

Episode 8: Don't Waste This | Thanksgiving Dinner in the US

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

We estimate that across the country 320,000,000 lbs of food will be wasted with this Thanksgiving. And I know pounds are not necessarily transferable everywhere. So if you want to look at some other metrics that help bring this to light, that's about \$550 million worth of food or 267,000,000 meals. And we're talking about a single day of waste that is generating all of that. And the equivalent of the emissions coming out of that meal is 190,000 gas powered vehicles for a year.

Alongside this conversation of Thanksgiving in abundance is food access, right? And especially the disproportionate access to our communities of food. When you have this juxtaposition of abundance and lack of access, that becomes really visually apparent, right.

If we were to not address food waste, I think we're going to risk them getting worse. We're going to risk those different areas becoming kind of more divided. More polarising, more apparent to us personally in our day-to-day lives and seeing that and how it's affecting us and our families.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Welcome to Don't Waste This. I'm Talya Shalev, International Partnerships Manager at WRAP. And I'm here today to chat with Tara Dalton from WWF and Jackie Suggitt from ReFED, two organisations who lead the US Food Pact, to talk about the global food system crisis and what's at stake in the United States if we don't fix it.

Welcome, Tara. Welcome, Jackie. Thank you so much for joining us today. Why don't we start by getting to know you both a little better? So could you introduce yourselves and to the podcast audience? Maybe. Jackie, you want to go first?

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Sure. Yeah. Thank you for having us, Talya. It's great to be here. Jackie Suggitt, I work for Refed, which is a nonprofit exclusively focused on what we'd lovingly refer to as "the world's dumbest problem," which is food waste here in the US and really proud partners with WWF on leading the US Food Waste Pact.

Tara Dalton, WWF

Hi. Yes, I'm Tara Dalton with WWF. I'm working as a circular supply chain manager on the food loss and waste team. WWF is working on food loss and waste because agriculture is the number one driver of biodiversity loss on the planet. Great to be here. Thank you.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Before we get into the real issues that we had to talk about and some of the more technical aspects of what's happening across our planet and also in the US, I wanted to start by getting to know you both a bit better in terms of your relationship with food and what food means to you. For me, food is incredibly emotional as I like to share with everybody that comes on the podcast and then anybody else that will listen and it's very much at the heart of who we are and our cultures as people.

So Jackie, starting with you, it'd be good to know that what would the food be or the meal be if you guys choose one dish that represents the US, or something that's particularly special to you and your country and then we can talk a little about the risks around that dish afterwards.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Sure. Yeah. Tara and I talked a bit about this. It was hard to identify like a dish necessarily that really felt like it encapsulated the American food cuisine, so to speak. But as we're having this conversation right now, Talya, we are actually a week away from the American Thanksgiving holiday. So we were thinking about that meal as a whole. So the turkey, the stuffing, the apple pie, and what that meal represents on its own.

There are certainly, I think, historical and cultural challenges with the holiday that we don't wanna gloss over, but it is in the way that it's celebrated right now a time of gathering a time of community. It's also a time of abundance, interestingly. And this this statistic actually shocked me. But 90% of people who cook a Thanksgiving dinner intentionally prepare to have leftovers, right? I'm not. I'm not sure there's another meal that we make throughout the year where we intentionally just universally as a culture intentionally over prepare. So I think in the in way that we celebrate Thanksgiving, in the food that we make and the way that we handle that food, it actually is a really great case study for some of the challenges and solutions around food waste more broadly.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Absolutely. I mean that idea of having far too much to make sure that we have some leftover is a very joyful feeling. Definitely for me, thinking about what I can go into the fridge and have the next day. But not everybody thinks about it in the aspect of what they're then going to do with those leftovers. Not in all cultures anyway. And it's very interesting to see what stems from that in the US, especially around the idea of leftover sandwiches, leftover wraps, pies. We definitely try and incorporate that post-Christmas in the UK too. But if we think about some of the risks that are associated to those meals.

I'm interested to know from your perspective if there's a key fact or story that comes to mind when you think about food waste and what's happening in the US at the moment.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yeah. Let me maybe start at kind of the 10,000 foot view and then Tara and I can maybe each share a more specific example of how that that may manifest itself. But we do a report every year where we look at how much food is actually wasted on Thanksgiving and we estimate that across the country 320,000,000 lbs of food will be wasted with this Thanksgiving.

And I know pounds are not necessarily transferable everywhere. So if you want to look at some other metrics that help bring this to light, that's about \$550 million worth of food or 267,000,000 meals. And we're talking about a single day of waste that is generating all of that. And the equivalent of the emissions coming out of that meal is 190,000 gas powered vehicles for a year. So macro level, it is certainly a big issue. It's also not representative of every day, but I think that's why it's interesting to look at this as we have this conversation today, it is somewhat intentional, right? It is. It is. We are culturally encouraged to behave this way on this day because of the way that we're celebrating.

So maybe just two specific examples of other challenges that may come up. I'll talk really quickly about some of the there's just the supply chain uncertainty and planning. So I actually went to look this up like what was the last year that we had a Turkey shortage and it was 2022. But we're actually expecting one again this year, which I didn't know. So good to know as I'm planning my shopping for next week, but because of avian influenza right, so things that are actually not directly associated, we don't mean not think about as a food waste issue but just supply chain challenges of if there's a bird flu that can impact the supply chain leading up to Thanksgiving. It's also a very compressed supply chain time, right? We're talking about day and time where companies are actually planning for months to have the inventory they need within their supply chain for that day.

Maybe a funny example is my family is also Canadian, and the Canadian Thanksgiving is actually over a month earlier. It's in October. And we live in the States right now. And so we're like, we wanna have a Canadian Thanksgiving like let's go find a turkey. We could not find a Turkey because it's not November. Like a large turkey. We ended up though finding stores. This was the first week of October that had already shipped in their turkeys for Thanksgiving. The end of November, but had them frozen back of house. So we were able to get one, but it was interesting just to see like how much planning and preparation and kind of front loading of the supply chain happens because of the heavy demand that comes for a very compressed purchase cycle around that holiday. So I think that throws into sharp relief just the importance of our supply chains and how they're not as linear and simple as we see them being, and that can actually have a really big impact on the waste that we see all the way down through to consumers.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

No, absolutely. And Tara, was there anything in particular when you're thinking about Thanksgiving and what it means to you and the work that you're doing that you wanted to share?

Tara Dalton, WWF

Yeah. Well, I love that stat that Jackie shared about like 90% of home chefs over Thanksgiving this year are intentionally over preparing the amount of food. I mean, I think in general beyond and that comes from a good place, right? Thanksgiving is about, you know, if you're doing it right, it's about celebrating the harvest and giving thanks and big community coming together. Everyone kind of jokes about falling into a Turkey coma right when you've had too much pie and cranberry sauce and all the Turkey. And so everyone kind of knows that. And that's kind of expected and it's it creates warm feelings but. I think overall, you know, the United States has this sort of culture of abundance and over portioning that leads to some negative outcomes, including the declining health of Americans, both young and old.

And then it leads to a great amount of food waste as well. And I just think about kind of the contrast of this with my German grandmother, who, you know, daughter of immigrants. She grew up during the Great Depression. And for her when she was cooking a meal, she would always try to get the portioning exactly right, like she, it was a success if there were no leftovers and she knew down to like the nickel, how much money she was spending per meal.

So we see this practice of overportioning coming out even in our US Food Waste Pact work with businesses. So this past year we just wrapped up a pilot on low waste events and worked with several sites across the country aiming to find out what are the key factors leading to overproduction of food and events in the hospitality space, and how can we address them.

And it was found that really overproduction and a lack of portion specifications in the kitchen was leading to a lot of this kind of over, yeah, over production and great amount of the waste. Chefs were often going by feel. And there's such a drive from the venue side to not displease the client or the planner right by running out of food. That's everyone's worst fear right? Running out of food when you've got hungry guests, or whether it's in a Thanksgiving home or in a hotel. So they would way overcompensate.

And so through our pilot, we were able to get the event planner, the client, and the venue all talking together to make some small changes that led to really big wins. Just for example, instead of serving one dessert per guest, we went down to 1/2 a dessert per guest and for bread rolls. We went from 1.2 bread rolls, convinced the chefs and the bakery there to just go down to .8 bread rolls per person. And you know what they still had a lot of waste in both items, but a lot less than they would have before and so. That was just kind of a good example there of how you can still have this abundance right. But there's still so much room to cut down and be kind of more reasonable and use certain strategies to kind of avoid the waste that typically occurs in hospitality due to this.

We really tried to emphasise quality over quantity, right? I think that can be another sort of cultural pitfall we sometimes fall into that more is better, you know? But we talked with them about, oh, if you have an oatmeal bar here and you've got eight different toppings to go on, the oatmeal bar, is that really needed? Can you make them be four toppings that are just really high quality and really

good. So it led to a lot of great conversations and obviously it's going to be not a cultural shift we can make overnight, but I think some of these case studies coming out on low waste events that will be publishing can kind of help start the conversation.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

I mean, it's great work. I've seen some of the examples of what you've been doing recently and I completely agree. The hospitality sector is such a difficult one to tackle, especially when you're trying to please the assumptions of what you think your guests or your clients might want. And having just been at a friend's wedding over the weekend, and we had this, you know, family style sharing meal and there was a lot of food and that to me is, you know, is what you want us in to see in a celebration. You really don't want to be counting your peas on your plate. But there was definitely going to be waste leftover in order to ensure that everybody had a little bit of everything as I guess that's like the mentality.

And that's as someone who works in sustainability, incredible anxiety inducing, but for everybody else was, you know, the most wonderful parts of the evening because there was so much they could try and it didn't cross their mind that there might be some leftover at the end of it. And what are we going to do with all that food? And there is so much that we need to do to change that normal, that understanding from the consumers perspective, but that starts also with you know changing the habits or the behaviours of what we're providing to those consumers. And I guess it's not going to happen overnight, but it's great that you're already engaging with some of the businesses in that sector to help them to look at those innovative solutions that will drive down on mass probably.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

And Talya, I think your example brings it highlights something that why this is so hard is because often the intentions are good, right? It's not that I wake up or a hotel chef wakes up and say, gosh, I really wanna throw away some food today, but it's culturally within our families, our communities, but also even from a business perspective and there's certainly the business drivers behind this as well. But we want to feed people, but that's how we express love and we are bringing in guests into our homes. You don't want to run out. It comes from a good place, especially kind of in a consumer mindset, and that's what makes it hard, right is it's not, it's not something people are doing wrong per se that we're trying to shift. It's actually what it can be seen as a positive behaviour that is having unintended consequences. And so from an individual level to a corporate level, I think that that through line is there. But yeah, intentions are harder to change, right?

Talya Shalev, WRAP



Completely. And as you said, it comes from a good place so you don't want to put people on the spot and make them feel guilty for their good intentions. And it's a really hard place to navigate when you start to bring in those emotions, which it is very much fundamentally driven by.

So you've briefly touched on it, Tara, in terms of the work that the US Food Waste Pact is doing. But could you tell the audience a little bit about the US Food Waste Pact in the first place in terms of what it is you're setting out to do and how long you've been around for?

Tara Dalton, WWF

Yeah, happy to. So the US Food Waste Pact, we're a national voluntary agreement to help food businesses achieve their waste reduction targets and it's designed to really go beyond just commitment setting. I always like to say it's a commitment with teeth. With teeth to really actually driving meaningful progress through pre competitive collaboration data collection across the supply chain and we were launched, oh Gosh Jackie, correct me here. It was the end of 2023, right? Did we make the announcement?

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yes, December, December 2023, I think.

Tara Dalton, WWF

When was it, COP? Yeah. Yeah, I'd always forget 'cause. It was right at the end of the year there. So 2024 was really our kind of launch initial year. So we're coming up on two years old. We like to say we're a toddler and you know we're walking now, we've definitely proven out the model and seen a lot of great success, but we have a lot of great growth to go ahead as well.

We've found a few key strategies to be very fruitful for this pre competitive work with companies. And Jackie, I invite you to jump in as well, but just a few that I was going to name. Employee engagement has been a major way that we've seen success in engaging with our companies. You know, you can have all the best corporate targets in the world around food waste, but if you don't have good employee engagement strategies on the ground, then they're not going to get fully implemented, right. And our companies realised this and they, I know, had kind of like a lot of compassion for kind of the frontline worker and employee and wanting to get them involved.

And so definitely if folks haven't before, they should go and check out the US Food Waste Pact employee engagement toolkit, there's just a lot of resources that we've built up there and videos and testimonials from frontline workers that have participated across the years in our pilots around employee engagement. We've also seen just a lot of success through the conversations happening in our working groups. We have various 4 different working groups now on a variety of topics such as food recovery, staff training and engagement. A new one that we launched this past year was on



consumer engagement and environments, which I think is just exciting to mention because it really shows kind of the evolution, I feel like, of our businesses mindset and thinking around this, that they're really seeing all the waste that's occurring downstream at the household and consumer level and wanting to impact that right and recognising their role in it. So excited to see where that goes.

And then we've also had a great kind of success with our whole chain projects and I do want to give a nod to WRAP here for first, inspiring us with their whole chain tactics and strategies that they've taken. We took a lot from that when we started developing out our own whole chain strategies and work here in the US.

And what is a whole chain project? Well, it's really taking one commodity and studying it from farm to fork, mapping out where do the spots occur. And then once you're able to see really where the waste is occurring and why being able to recommend targeted solutions.

So I'll just give our whole chain project on strawberries here as an example. We work with four different retailers and a major strawberry supplier to identify where the waste was occurring along the strawberry whole chain supply chain. And turns out that about 36% of the farm supply was being, or 36% of the farm harvest was being left in the field and 25% was edible fit for human consumption. So then that kind of raises the question of how can we develop new market channels, right for these edible, but maybe not retail, grade strawberries. So as a Part 2 we were able then to engage our food service companies under the US Food Waste Pact to look at utilising these edible strawberries that previously didn't have a home and finding new ways of processing them in a food service kitchen, right. And getting them into onto the plates of consumers. So we're very excited about that pilot and the case study will be coming out in January right about I think when this podcast should be airing. So check it out.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Thanks Tara. And Jackie, was there a specific example or success story that you wanted to share in terms of what the Pact the US Food Waste Pact has been doing there since its launch two years ago?

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yeah, I'll maybe just first add on to one of Taras and then add one of my own. But the employee engagement stuff is honestly just some of my favourite work we've done. And what what I love about it is it's so additive overall to the solutions that we already focus on, right, because the solutions that are coming from frontline employees are not the solutions that are coming up in boardrooms, right? Both are important. You need to have both approaches, but the ones that we were getting, they're low cost, they're low tech, but they're high impact and it's you know it's using a screwdriver to tighten a grain line. It's like that, you know, that's not going to come up in a corporate strategy session on how to reduce food waste, but it's a really tangible easy example of how giving a

megaphone to the people on the front lines actually brings a whole new set of solutions to the table that aren't cannibalising or competing with the work that's happening elsewhere but are 100% additive to that. So I just I really love that work, so I wanted to plus one to what Tara said.

The other thing I'll add is it's a less riveting topic, but I think really important is the data side of the work and the way that we approach the US Food Waste Pact, not unlike many of the others around the world, is really intentionally around data collection, progress tracking, using data to drive action and prioritise solutions etc. So leaning back into the four or five years of the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment, that was really the starting place in the generation point for the US Food Waste Pact. Over that time we saw up to 30% reductions in unsold food rates in participating retailers in the Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment and that the US food waste packed so at a time where globally and nationally as well, it's inconsistent in how we see reductions and increases in waste across different sectors. I think that group of signatories has really leaned in and that's not all attributable to the work they do through the pact. That's their own initiatives that they're doing outside the pact as well. But they've leaned in, they've shown that progress can happen, right, and that fluctuates year to year, certainly as there are external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic or supply chain challenges or inflation, etc. But they're showing that a dedicated, concentrated effort on food waste does in fact reduce food waste. And I think that that's half the battle is the case study for is the investment of human and capital resources worth the outcome that we get at the end of the day. So being able to showcase that is something I'm really excited about through the work that we're doing.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Yeah, absolutely. I mean in the US you have got you're very good at communicating that return on investment to the businesses to demonstrate the value for them to be involved even just from a cost savings perspective, but also then in terms of raising awareness and as you mentioned, one of the aspects being around engaging with employees but also those at different levels, seniority across the business too, which is incredibly important and not as easy to do in every country that we have a Pact in, depending on cultural differences as well. So really great to hear that that's working and that you're going to keep emphasising that as part of the activities that you do going into next year as well.

And Tara, you mentioned this and then we appreciate the shout outs in terms of the support that you're getting from other organisations across the Food Pact Network and we know that food waste is not a national issue, it's a global issue and you've been part of the Food Pact Network since its inception back in 2024, so I was wondering if you had any examples of you're able to speak to how the Food Pact Network has helped you to make progress outside of the support that you've been getting from WRAP over the last few years?

Tara Dalton, WWF

Yeah, happy to. It's been a really impactful community to become a part of. You know, I think before it officially became like a global Food Pact Network, there was, there was some, you know we had like in connections with certain individuals here in this country there that one there and we'd reach out you know if we'd say oh we kind of heard that they did like a bread case study and we're thinking about a bread case study. So let's hop on a call, right? But it'd be very kind of ad hoc like that and it would be just we'd realise there was like a lot that we didn't know about what was going on, right, with each other's programmes.

And so what I've really loved about the global Food Pact Network and community coming together in a more concerted way is just that, facilitating that sharing. When we published the employee engagement toolkit, we were able to really quickly and efficiently share it with all of our peer networks. And we got a lot of interest and folks wanting to follow up with us and ask questions. Likewise, when we're thinking about engaging in a new whole chain project or you know have a question about a certain resource around maybe fundraising or oh, how do you manage your working groups? We've been able to tap that group and just ask folks for giving different examples of how they've made certain things work. So it really is a way of just accelerating everyone's progress by not always starting from scratch and trying to figure it out right in your own country drill hole. And we've really appreciated that. Not to mention that supply chains are very international, right. And I think there's so much more there that we haven't tapped yet that we could, about recognising these corporations that we work with across country lines, the supply chains that we all want to work on collaboratively together. So I'm really excited for that. I think that's coming in the future too for that community.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Yeah, absolutely. That's definitely a topic or an area of opportunity that a lot of packs have indicated an interest in in terms of starting to really engage with those multinational corporations and looking at the issues from a global supply chain perspective, which I really see as an opportunity for our activities over the year to come, which is very exciting.

And Jackie, we've talked about progress, but you know there is still a match of urgency. We have targets that we're all trying to hit. Some are coming up quicker than others and we want this issue to be dealt with maybe not resolved. I don't know if we'll ever get to that point of complete resolution, but I was wondering if we know if we think back to the Thanksgiving meal and thinking about the components and the ingredients within it and the significance of it as you described as well to so many people, families and communities, what do you feel might be lost if we don't, as a society, not just as a Pact Network really engage with this issue and this crisis that we're still definitely facing at the moment.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yeah, I think I mean candidly, I think we're seeing a lot of that impact already and it's not to say that good work isn't happening, but I think we're starting to see the impacts of how this could become worse if we don't continue to address it. So a few areas, one, I think we've all been, become shockingly familiar with how the economy and inflation works around food prices in the last few years coming out of the pandemic, that's been a global experience for many of us in our generation. It's the first time we're seeing that level of impact on, are things showing up on shelves? Are food prices rising? I wish I had this stat with me, but I think, the average price of the Thanksgiving meal is notably higher this year, and that trend has gone up in the last few years. So you're seeing that play out on the actual grocery bill when you walk in to the grocery store as well. That's gonna hit people next week when they're going and shopping for their meals.

Another topic we really haven't brought up yet, but I think is really important to have alongside this conversation of Thanksgiving in abundance is food access, right? And especially the disproportionate access to our communities of food. And this is also kind of the kick start of our, you know holiday season leading into Christmas. So I think there's also a mindset and a focus around gratitude and service and community engagement. So we see an uptick in that. It's unfortunate that it is seasonal, I think unfortunately, but I think that's another area where we're seeing more disproportionate access across our communities to food, when you have this juxtaposition of abundance and lack of access, that becomes really visually apparent, right. And I think people are aware of that. And then you add in those economic inflationary facts as well. And I think that only makes it worse. So I think we're, you know, I don't know that there's some new tragedy awaiting us down the road. I think we're already kind of seeing a lot of these impact areas. If we were to not address food waste, I think we're going to risk them getting worse. We're going to risk those different areas becoming kind of more divided. More polarising, more apparent to us personally in our day-to-day lives and seeing that and how it's affecting us and our families.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

And that will only be inherited by those in future generations too. If we don't deal with it now, those in the instances of crises will be perpetuated globally as well. And it's obvious that you're both very passionate about this work. I mean, this kind of work really requires people that are driven and passionate to keep pursuing areas within sustainability, but also specifically around the food system crisis. So I'm curious to know if you're able to share what motivates you on a day-to-day basis to keep working in this space and to keep pushing forward with what you're doing. Tara, I don't know if you want to start.

Tara Dalton, WWF

Sure, yeah. And I'll, I'll start by saying I think food loss and waste is such an amazing topic to be working on, 'cause there's really something in it for everyone, right? Everyone has a stake in this. I personally came at it from kind of the, my background was more in like nature preservation and sort of sustainable farming as well. And so I really kinda come at it from that environmental lens, I'll say, and you know that's fitting since I work at WWF, World Wildlife Fund, and as I mentioned earlier, WWF is working on food loss and waste because agriculture is the number one contributor to biodiversity loss, primarily as a result of the conversion of land to farming and grazing.

But you're, you know, you'll find, you know, Jackie probably has a very different reason that brought her to this work, and I find you know, the businesses we're working with, there's the just the pure profitability of it as well, of reducing food loss and waste. So that's why I really love working on this topic.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

I did come from a different angle. I kind of started my career more interested in the public health side of issues, maternal health, nutrition. And I started my career in retail focused on sustainable nutrition. And so I, you know, I grew up professionally, so to speak, kind of knowing all of those statistics and realities around food access and hunger, and I actually still remember the meeting I was sitting in when I heard for the first time at that time, you know, 40% of our food goes to waste and my brain had this little moment where it couldn't comprehend how both of those realities could exist. How could one in seven or one in eight, depending on the time, Americans be food insecure and hungry and 40% of food going to waste and that's better known now. But to me like you know, a decade ago, 15 years ago, that was really kind of a light bulb moment for me of, you know, I don't understand how both of those realities can be happening at the same time. So it was several years later that I got to finally dive deep into food waste. And I think that that human side of it, in addition to the, the nature and environment sides is really what motivates me is how do we, how do we close that gap between those, those two realities.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

And has there been a moment recently where you felt that from like a, you know, a day-to-day perspective that you are actually on that path and you are making that difference that you set out to do?

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED



Yeah, I think the challenge of working in sustainability, as Tara said, that the pro is, I think it connects to everyone on a human level. The downside is I think it is, it's pushing a big rock up a big hill, right, like progress can be slow, it can be disheartening at times.

So I think the fact is those two realities still exist. Where I find hope though is, I think we do as we said earlier, we do see these nuggets of progress where like things are actually changing. And some of the specific examples that Tara shared, even with the whole chain work and the employee engagement work I think are illuminating. But for me, one of the things that excites me most is, 10 to 15 years ago, if I told people I worked on food waste, they'd be like food what? It didn't kind of click for them and now people love it. They're like you work on food waste. That's so cool. I compost is 90% of the time. The first thing they say to me, but there's an interest there. Recognition that this shouldn't be a thing that happens, and I think there's just this general awareness that we can all be doing better and we need to be doing better. So that mindset shift to me in the last decade or so, I think is one of the things that really gives me hope.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Yeah, I could definitely relate to that feeling of feeling, that recognition that you start to get from your peers and your family where sustainability isn't such a difficult buzzword to understand anymore. But there's still obviously many misconceptions around what that actually means, but there is more and more awareness that's being raised and that comes from the work that organisations like yourselves are doing, which you know we're all very excited about and hope that more and more people join us on that journey.

So let's imagine for a moment that you know, we fixed the food system crisis tomorrow. I mean, hopefully there'll be other work for the three of us to do aside from this. But for you, Tara, what would change for people and for the environment and for the future of the Thanksgiving meal in the US look like?

Tara Dalton, WWF

I think if we fixed, you know this the problem tomorrow and the US was no longer wasting, what is it? 31% of our specific food system, it would look like better and more equitable access to healthy foods. And I think that's important as well, I do think you know the connection here to human health. We can't ignore and it's super important, right? I heard. I think ReFED has this stat that only 12% of the food that could be donated in this country actually makes it to its end destination, right, to those in need. And so I think we'd see definitely a change in that in which food donation and recovery was much, much more the norm, much easier, right?

We, you know, I used to work in a food bank and I remember around this time at Thanksgiving is when you'd have your biggest influx of donations. You'd have suddenly every volunteer group wants to sign up, right between the time of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

And that's great and wonderful. And I love that the holiday season inspires that in Americans. But I think, you know, if we truly fix the problem, we would not see that sort of holiday job that become a yearlong sustainable thing in which these food recovery organisations are getting that food intake that they're needing, right. And we have much better distribution systems for it. Jackie, what do you think though I've I was only touching on the food recovery effort there, yeah.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yeah, I'd agree. I'd agree with everything Tara said, and I think you know some of the other issues we brought up earlier around the supply chain inconsistencies and the economics. I mean ideally we're fixing those two. Those are big macro issues though, right? That aren't only driven by food waste. So I think we have to, you know, be realistic about kind of the broader global economy and food system. But but I think you know when I think about Thanksgiving, I think the other thing is we don't want to take away celebration either, right. I don't think any of us are like we want to be so strict on food waste that there's never a time that you can really like link, 'cause food is cultural, food is familial and community based and it is meant to be a part of celebration. So I think it's OK if there's still a spirit of abundance around Thanksgiving. If we're planning it right, right. Are we thinking about the seasonality of the foods that we're making and purchasing? Are we thinking about pre planning what we're gonna do with those leftovers afterwards? Are we, to Tara's point, being mindful of how we're giving back in a societal way with the abundance that we do have to ensure that there is access for everyone around this holiday season. So I don't wanna take the culture and the celebration out of food. When we talk about solving food waste, but I think it's more about how can we continue to elevate and allow and promote that while also being mindful and strategic about solving food waste where we can within that experience.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

And I've really appreciated the fact that you've brought to the podcast an element of celebration. Then the how much food plays a role in that? Because that's not just a Thanksgiving opportunity. It's not just a US opportunity. That's something that we experience across many communities and many religions all throughout the year.

And there'll be many people that can relate to that feeling of abundance, hopefully, and celebration and joy that comes from those moments. And definitely there's there's that aspect that you said, Jackie, about raising it, our ability to be mindful of what we're consuming and why and what we do with it and considering others in society and their place in those celebrations too, Tara, as you've mentioned, to make it matter for the right reasons and make sure that we're not continuing to do more damage to our environment.

And to others around us as well. And that's what this is all about really. So we've talked about culture and we've talked about our communities and joy around food and celebration. We've also

talked a bit about the environmental impact that we're seeing in terms of food waste and within the food systems crisis. And I really appreciate you both sharing what has personally driven you to this work, what brings you to work every day, and what keeps you on track in terms of motivating you to keep working out this because it's not an easy space to to work in on some days.

So before we finish up, I was wondering, we asked one of our guests if they can do this. It's difficult, but in 10 seconds I'm going to give you both 10 seconds. Don't worry. We'd like to know what you feel is the most urgent message that you would like our podcast listeners or viewers to take home with them and to make sure that they understand why we need to fix the global food system crisis. I'll then leave up to you as to who wants to go first.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Yeah, I'll. I'll jump in first, just because I fear mine might be the slightly more pessimistic of the two and Tara's really good at leaving us on a on a high note here. And I don't mean it that way. But I think if we start my 10 seconds now, I think you know, we need to fix the global food system because I think we have structurally and philosophically designed it wrong, right? We hear a lot that it's broken. I actually think it works pretty well for how we designed it. We just didn't necessarily design it in the right way. A great example of that is we're talking about food waste. We are calling it waste. It was designed into the system to be acceptable to waste food. And I think we need to reframe that as value that we can capture.

Tara Dalton, WWF

That wasn't pessimistic at all. Jackie. That was great. No, I would say we need to fix our food system because as I was saying before, the food system is this ultimate connector between people, nature, environmental, humanitarian and business issues. The food system is just quite simply how we sustain ourselves, and there is a lot of reason to be hopeful, though we see policy, we see like global headwinds, we see technology all driving us towards solutions to solve this thorny problem.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Thank you both. I really appreciate that and the messages are strong and they are clear and hopefully heard by lots of our peers and hopefully in the US as well, but also those more globally. We started this podcast on this episode by talking about Thanksgiving and what it means to you both. It's not something that I've had the joy of experiencing yet, but maybe at some point I'll get a chance to and it's really, really special to hear what it means to both of you and what it means to your your communities as well. So thank you for sharing that and it and what you've also helped to shine a light on is what we can do, what we can improve.



And what we can make better whilst also continuing to share that joy around food and community and bringing our families together and being cognizant of the impact that we can have to the people around us as well as part of that celebration and those cultural moments and those traditions. So thank you and hopefully we can continue to do the work that we're doing and and protect those traditions for the generations to come. So yeah, all I have to say is thank you both.

Jackie Suggitt, ReFED

Thank you, Talya.

Tara Dalton, WWF

Thank you for having us.