University of Florida students and organizations reduce food waste

According to a report published in Science Direct, 273 pounds of food are thrown away each year in the United States, per capita. This adds up to one wasteful nation; in a year, $165.5 billion is tossed in the trash because of food waste.

What should be done about this?

"You shift the norm," said Laurel Nesbit, a program assistant at the University of Florida's Office of Sustainability. "You change your own way of life and let other people see that."

At UF, the norm is indeed being shifted. Students and organizations both on and off campus are engaging in sustainable practices to reduce their food waste.

Gator Dining Services, UF's official food service provider, has been taking great strides towards reducing food waste, according to Nesbit. Scrap programming is one of its major methods for reducing food waste. Leftovers from tomatoes cut for the salad bar are used to make sauce or salsa. Old pizza dough is turned into croutons.

Another initiative is trayless dining, which means students can only eat as much as they can carry with their own hands, unless they make multiple trips. Although this doesn't seem like a big change, more than 60,000 pounds of food waste is prevented each year, according to the Gator Dining Services website.

Nicole Gomez, a 20-year-old junior studying journalism at UF, frequents the dining halls run by Gator Dining Services. The trayless dining isn't much of a hassle to her, and she appreciates that the company is working towards food sustainability.

"It's not important that I'm an activist, but it does matter to me," Gomez said. "I see how much food gets thrown away all the time."

UF Campus Kitchens also provides a way to minimize food waste. This student-run organization works with Gator Dining Services, local restaurants and other organizations to make sure leftover food gets taken to homeless shelters.

For students living off campus, watchfulness is the name of the game.

"The first step in reducing food waste is reducing the amount of food you're buying," said Nesbit, who works at UF's Office of Sustainability.

Denise Fierro, a 21-year-old senior studying food and human nutrition at UF, barely throws away any food at all.

"I'm well aware of when I do get produce," Fierro said. "I eat it right away."

Fierro also keeps track of the expiration dates of the food that she buys and doesn't eat out often so that she finishes the food she buys.

Food sustainability is very important to Fierro, and not just because it saves her money.

"You have people out there who can't even afford things, and to see things going to waste?" Fierro said. "It's really sad."