**US falls behind in global drive to stop billions of dollars in food waste**

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Every other piece of food ... the US struggles with food wastage. *Photo: Sasha Woolley*

WASHINGTON: Americans throw away up to 40 per cent of their food every year, cramming landfills with at least $US165 billion ($158 billion) worth of produce and meats at a time when hundreds of millions of people suffer from chronic hunger globally, according to an analysis from the Natural Resources Defence Council.

The analysis, a compilation of various studies and statistics, found that waste exists from farm to fork even as an ongoing drought threatens to boost food prices. But the resources the government has devoted to identifying where the inefficiencies exist and how to combat them pale in comparison to efforts under way in Europe, particularly in Britain, concluded the report that was released on Tuesday.

For now, the relatively low US prices make it easy to toss food, which may explain why the average American family of four ends up binning the equivalent of up to $US2275 worth of food each year, the report said. These wasteful tendencies have worsened over time, with the average American dumping 10 times as much food as a consumer in south-east Asia, up 50 per cent from the 1970s.

Against that backdrop, it is no wonder that food makes up the largest component of solid waste in landfills, said Dana Gunders, the NRDC scientist who wrote the study. The frustration for environmentalists is that natural resources - water, land and energy - are used to produce all that uneaten food, which is why the NRDC is weighing in on the topic, Ms Gunders said.

''We're essentially tossing every other piece of food that crosses our path,'' she said in a statement.

''That's money and precious resources down the drain.'' The analysis cites weak spots along every step of the food production chain.

Growers sometimes do not harvest foods because of poor market prices and foods with blemishes are culled, and of the goods that are shipped, distributors reject food considered to be defective.

But many studies suggest that most of the waste takes place in stores and homes. The government estimates that supermarkets lose $15 billion each year in unsold fruits and

vegetables alone.

Last year, industry groups - including the Grocery Manufacturers Association and the National Restaurant Association - launched an initiative designed to help them donate more food and cut back on the estimated 36 million tonnes of food sent to landfills every year.

But Europe has a head start.

The European Parliament has adopted a resolution that would slash food waste in half by 2020, and nearly five dozen leading retailers and brands there have committed to reducing food waste, the NRDC said. In Britain, which launched a ''Love Food, Hate Waste'' campaign five years ago, some retailers are already using promotions aimed at discouraging consumers from buying more than they need - as in ''get half off'' instead of the ''buy one get one free'' tactics often used in the United States, the NRDC said.

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Read more: http://www.theage.com.au/world/us-falls-behind-in-global-drive-to-stop-billions- of-dollars-in-food-waste-20120822-24mo8.html#ixzz24K23yR26

      