

A painless way to achieve huge energy savings: Stop wasting food

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Scientists have identified a way that the United States could immediately save the energy equivalent of about 350 million barrels of oil a year — without spending a penny or putting a ding in the quality of life: Just stop wasting food. Their study, reported in ACS' journal *Environmental Science & Technology*, found that it takes the equivalent of about 1.4 billion barrels of oil to produce, package, prepare, preserve and distribute a year's worth of food in the United States.

Michael Webber and Amanda Cuellar note that food contains [energy](#) and requires energy to produce, process, and transport. Estimates indicate that between 8 and 16 percent of [energy consumption](#) in the [United States](#) went toward food production in 2007. Despite this large energy investment, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that people in the U.S. waste about 27 percent of their food. The scientists realized that the waste might represent a largely unrecognized opportunity to conserve energy and help control global warming.

Their analysis of wasted food and the energy needed to ready it for consumption concluded that the U.S. wasted about 2030 trillion BTU of energy in 2007, or the equivalent of about 350 million barrels of oil. That represents about 2 percent of annual energy consumption in the U.S. "Consequently, the energy embedded in wasted food represents a substantial target for decreasing energy consumption in the U.S.," the article notes. "The wasted energy calculated here is a conservative estimate both because the food waste data are incomplete and outdated and the energy consumption data for [food](#) service and sales are

incomplete."

Percentage of Various Foods Wasted in the U.S.

Fats and oils	33%
Dairy	32%
Grains	32%
Eggs	31%
Sugar and other caloric sweeteners	31%
Vegetables	25%
Fruit	23%
Meat, poultry, fish	16%
Dry beans, peas, lentils	16%
Tree nuts and peanuts	16%

More information: ACS' *Environmental Science and Technology*
"Wasted Food, Wasted Energy: The Embedded Energy in Food Waste in the United States"

Provided by American Chemical Society

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