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NEWSLETTER FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

## Bon Appétit: A New Life for Leftovers

Food! It's an essential element of daily life — you would be hard-pressed to find a social setting where there isn't food. It's in restaurants and street-side stands, grocery stores and farmers' markets, hospitals and office buildings, and of course, in our homes. But, did you know that food waste is also a huge share of what we toss out every day? It amounts to an impressive 320,000 tons of waste annually in Connecticut alone.

Americans throw out as much as **20 pounds of food per person per month** at a cost of well **over \$2,000 a year** per household. The **National Resources Defense Council's 2012 Report** showed that food is wasted at every step along the way from farm to table — beginning in the fields with the harvesting process, then at both the packaging and retail levels, and finally from our plates.

Food waste is a concern for a number of reasons — economic, environmental and health. Throwing away food is misusing resources and wasting money; it impacts the bottom line of food businesses and is a significant item in everyone's monthly budget. Throwing food in the trash contributes to harmful health effects since it creates pollution, both on land and in the air, wastes fuel and water, and generates greenhouse gas emissions. Fortunately there are many ways we can reduce the amount of food that is thrown away, or at least make use of better options than the dumpster or trash can.

**Restaurants, cafeterias and businesses** that prepare or sell food can follow the 3Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle — starting with finding ways to **reduce** kitchen scraps and unused food. There are computerized food tracking systems such as **LeanPath** that focus on prevention. Food waste is measured daily and an analysis



Jesus Pernia of Yale-New Haven Hospital's St. Raphael Campus gets leftover food ready for donation to a local community center.

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of why it was thrown away is provided (e.g., spoilage, trim waste, overproduction). This makes it easy to make changes in the future.

There will always be times, however, when too much has been prepared or there is more than can be sold. **Donating** unused food to local organizations that feed the hungry is an excellent **reuse** option. It not only helps those in need, but can be a tax benefit to your business.



**Food scraps separated for composting**

The **Federal Good Samaritan Food Donation Act** protects against liability when donating to a non-profit organization. In Connecticut, **Community Plates** and **Rock and Wrap it Up!** are examples of donation organizations.

**Recycling** food waste is also better than putting it in the trash. This includes composting it on-site or at a commercial facility. **Three composting facilities** in Connecticut are currently permitted to receive food scraps and a few **anaerobic digesters** are expected to be proposed for the near future. A **new law** requires certain commercial businesses, such as food wholesalers and supermarkets to separate organic materials and ensure it is recycled; its intent is to spur development of more processing facilities where food scraps can be recycled. Another option is to contact local animal farmers about taking scraps for animal feed; there are regulations that apply so check with the **CT Dept. of Agriculture Animal Health Division**.

## Look Who's Putting Leftovers to Good Use —

**Yale-New Haven Hospital and St. Raphael's** started donating food six months ago through Rock & Wrap It Up! More than 6,500 pounds of food, equaling 5,000 meals, have gone to feed the hungry at St. Anne's Soup Kitchen, Community Soup Kitchen, Beth El Center and Christ Church. And, close to 5,000 lbs. of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were eliminated.

**Connecticut Children's Medical Center** uses Aramark's food tracking system. They have reduced the cost of produce by 18% through eliminating waste during kitchen preparation. Food waste is currently 8% of the total waste produced with a goal of 4% for the future.

**Mohegan Sun Casino** has been sending food scraps to a local pig farm and averages nearly 1,200 tons diverted annually from 2006 to 2013.

**Community Plates** has "reused" 4.5 million pounds of food from 86 food donor restaurants, markets, and farms, going to 50 receiving agencies (soup kitchens, food pantries, homeless shelters) in New Haven and Fairfield. Fairway Market in Stamford has donated 450,000 meals since September 2011.

**CT DEEP headquarters** has been **composting** 6,000 lbs. per year of food scraps on-site from employee lunches and snacks for over a decade and is the first state agency to join the **U.S. Food Waste Challenge** (the **Food Recovery Challenge** is the sister program at US EPA).

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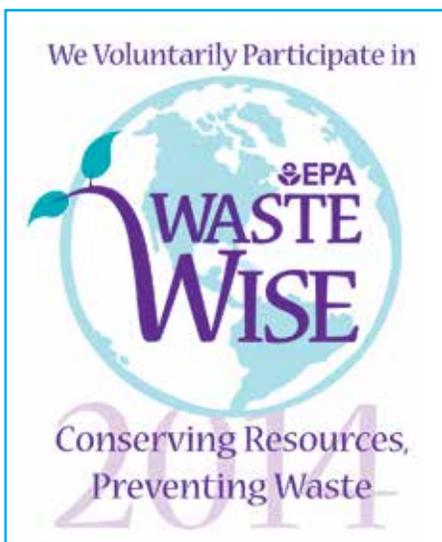
**At home** we can cut down on food waste by planning meals and making a shopping list before heading to the store, and by checking the fridge to assess what's in there so you don't buy more unnecessarily. "**Sell-by**" and "**Use-by**" dates are not an indicator of food safety, but rather of a manufacturer's suggestion for peak quality. Understanding that most foods can be consumed after these dates can reduce waste. Food scraps that result from cutting fruits and vegetables, eggshells and coffee grinds can be **composted right in your own backyard** and then used to enrich your soil and feed your plants and flowers.



Home compost bin

Learn more from CT DEEP's new **Food Waste Reduction & Recovery** web page.

## Businesses, Institutions and Agencies Getting Waste Wise



Cutting your trash bill can save your business, facility or institution money. First you need a clear picture of what you're throwing away and how much. Free software from the U.S. EPA can help you accomplish this step.

Norwalk Hospital and the Orchards at Southington are among the Connecticut facilities taking advantage of the tools made available through **WasteWise**, the EPA program that encourages tracking and measuring as an important step in making changes. Both WasteWise "partners" were recently **recognized** for going above and beyond reducing the amount of waste they generate. "We've been recycling at the Orchards since we opened in 1998; with being part of WasteWise we've looked even harder for ways to reduce, like finding a dish detergent that uses 95% less packaging waste and composting kitchen food scraps," noted Patricia Hooper, Executive Chef. "Our goal was to recycle more

than we throw out, as measured by dumpster usage, and we've achieved it by working collaboratively with staff, residents and their families."

Michael Murphy, Director of Support Services at Norwalk Hospital, says "The EPA has been a great partner and provides us with a program to augment all of our recycling efforts. As a healthcare institution it is not just important to us, but also to our patients and employees, that we are doing everything we can to be a greener organization and to reduce our carbon footprint in our state." The overall goal is for the facility to cut costs while also cutting emissions and reducing pollution.

Connecticut currently has **22 WasteWise partners**, including colleges, government agencies, non-profits, and businesses such as hotels, retailers, manufacturers, medical service providers, construction companies, and more. DEEP is a Waste Wise partner. In 2012, the agency avoided GHG emissions equivalent to taking 51 cars off the road, the electricity needed to power 12 households, or 27,800 gallons of gasoline.

# Ask Eartha

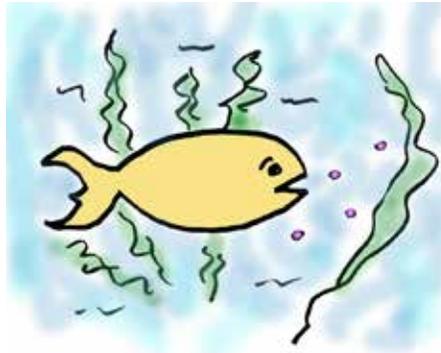
***I heard that I should avoid products with microbeads. What are they and how do I know which products have them?***

Debbie G., Voluntown, CT

Tiny beads made out of polyethylene or polypropylene plastic, so small that we can barely see them, have invaded a huge array of personal care products. These “microbeads” are intentionally added to toothpaste, facial cleansers and body scrubs. Why? They are exfoliants (slough off old skin) or remove stains. But these hard plastic beads are then washed off and go down the drain — and their plastic pollution journey begins.

Microbeads continue to local water-treatment plants where they sneak through the treatment filters and are discharged to local streams or rivers. From there they make their way into lakes or Long Island Sound and the ocean. Along the way, these plastic beads join other plastic pollution. Globally about 90% of the ocean-floating debris is plastic, consisting of approximately 46,000 pieces per square mile. And most plastic doesn't break down or “biodegrade,” it only photo-degrades into smaller and smaller pieces in the sun.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), plastic debris also accumulates toxins like cancer-causing PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) at



rates from 100,000 to 1,000,000 times the levels found in seawater. Another contaminant that attaches to the plastics is *Vibrio* bacteria, which includes cholera and other gastrointestinal pathogens. The tiny bits of toxin-covered plastic are eventually consumed by fish that mistake them for food. Scientists are studying the food chain to see how this plastic food source may be working its way up to people.

Some states, particularly ones on the Great Lakes where microbead pollution has been documented, have begun to address plastic pollution with **proposed legislation**. And some companies have announced they are phasing out the plastic microbeads in their products by 2015.



## Meanwhile, here are some tips:

- Avoid personal care products with “plastic,” “polyethylene,” or “polypropylene” in the ingredients. Download the **Beat the Microbead app** to help.
- Buy exfoliants that have with sea salt, crushed almonds or other natural ingredients as the “scrubber” or **make your own**.
- **Let companies know** that you won't buy products with microbeads.
- Lastly, take the **plastic promise** and reduce your use of plastic. The fish will love you for it!

*Eartha*

Eartha answers selected environmental questions. Email your question to **judith.prill@ct.gov** and watch future issues for your answer.

**Before you apply toxic chemicals where your kids and pets play, check out alternatives at [www.ct.gov/deep/organiclandcare](http://www.ct.gov/deep/organiclandcare).**



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