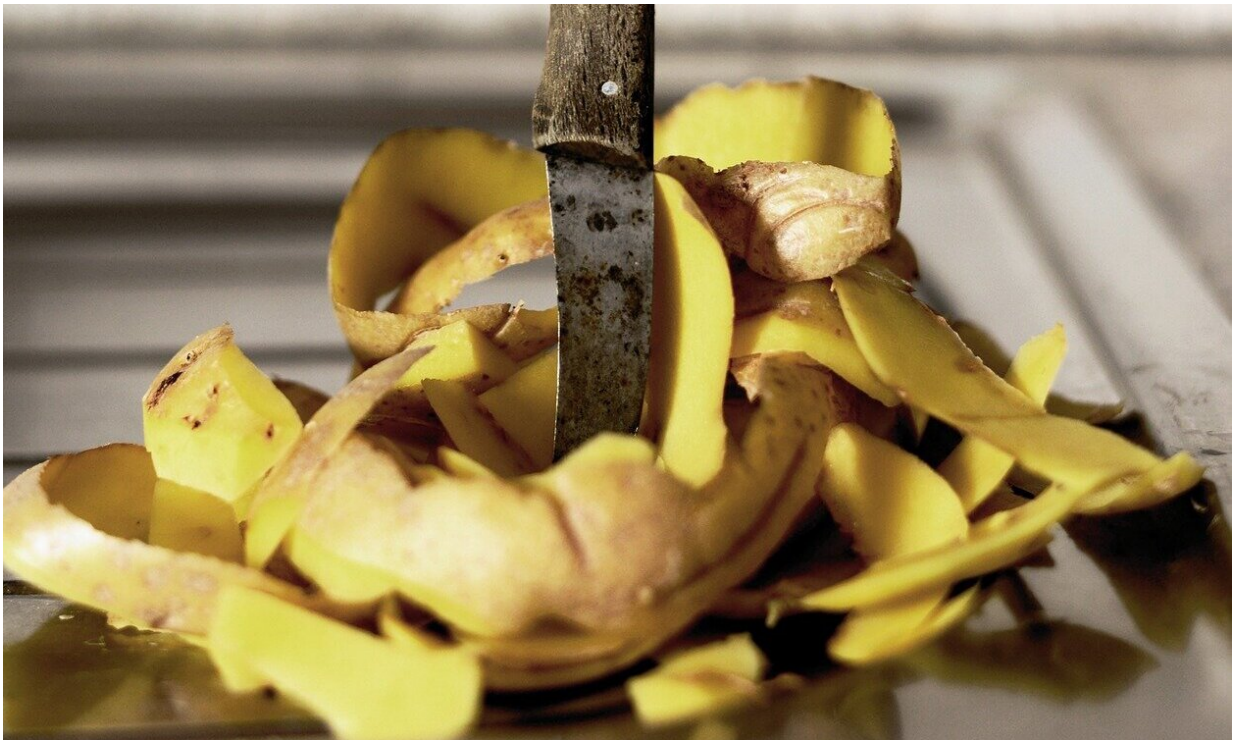


Americans spend more on wasted food than on gasoline

April 21 2020, by Adrienne Berard



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A new study by Zach Conrad, assistant professor in William & Mary's Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences, finds that the average American consumer spends roughly \$1,300 per year on food that ends up being wasted.

To put that into context, his study found that on average Americans spent more annually on wasted [food](#) than they did on vehicle gasoline (\$1,250); apparel (\$1,207); household heating and electricity (\$1,149); [property taxes](#) (\$1,046); and household maintenance, repairs and insurance (\$936) for the average single-person household in 2017.

"Across America, people report that saving money is the most important motivator for reducing their [food waste](#)," Conrad said. "So it can be particularly helpful for people to compare those potential savings with the money they spend on everyday household expenses—that can really put food waste into perspective."

The study, published today in *Nutrition Journal*, integrated dietary data from nearly 40,000 adults. The data were collected over a 16-year period and use nationally-representative information on food waste, [food prices](#), eating location and food price inflation.

The findings demonstrate that consumers spent, on average, over one-quarter of their daily food budget on food that ended up being wasted, representing over \$3.50 per day, Conrad explained. Meat and seafood accounted for the greatest proportion of daily food budgets spent on wasted food, followed by fruits and vegetables, grains, sweets and dairy.

"Until now, we didn't have up-to-date information about the amount of money that people were spending every day on food that ends up being wasted," Conrad said. "We didn't know whether that waste was occurring at home or at restaurants. This study fills those gaps, and pinpoints specific foods that contribute most to that expense on a daily basis. That can help people reduce their waste and increase their budgets."

Changing habits saves money, but it could also save lives. Conrad notes that [poor diet](#) is the leading risk factor for morbidity and mortality in the U.S. Less than 10 percent of Americans consume the recommended

amounts of fruits and vegetables, and 60 to 70 percent exceed the recommendations for empty calories like added sugars and saturated fat, he added.

At the same time, the average American wastes about one pound of food every day, including large amounts of healthy foods like fruits and vegetables, Conrad explained.

And it's not just food that goes to waste. All of the agricultural inputs like pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation water and energy go to waste right along with it. These wasted inputs contribute to [environmental problems](#) like [greenhouse gas emissions](#), water pollution, soil erosion and biodiversity loss, Conrad explained.

"Food waste represents massive amounts of wasted money and needless environmental impact from wasted greenhouse gas emissions and energy," Conrad said. "At a time when we all need to reduce our environmental footprint and tighten our purse strings, reducing our food [waste](#) can help us accomplish both of those goals."

More information: Zach Conrad. Daily cost of consumer food wasted, inedible, and consumed in the United States, 2001–2016, *Nutrition Journal* (2020). [DOI: 10.1186/s12937-020-00552-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12937-020-00552-w)

Provided by The College of William & Mary

Citation: Americans spend more on wasted food than on gasoline (2020, April 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-americans-food-gasoline.html>

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