

Sustainability: *A Comparison of Mindless Food Purchase and Mindless Food Consumption*



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Sustainability can be defined as an ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself.

Food waste is one of the major problems that society faces when it comes to sustainability. According to www.sustainabletable.org, an American website, it is estimated that every year Americans trash 40 percent of their food supply, valued at about \$165 billion. The average American family of four throws away the equivalent of up to \$2,275 annually in food. Just a 15 percent reduction in U.S. food waste would save enough food to feed 25 million Americans annually.

Do you find you are throwing out food from your refrigerator and wondering, “What was I thinking when I purchased all of this?”

There are two sayings that we might consider when we compare the ways we over-purchase food and the ways we overeat. The first is “We eat the way we live.” The second is “We bite off more than we can chew.”

We are mindless in the way we purchase food much in the same way we are mindless as we eat.

We stuff items into our grocery cart without reflecting on how (or even whether) we will use the food. It just “looks good and we want it” in that moment.

We might also stuff food into our mouths without asking ourselves if our body is really hungry for food. It just “looked good and we wanted it” when we spotted it in the pantry.



Through the use of mindfulness in the contemplation, purchase and eating of food, we stand a better chance of making wise choices for both our Earth and our body.

Mindful shopping might involve the following:

- Checking the items that we already have in the refrigerator to make good use of them.
- Planning our menus and checking to make sure that we have all the ingredients so we don’t end up unable to make what we had planned.
- Finding a balance between waiting too long between trips to the store and stopping every night at the store.

These suggestions aren’t new. Included at right is a World War I poster that encouraged people to become more aware of food waste

Mindful eating might involve the following:

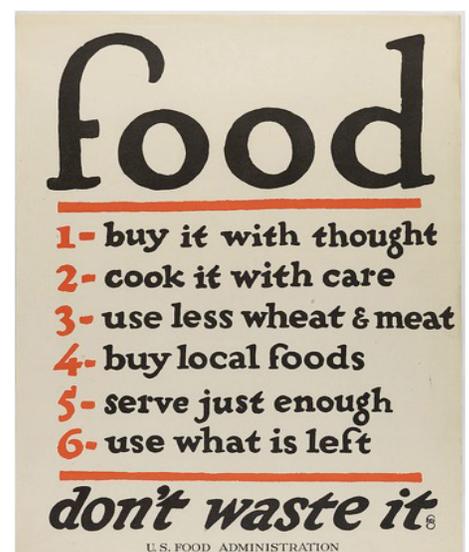
- Pausing before beginning to eat to appreciate the variety of food in front

of you.

- Eating slowly, mindfully noticing the appearance, the subtle tastes, the smells, the texture of the food in your mouth.
- Noticing when your body lets you know that you have had just enough food and then stopping.

Each of us can make small changes that add up to create food sustainability for the beautiful world we share.

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This photo encouraged sustainability during World War I as something civilians could do to help the war effort in the United States.

Courtesy photo: US Food Administration

COMMUNITY WISDOM:

We asked our members to reflect on issues of sustainability and mindful eating:

Do you recall a moment when you experienced the beauty and/or the “pain of the Earth” and perhaps, as a result, began to change the way you relate to the earth and all living beings?

“I cannot recall a pinnacle moment. However, simply watching an insect suffer when they have lost a wing can bring you right into the present moment.” ~ *Natalie Murphy, RDN, LD*

“The pain was the realization of how factory-farmed animals suffer horrifically, just so we can enjoy a meal of meat. Since then, I have refused to buy or eat products from businesses that use inhumane practices.” ~ *Barbara McGonigal, DTR*

“About a dozen years ago, a surgery left me unable to walk. I was angry, confused and overwhelmed. One day, I crawled out to my backyard to lie in the grass and connect. I was aware of such beauty--the warmth, the grass, the sky, the leaves rustling in the trees. I was aware of my own pain, fear and grief. And as I felt the gentle sensations of the rain, I opened to a sense of joy and abundance and connection to something larger. It was at that time that I first understood that peace came from connection to my life and the beauty around me, and it did not depend on my circumstances.” ~ *Cheryl Harris, MPH, RD*

As you practice “wakeful presence” and take time to see and experience Mother Earth and all living beings through your senses and with “love eyes,” what are some ways that you have been able to care for the Earth and its human and nonhuman community differently?

“I call my food “The food of Love.” Love for the Earth, for animals, for myself and others. At every meal I repeat the Five Contemplations from Thich Nhat Hanh.” ~ *Alessandra Pollina*
Mindfulness coach

What are some ways that you have been able to help your clients practice “wakeful presence” and mindful care of themselves, the Earth, and all living beings?

“By being present during my sessions I allow my clients to explore their own space in life. I don’t “feed” them ideas; mostly I share information, tips and techniques and accept them exactly as they are; that is what brings out their own motivation for change.” ~ *Kati Konersman, MS*

“Focus on HOW we eat, rather than what we eat. Being a reformed vegetarian, I know how tiresome and frustrating discussions/debates on sustainable food choices can be, and I think it’s a deeply personal decision.” ~ *Corina Brdar, M.Sc.*

“Suggest they slow down and reflect on the ways in which they live which transfers over to the ways they eat. In other words, do they live fast paced? Are they disorganized or well planned?” ~ *Carla, CINC, CEC, CFSP*

Five Contemplations

Thich Nhat Hanh

1. This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.
2. May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.
3. May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation.
4. May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.
5. We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.



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