

Abstract

Lick the Plate Clean: The Intersection of Food, Nutrition, and Waste [†]

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Abstract: Many factors affect food choice, including hunger, cost, time, culture, and knowledge. Food choice can also be guided by food and nutrition guidelines, which promote human health and, ideally, planetary health. The Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines for New Zealand adults include six Eating Statements. The first Eating Statement is to “Enjoy a variety of nutritious foods every day”, and this includes grain foods. Globally, a common source of grain is bread. The 2008/09 Adult Nutrition Survey reported that the bread group was the single largest contributor of carbohydrate, protein, dietary fibre, many B vitamins, iodine, selenium, and sodium to the diet. Despite being one of the most nutritious foods that we eat, bread is also the food that is most commonly thrown out by New Zealand households. A study conducted by WasteMINZ in 2014/15 estimated that 29 million loaves of bread were wasted each year in New Zealand. Globally, 40% of food that is produced is wasted, and this waste occurs throughout the food supply chain: from production, processing, distribution, and retailers to consumers. Not only are food loss and waste inefficient uses of resources, but they also contribute to climate change. The food system is responsible for 21–37% of total greenhouse gas emissions. One of the goals of the first ever UN Food Systems Summit, held in September 2021, was to devise actions to help the world “transition towards diets that are healthier, safer, climate and nature-positive” and “to eliminate food waste and build circular food economies”. The phrase to “lick your plate clean” historically meant to eat everything on your plate, either from hunger or because the meal was so delicious. The time has come to redefine the phrase: nutritious (and delicious) food should not be wasted.

Keywords: dietary guidelines; food choice; greenhouse gas emissions; food systems; food waste



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