

clover food lab

WELCOME TO FOOD WASTE FRIDAY!

Veggie Monster *hates* food waste.

...and judging by your survey responses, so do you. Aside from meat consumption, food waste is the leading cause of food-related-climate change.

In restaurants, food waste has a very real cost — in dollars lost. What's worse than sourcing a beautiful piece of food, paying someone to transform it, packing it, storing it, and then having to throw it away because it went bad?

When I started working at Clover as a prep cook, I picked up on some food waste tips that I've continued to use in my own home kitchen. Here are just a few:



1. **FIFO - first in first out.** This acronym sounds like a muffled name for a dog, but really it's this: **label your food when you put it in your fridge or open it**, and look to OLDEST items FIRST when you're trying to come up with a meal. At Clover we have no freezers and lots of customers, so "old" in our case might just be a day. In your fridge things might take a bit longer to run through. Putting a label on your leftover rice (whether some [cheffy blue tape](#) and a permanent marker, or via a label-maker) will help you remember when it entered so you can be sure to use it up (hey, maybe it's fried rice for dinner tonight instead of takeout!)

Confession/Tip: when it comes to FIFO, I've been guilty of not practicing what I preach. My fridge used to be a graveyard of half-opened salsa jars and olives (always those two items), until I started snapping a photo of my fridge right before I went grocery shopping. That way I can see all the labels and get a visual of what I need to restock.

2. **Make friends with Cambro** - no he's not a person; [Cambro](#) is the Tupperware of the restaurant world. Unlike Tupperware, these hard-sided containers *see above) actually close every single time (with a satisfying soft click), and I think their square shape is beautiful. The containers stack so they're easy to store, they freeze well, and you can buy lids that are made for dry food or lids that are made for liquid food. They never spill, warp, or annoy me. I use the 2-quart version — which holds about 8 cups of food — for storing big batches of soup, fermented veggies, granola, or meal prep items like rice and beans.
3. **Cross-Utilize Ingredients** - this is something that Ayr and Rolando clued me into on the original food truck, and while it may seem obvious, it kind of blew my mind. When designing a menu for a very tiny food truck (with very tiny refrigerators) you need to pick ingredients that A. you love and B. can be used in *more than one* recipe/item. I think the best example is our pita. We don't make or buy a million different types of bread. We bake our same gorgeous fluffy pita and use it for all 6 sandwiches. For that reason we're able to run through bread fast, meaning that we can afford to make that bread daily in small batches. That in turn makes the bread taste better - it's a beautiful circle. Same with our Grafton cheddar. We pick a cheese that's so delicious that we want to use it nearly every time a recipe calls for cheese.

In a home kitchen what does this look like? It might mean that you cook up a big pot of pinto beans (see Kiernan's bean recipe in Wednesday's edition of Veggie Monster) and use those beans to make tacos one night, a bean soup another night, and maybe pasta with beans a second night. Even though each of those recipes don't call for pinto beans, they're close enough and you'll save so much time, money, and ... beans.

4. **If you do nothing else, bookmark the [Food Waste Feast website](#).** This genius website comes from our friends Mei and Irene Li, who you may recognize from the Mei Mei truck, restaurant, and dumpling empire. I heard about this project when I was a co-panelist with Irene at a Harvard food conference, and I'm so happy to see that it has come to fruition.

Here's how it works. Enter any ingredient you have that might be about to go bad, and the website will spit out ideas for how to use it. When I typed in "cabbage" I got an amazing recipe for a fridge-clean-out okonomiyake, a Japanese pancake that you can eat any time of day. It will also tell you how long each ingredient lasts in the fridge, so you can consult it before you meal-plan, learning that a rutabaga will last long past Friday, whereas those blueberries are going to need to be used in a smoothie right...about...NOW.

Hope this was helpful! In future Food Waste Fridays, we'll share specific recipes for avoiding food waste and extending the life of your veg - as always write to us if there's a specific question you have, and we'll try to get it answered.

-Lucia and the Veggie Monster team

