

# MOUNTAINS OF FOOD

Gaining understanding of hunger in America

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When was the last time you worried about where your next meal was coming from? Data from the United Nations shows that there are currently 7.7 billion people in the world and that global food production is enough to feed 10 billion. The United States produces over 6% of that food but contains only a little over 4% of the world's population. Our refrigerators should be well stocked, right? In reality, one in eight Americans do not have reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. An estimated 17.4 million American households experience some degree of food insecurity.

Many factors contribute to this problem of hunger in the United States. Unsurprisingly, poverty is one of the main causes. Discrimination, low wage rates, and job instability can all limit a person's ability to generate an income capable of putting adequate food on the table, but another aspect that is often overlooked is food waste.

Since the 1980's, significant progress has been made in the reduction of materials that end up in landfills. Recycling efforts have helped reduce the amount of paper products and glass waste by over 50%. In spite of these gains, the amount of landfilled food has nearly tripled as shown in Figure 1 below. Only plastic waste has shown similar increases. America currently wastes 150,000 tons of food each day, an estimated 30 to 40% of our total food supply.

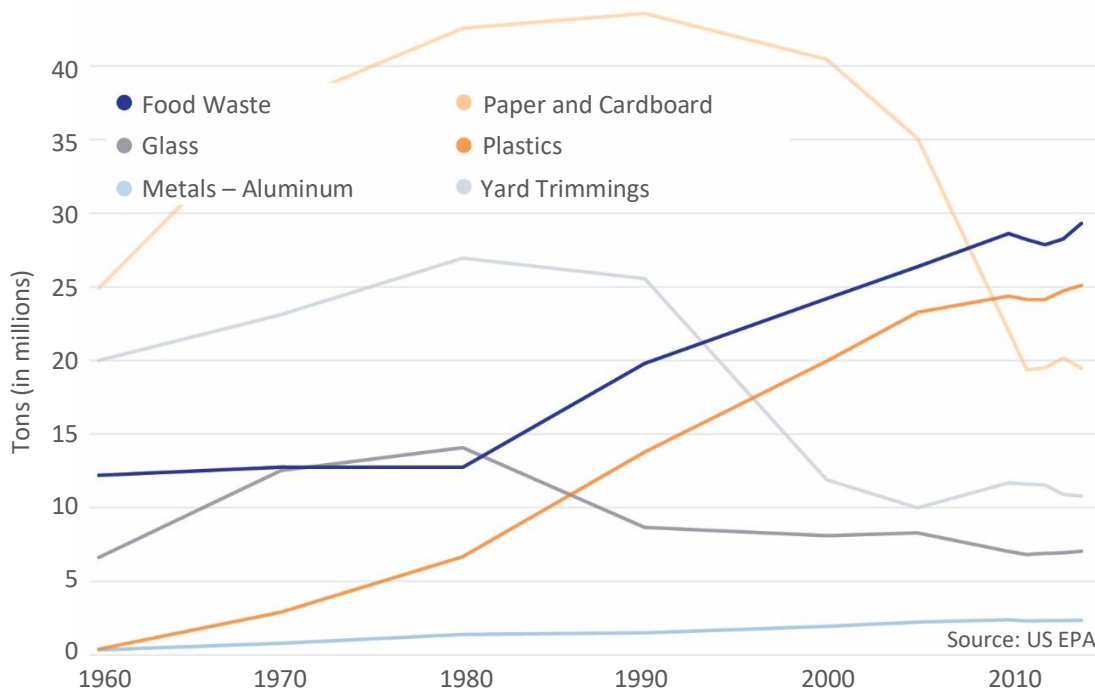


Figure 1 – Landfilled food waste has increased from 12.7 to 29.3 million tons between 1980 and 2014

There are no simple solutions to the problem of hunger in America. Current food manufacturing, transportation, and inventory processes all contribute to the amount of food wasted each day. However, improvements in these areas, and in others such as food donation regulations, could go a long way toward sending hundreds of millions of meals to Americans in need rather than landfills.