonly wasted foods?

Dana Gunders:

There's been some studies about this. Coffee is actually, from a weight perspective, I know it's heavy, but that's a high one. Pasta and rice are pretty high up there. But then fresh fruits and vegetables that don't get consumed. And then interestingly, leftovers are pretty high up there because people kind of get sick of them or they kind of intend to do it and then they just don't. They're great on day one. They're great for lunch the next day, but the next day you're kind of like, "I don't need any more chili."

So, one of the things I like to promote, I'm sure we'll get into those more later, but is freezing foods and especially leftovers because most people don't like to eat those leftovers past that first day. And so after day one, put them in the freezer right away and they only have to stay in there for a week. They don't have to stay in there, it doesn't have to be long-term storage for months and months. Freezers can be more actively used. So.

Mary Purdy:



As a personal note here, I live for leftovers, I love leftovers. I cannot get enough of my leftovers. So hopefully we can change the dynamic on there. I'm Mary Purdy and you're listening to the Good Clean Nutrition Podcast. We're on with national Food waste expert, Dana Gunders. And next, we're going to dive a bit further into how you can limit your household food waste in your home and in your community. But first, a word from the sponsor of this podcast, Orgain.

Acacia Wright:

Thanks, Mary. We're proud to announce that Orgain has earned its B Corp certification, joining a growing movement of like-minded businesses balancing purpose and profit to positively impact the planet and the people living on it.

This marks an important milestone in Orgain's ongoing efforts to be a force for good in the world, which began with our founding mission to provide accessible, clean nutrition for all.

To learn more about our B Corp certification, visit Orgain.com. Now back to you, Mary!

Mary Purdy:

Let's get back to our conversation now with Dana Gunders.

So Dana, I want to talk a little bit more about strategies and how we can reduce food waste or how folks who are listening can help to reduce food waste in their homes. I'm about to go on a trip and we are in the process of clearing out our refrigerator. And when I've done this before in the past, we have the craziest meals. We're like having pickle sandwiches and my husband's like, "Oh my God, is it olives and fermented sauerkraut again tonight for our vegetable?" Anything that we can do to just clear out the fridge. But you talked about the food management skills for reducing food waste, for helping with benefiting health and then also reducing that grocery bill. Let's talk a little bit more about some of the strategies behind how we can reduce food waste in our homes and communities.

Dana Gunders:

Sure. First off, the best way is to be a good planner. Now, I know that plan is a four-letter word in our society these days, but if you are able to do that, and this does not have to mean sitting around on a Sunday night reading a cookbook for two hours, it can be like, okay, we always have pasta and quinoa bowls and whatever, and just kind of the standard. And also Wednesday, we're going to be out. We're not going to be here. And so I think importantly, planning in for nights you're not eating is important.

Just making sure that kind of those standard meals get in there because you're more likely to actually follow through with a plan for your standards and then maybe sprinkling in something exciting, if you have the energy for that. If you can plan and stick to a shopping list, you will save money, you will eat healthier typically, and you will also have less food go to waste. Apparently you also save time. At least that's what some studies have shown. So it's really a great practice. Doesn't work for everyone.

If you are not very good at that, then what you need to do is get very good at your use it up strategies. And I love that you're planning ahead. I mean, when I go on vacation, it's like a week ahead, I'm like, "Oh gosh, we're going on vacation in a week."

Mary Purdy:



I know.

Dana Gunders:

"What am I going to do? I have seven days to strategize around all this food I have." But whether it's vacation or just your average week, I think getting really good at these, use it up strategies is important. Some people have a fridge night or some people call it Wasteless Wednesdays or Stir Fridays, but having that go-to meal, it might be taco night, it might be a soup that you make, it might be frittata, but whatever works for your household, but kind of working in those, use it up meals into your rotation is a really good strategy.

Another, as I mentioned before, is freezing foods. Our freezers are a magic pause button. So let's say you don't get around using everything in your fridge before you go on vacation. I mean, before I go on vacation, I take 10 minutes to just take whatever I can out of my fridge and stick it in my freezer, whether it's pasta, half a jar pasta sauce. You can freeze eggs if you can have taken them out of the shell and scramble them, but don't cook them. You can freeze cheese, you can freeze milk.

Mary Purdy:

You can freeze beans and tofu. I think people don't think that you can, but you can.

Dana Gunders:

You can. And sometimes, I mean with somebody like tofu and sometimes beans, the texture might change a little bit.

Mary Purdy:

So what?

Dana Gunders:

And that's where that mindset comes in.

Mary Purdy:

Exactly.

Dana Gunders:

It'd like, all right. Well, so it's a little bit strange. We're not eating Michelin star meals every night in our homes. It's okay. So I think in homes, those are the main strategies.

And then it's also important to understand what the date labels on food mean. Many people think they're telling you to throw that food out, when in fact the sell by, use by, best by kind of dates are really meant to be an indicator of quality and when food is at its top quality. And most foods can be in days, weeks, sometimes even months after those dates depending on the food. So if you are worried about it, just taste it. Our bodies are very well-equipped to taste when something is too old to eat.

And if you're scared of it, it's important to know that the reason people get sick from food, when you hear about a foodborne illness like E. coli, salmonella, listeria, those are products that are on the food before they get to us. And whether or not they're past their date, they will make us sick. Now, typically



that's not happening, but it's not a factor of age. And so listeria is a little bit different. Typically, for most foods, the bacteria and enzymes that decay food are not dangerous to us. And our bodies are very well-equipped to know when to not eat something.

Mary Purdy:

So the best by, use by label that you might see on food is not the date by which you will grow a third ear, but the date by which the manufacturer of that food thinks the food will taste its best, right?

Dana Gunders:

Exactly.

Mary Purdy:

And we luckily have another bodily part, which helps us determine, and that's the old nose. If you smell something that feels off, your nose is a pretty good indicator of letting you know that. And one thing I love doing too is you mentioned frittatas, you mentioned soups. I'm a huge fan of taking stalks, broccoli stalks, leafy green stalks, I never throw those out. Those are gold. Those are gems to throw into a frittata, stir-fry, soup, and sometimes even a smoothie if you've got a blender that's strong enough.

Dana Gunders:

That's right. In our house we have a... we call it butt soup. It's the, it's cauliflower butts, right? That cabbage part of the cauliflower. And we just make a little soup with it. And my kids love it. And I think it's hilarious 'cause it's called butt soup.

Mary Purdy:

Right, I mean I think this is about that mindset. It's not about, oh gosh, here's the stalk that doesn't look as pretty or doesn't seem as appealing, but it actually is just fine. And in fact it can be fabulous. It can be more than just fine or adequate. It can be delectable, delicious and it's just about getting creative in the kitchen. And what about when people go out to eat when it comes to portioning or bringing containers? What's your advice around that with restaurants?

Dana Gunders:

Restaurants are challenging because you don't have control. Well, you do, but you don't over exactly what you're going to get. And so, one of the biggest causes of waste in the whole food system is actually what we call plate waste. That's food that is served in restaurants that is not eaten. There is so much of it, right? About 70% of the waste that's happening in restaurants is actually already sold and served. And so what can we do about that as consumers? I think as consumers, it's asking about what the portions are, what comes with it, and just kind of thinking through, are you going to eat at all? Right? Because it's our natural inclination to just everyone order a meal. But sometimes that happens and you get all this food and we've all had that experience where everybody has just ordered and then it comes out and you're like, oh gosh, there's no way we are all eating those. We totally could have split that. But sometimes it's hard to know ahead of time.

So I think really asking your server kind of, "Well, how big is this?" And one of the things I would like to see more of is visual representation of portion sizes before ordering. I think if restaurants could do that for us, that would be great. Also, a lot of times you can get a half order even if it's not on the menu. So



that's a good thing to know, really kind of looking at what the sides, what comes with it, because that's the other thing that happens. You eat the burger but not the french fries. So making sure that the sides are the ones you want. And then as you mentioned, taking what you can home if you don't eat it. So whether that's bringing a container yourself, which I think is kind of a high bar, a lot of people don't want to do that, but at least asking the restaurant to take things home and then remembering to eat it when you get home.

Mary Purdy:

I have now started putting take home containers just in my bag the same way that when I go to the grocery store, I just automatically bring my own bags, I've started to create a new mindset in myself. I just bring containers. So I was out at a restaurant the other night and just brought containers, and I actually brought containers for the friends that we going out to eat with. And so they took home one of our containers and we took home one of our containers. You know who loved it, was the waiter. They were like, "Oh my god, this is a great idea." And I said, "This should be enforced at restaurants." It's sort of like when you book your reservation, "Don't forget to bring your containers." And I love your idea too, of the visual representation of the actual portion size. That's brilliant.

Dana Gunders:

Yeah.

Mary Purdy:

What about convenience foods? You were talking about plastic in your life at the Natural Resources Defense Council and marking plastic, but plastic can actually also play a role with reducing food waste. It's one of the few good things about plastic. How can convenience foods play a role in reducing our food waste, like pre-cut foods?

Dana Gunders:

One great example are frozen vegetables. I always have some on hand. I think it really takes the pressure off of always having those fresh vegetables around. Now, most of the time I do. Frozen vegetables are great, they're chopped for me, they're washed for me. All I have to do is throw them in the pan and there we are and they never go bad. So that would be one area where is a huge convenience and it helps have less waste. I think other convenience can go the other way. And to me, time and convenience are kind of intertwined. So this idea that in some places you can order your groceries in two hours, they'll be there in two hours or your meal, that is very convenient for us as consumers, but it could lead to more waste at the grocery or restaurant level because they're needing to have everything on hand to make sure they can get it to you in two hours.

Mary Purdy:

Oh, interesting. Yeah.

Dana Gunders:

Some of that convenient stuff is convenient for us, but maybe leading to waste upstream.

Mary Purdy:



It's so good to have that perspective. I actually had not thought of that before. What about food like meal delivery kits, are those effective or is that a good thing to buy, not a good thing to buy as it relates to food waste?

Dana Gunders:

Yeah. Well, as it relates to food waste, those are actually great because they do the planning for you, they do the portioning for you, they do a lot of the work for you, and you just kind of got to do the cooking. Those save quite a bit of waste, especially for things like herbs or condiments that you don't really want to buy a whole spice jar of mace or something. And so they just give you a little bit that you need. You don't have a use for a whole bunch of parsley or thyme or something. I think that those are really useful for that. So they generally do, and it's very rare that somebody buys those meal kits and then doesn't follow through in cooking them because they're all right there and you paid the money.

And so I think there's quite low waste and there have been studies that have shown that. Of course there's a trade-off, there's quite a bit of packaging associated, and I think they're trying to work on that. And we're seeing more in-store Meal Kit 2.0 kind of things coming out where you can go up to a place and pick your protein and pick your thing and cook it that night.

Mary Purdy:

And we should mention that we're talking about mace the spice and not mace the thing you might spray in somebody's eye.

Dana Gunders:

Yes. Thank you.

Mary Purdy:

I always hear that word and go, "Oh, are we talking about the edible mace or the hazardous mace?" We can't talk about food solutions when it comes to food and agriculture without talking about a touch of technology. So what technology advances have been made, whether it's apps or other things that are out there that are helping to reduce food waste?

Dana Gunders:

There's a bunch kind of within the supply chain. There are ways that, so the average grocery store sells about 50,000 different items, and it's very hard for them to track every single item and predict the sales for every single item as they're buying it. So that's been a great application of big data and artificial intelligence to really look at how each product sells, depending on the weather, depending on what other promotions are happening in the store and be more precise and accurate about their purchasing. And there's other stuff that's like that, some imaging to detect quality issues and such in the supply chain.

I think when it comes to consumers, one of the really successful apps, and this is kind of both at the market and consumer, but are these last minute sale apps. So at the grocery store, there's one called Flashfood. With restaurants, there's one called Too Good To Go, and those are allowing restaurants or grocery stores to say, hey, wait a minute, I have this product that I'm about to take off the shelf or throw out because it's the end of the night and it allows them to put it on for a half price or a deep discount



and still sell that. And that's just a win-win for everybody. It allows for us to get food cheaper. It allows for the store to get some income out of it, even if it's not the full amount.

Mary Purdy:

And I know there are organizations now like Misfit Produce and Imperfect Produce that are also offering foods that may not always fit the ideal of what food should look like, but they're able to sell those as well, whether it's last minute or just as a service.

Dana Gunders:

And I mean, they started off by selling the "ugly" fruits and vegetables, those products that didn't fit within the more strict specifications that grocery chains tend to have. And they've expanded, right? Now they sell eggs that are too small that don't make it in. They sell pretzel bits that have fallen... That pretzels break when they... Pretzel bits you can buy or the ends and trims of things. And so they really are doing their best to look all around the food system and go, okay, where are there steady streams of things that can be sold? And also their business model allows them not just to rely on the steady streams, but the more spontaneous like, oh gosh, there was a bumper broccoli crop and now there's too much broccoli on the market, and so we're really going to push that through our boxes. So yeah, they're playing an important role.

Mary Purdy:

And that seems like another terrific place where consumers can advocate for buying those or to actually purchase those upcycled foods or that imperfect produce. And again, changing that mindset of what a tomato actually is supposed to look like or what an apple should look like. And it can be cheaper too. I was at the farmer's market last week, and apples, I'm here in the Seattle, Washington area, and apples tend to be, at the farmer's market, 2.99 a pound, and they had seconds in a little pile, and that's where I always gravitate to. And they were 1.50 a pound instead. And I had three of them this week and they were fabulous. Again, shifting that mindset.

One final question, which is, we've been talking a lot about things on the individual level, and I would imagine there are people out there listening who may either work in institutions or in healthcare facilities or may have some kind of influence in a larger facility, a larger organization. How can we get more action in larger institutions to take measures to reduce their food waste? And how can we as individuals help them to achieve that?

Dana Gunders:

Yeah. Well, I will say the first thing is getting people's attention and commitment to the issue. That's not that hard to do. Nobody really wants, even at the institution level, to have food go to waste. So it really quickly goes to like, well, what do we do about it? And I will say that our website, and one of the things we were actually founded on at ReFED is analyzing how well solutions work. And so if you go to our website at refed.org, we have something called the Insights Engine. And you can go there and say, I work at a food service institution. And then it will tell you, you'll hear the top solutions from a financial perspective, from a greenhouse gas perspective, and here's how much they cost to implement and here's how much food they could save and here's how many greenhouse gases they could save.



And we try to give people that, and you can click through and find different companies that are actually providing those solutions. There's a wealth of information to get people started there. And it just kind of depends on the institution. For instance, in hospitals, ordering ahead has been a really good strategy, providing those menus and that choice because at least patients are getting something that they're interested in. Waste tracking in kitchens in those facilities has been really successful. On college campuses, taking away trays from cafeterias so that they have to carry everything. Sometimes having smaller plates so that when they fill them up, they're filling them up with less food.

And sometimes it's just signage, just kind of trying to raise that awareness when people are taking food. Like, "Okay, you can always come back, make sure you're going to eat all this. Did you know this much food goes to waste and it has this impact?" So yeah, it does vary a little bit by your setting, but certainly there's something we can all do. And I think also, if you work in an institution, a lot of times, the frontline people or the managers of a particular cafe, they really know it's really productive to engage the employees who are working because they see it all the time. They've become numb, but they see it. And if you ask them, they might have some good ideas.

Mary Purdy:

That's terrific advice. So I mean, it's not just the person looking from the outside in, it's the people on the inside looking out and being able to collaborate between all of those different members of this system. And I can recommend anybody out there who's listening or watching to take a look at ReFED because they have incredible tools and resources and ideas and tools for anybody who is out there looking to find ways to reduce their food waste. They're working with food businesses or they have a place for food businesses to come, and funders and policy makers and people who work in the various different food service industry, so highly recommend going to ReFED to check it out. Dana, thank you so much for an incredible conversation, for the incredible work that you're doing. Is there anything that we should know about how to find you or the work that you're involved with right now? Where can people come to find you and more about what you're doing?

Dana Gunders:

Yeah, well, you can find us at refed.org, that's RE, F as in Frank, ED.org. You'll find all those things you were describing and more and certainly check out, there's a big green button that says the Insights Engine, and that's where you can really dive into the good stuff.

Mary Purdy:

Excellent.

Dana Gunders:

So check that out and you'll find me and great information.

Mary Purdy:

And she also wrote a book, the Waste Free Kitchen Handbook, which has lots and lots of great ideas as well for how to reduce waste in your kitchen, not just food, but lots of other things too. So wonderful again to speak with you, Dana. Thank you so much for sharing your time and insights today. Really appreciate it.



Dana Gunders:

Of course. It's been great to be with you. Thank you, Mary.

Mary Purdy:

Thanks for tuning in to this episode of the Good Clean Nutrition Podcast. If you like this episode, we would really appreciate it if you subscribe so you don't miss another episode. And if you can, give it a five-star rating, a review, or a thumbs up on your favorite podcast platform like Apple Podcast, Spotify, or YouTube. Thanks so much and we'll see you next time.