



[HOME](#) > [NEWS](#)

COVID-19 Is Making Our Food Waste Problem Even Worse

From upended supply chains to more home cooking, the way we eat has changed—and so is the way we're wasting.

By [Mike Pomranz](#) | April 06, 2020

During America's initial COVID-19 shutdown, food waste was an immediate concern. Look no further than [Disney theme parks](#), which went from serving millions of guests a month to being closed [indefinitely](#), creating a massive windfall for local foodbanks in California and Florida. But as stay-at-home orders continue, food waste will likely continue to get worse as both individuals and companies adjust to the path food takes to our plates.

Americans are still eating (obviously), but our purchasing habits have changed, something that's easily seen in empty grocery store shelves. But while the suppliers for supermarkets may be struggling to keep up, companies that support [the hospitality industry](#) and large scale clients like schools and businesses are forced to rework their [logistics](#). These disruptions can impact farmers of [perishable](#) produce grown with specific [outlets](#) in mind, as well—assuming these farms can find enough laborers to even [harvest](#) their crops.



PHOTO: CLARA BASTIAN / ADOBE STOCK

As Politico points out, USDA data shows that Americans spent over \$50 billion more at restaurants than they did at markets in 2018 (\$678 billion to \$627 billion). But the amount spent out of the home is set [to plummet](#) this year, and shifting from serving the restaurant side of the food business to supplying retail isn't necessarily easy.

"Since we're buying more at the grocery store, it means [food items] have to be in that form," Pat Westhoff, director of the University of Missouri's Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute, told the site. "We have a bunch of stuff that's still stuck with restaurants, and they're trying to decide what to do with it at this point."

Things get even tougher for producers of more [perishable](#) goods who have a shorter window to rework things. "Farmers planned for their sales outlets months ago when they planted," Ben Feldman, who works for the Farmers Market Coalition, told National Geographic. "If their markets are forced to close and they [can't pivot](#) to other sales outlets, that produce will rot in the field."

Speaking of rotting in the field, as I covered last month, simply [harvesting](#) crops has become more difficult. For one, farms may be working with reduced staffs due the coronavirus, [regardless](#). But additionally, travel across borders has become more difficult, too, likely leaving

a shortage of [migrant workers](#). Reuters recently suggested that, in Florida, the lack of labor could soon leave watermelons and blueberries to rot.

And all this isn't to say that we won't be wasting food ourselves. In fact, San Francisco is already seeing more household food waste. "People are cooking more at home," Robert Reed, who works with the city's waste management company Recology, told Nat Geo. "Tonnages of food [scraps](#) from single-family homes and apartments are up."

In short, the food industry, like everything in our lives, has been [upended](#) by the coronavirus pandemic. And when it comes to perishable items like food, uncertainty can lead to waste. Unfortunately, on a large scale, **there's little** most of us can do about it.

However, Maximo Torero, chief economist of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, said we should focus on what we can do, starting with avoiding unnecessary [panic](#) buying. "Individuals should only buy what they need to avoid food waste," he told The Guardian. Frankly, it's good advice all the time, but especially so now.

<https://www.foodandwine.com/news/food-waste-coronavirus-covid-pandemic>

Grammar Note: "**there's little** most of us can do about it."

1. The article "a" can be used here, or it can be omitted. However, the meaning changes.
example: a) There is **little** most of us can do about it. = We cannot do much, or and if we can do something, it's probably not going to really help anything.
b) There is **a little** most of us can do..." = We can do something. This is positive. Even if it's not a lot, it will help.
(a) is negative, and (b) is positive
2. This is also true of "few," which is only used for count nouns. "Little" can be used for non-count nouns.
example: a) I have **few** friends. = I'm lonely. I wish I had more friends.
b) I have **a few** friends. = I'm happy with my friends, and the few that I have are probably very good friends.
3. Which of these people is likely to help you with something? The one who says (a) or the one who says (b)?
 - a. "I have **little** time."
 - b. "I have **a little** time."

Most likely (b), and in fact, the next sentence would probably be, "How can I help you?"

This minor grammar point is actually very relevant here because you can misunderstand the author's intention if you aren't aware of how this works in English.