WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for February 5, 2024
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, & Healthy Relationships we'll talk about food waste, and as always look at some upcoming programs from OSU Extension.

A few days ago, I had the pleasure of speaking to local Boy Scout Troop 403. They have been working towards their Sustainability Merit Badges. This involves learning about the importance of sustainability to society and how they can contribute to fulfilling the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations. They explored topics like water, energy, and "stuff."

My role was to teach about food waste. It is a topic I enjoy because it is at the intersection of agriculture and consumer sciences. The USDA says, "when food is wasted, so too is the land, water, labor, energy, and other inputs that are used in producing, processing, transporting, preparing, storing, and disposing of the discarded food."

Studies estimate that 30-40% of the total food supply in the US goes uneaten. Some of this is due to unharvested crops, crops lost to disease, or an overabundance of food going to waste at grocery stores or restaurants before it is purchased.

A 2020 study in the American Journal of Agricultural Economics found that 32% of the food that Americans purchase is wasted. This is food we bring into our homes, either from the grocery store or take out from a restaurant.

It is not surprising to learn that households with low food security waste only about half the amount households with high food security waste. As the number of people in a household increases, food waste decreases. Single-member households waste about 40% of food, while households with six-members waste only 20%.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), food is the single largest category of material placed in US municipal landfills. It is estimated that about 60% of food waste goes to landfills. There are two things I discussed with the scouts to reduce the amount of food they throw into the garbage can.

Composting- This is the natural process of recycling organic matter, such as leaves and food scraps, into a valuable fertilizer that can enrich soil and plants. For several years we have faithfully composted fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, and coffee grounds from our home. We keep a small container on the kitchen countertop and empty it outside in the compost pile every couple of days.

It is a fairly easy process with a little know-how and a few supplies. Be certain to avoid adding meat, bones, or fatty foods such as cheese, salad dressing, and cooking oil. These foods ferment or putrefy, causing odors that attract rodents and other nocturnal animals that can be pests. You can learn more at go.osu.edu/composting.

Best buy dates on packages - We've talked here before about the reason for package date labeling. This is almost always quality guidance. Except for infant formula, the date on a package will never tell you whether a food is safe to consume. Use your senses. If it looks or smells spoiled, then don't eat it. If it tastes stale or just "off", then don't eat it. Packaged dry goods, like crackers and cereal, and canned goods will often taste good long past the label date.

I love this quote from Dana Gunders, "Imagine walking out of a grocery store with four bags of groceries, dropping one in the parking lot, and just not bothering to pick it up. That's essentially what we're doing."

We can each try to buy less food to start with, do a better job of eating what we have before we buy more, and keeping our produce scraps out of landfills and turn it into usable compost.

And now let's see what's new from OSU Extension: Be on the lookout for registration information soon for Dining with Diabetes. This program will be Wednesday evenings in April. You can find information about all our programs on our Facebook page or our website coshocton.osu.edu.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help educate and empower our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!