

# FOOD WASTE IN SHAWNEE COUNTY



Food waste is the discarding of potentially usable food, and is a significant problem in the United States. USDA estimates that nearly one-third (31 percent) of the available food supply at the retail and consumer levels went to waste in 2010.

Reducing food waste offers many benefits to a community and its residents, including financial savings, preservation of natural resources, reduced demand on waste management systems and landfills, and increased amounts of potentially wasted food that is safe for human consumption food diverted to feed individuals at risk for hunger. When foods or food by-products are not safe or appropriate for human consumption, they may still be usable as animal feed. Composting of food scraps and spoiled foods recovers some value from the waste stream by producing a rich soil amendment that can be used in gardens to reduce the need for chemical fertilizers.

Much of the food that is being wasted is nutritious and safe to eat, but discarded because of over-production, or because is it slightly blemished, imperfect or approaching “sell-by” dates. Gleaning and food recovery programs collect those excess or imperfect foods from farms, farmers’ markets, grocers, restaurants and other sources in order to re-direct it to those in need.

**51 million pounds** of food are wasted annually by Shawnee County consumers with an estimated value of **\$65.5 million**  
Americans **throw away about 25 percent** of the food they buy

For more information visit [www.heartlandhealthyneighborhoods.org](http://www.heartlandhealthyneighborhoods.org) to access the full report.

## Facts & Trends

- While more than **25,000 tons** of food are wasted each year in Shawnee County, more than **27,000 Shawnee County residents** are struggling to get enough food.
- The estimated annual cost of food waste for a family of four is between **\$1,350** and **\$2,275**.

## Strengths

- Shawnee County Extension offer one free composting bin to households in Shawnee County
- Mobile Food Pantry
- Topeka Sustainability Advisory Council committed to decreasing food waste
- State and Federal “Good Samaritan” laws limit liability related to donated foods

## Challenges

- Lack of local data measuring food waste
- Lack of a “gleaning” infrastructure”
- Lack of community composting supports
- No clear understanding of food safety regulations
- Consumer confusion about “best by”, “use by” and “expiration” dates
- Business fear of liability related to donating foods

## Policy Needs

- Establishment of a Food and Farm Council
- Zoning, tax, and incentives for food retail and processing
- Comprehensive review of planning, licensing and zoning to ensure inclusivity of health, equity, hunger and agriculture
- Complete a food system waste study and plan

## Community Needs

- Private sector buy-in for food waste reduction and donation practices
- A local-minded approach to development
- A system-wide approach to healthy food
- Increased composting options
- Education on food safety and expiration dates on foods
- Increased awareness of Good Samaritan laws limiting liability
- Better food purchase prediction tools for retail establishments