

4-H Youth Help Build Climate-Resilient Households

Yu Meng, PhD; Marisa Neelon, MS, RD; Dorina Espinoza, PhD

Introduction

The average U.S. household wastes 31.9% of the food it buys, with an estimated value of \$240 billion.¹ Greenhouse gases released by decomposing food and yard waste contribute to climate change. To respond to this issue, California's short-lived climate pollutant reduction strategy (SB1383) aims to reduce organic waste disposal 75% by 2025.² Household food waste is a complex and multifaceted issue and is affected by food-related practices (planning, shopping, storing, cooking, eating, and managing leftovers).³ Educating consumers about strategies to reduce household food waste will support their compliance with SB 1383.

Extension can play a part in addressing household food waste reduction efforts. There is a call for giving children and young people a 'voice' and a 'hand' in redressing climate change.⁴ Increasing youth awareness and knowledge about the issue can engage them in food waste reduction and potentially influence a larger community. Youth in 4-H can highlight the issue through club projects, community service, public speaking opportunities, and civic engagement. In response to CA SB1383, the 4-H Food Waste Busters Project provides an opportunity for youth to engage in reducing household food waste and help combat climate change.

References:

1. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajae.12036>
2. <https://calrecycle.ca.gov/organics/slcp/>
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652618303366>
4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14733285.2019.1614532>

Methods

- UC ANR Advisors adapted a food waste school curriculum into age-appropriate, inquiry-based online lesson plans.
- The 4-H lesson plans included team building, group agreement development, activity exploration, a capstone project, and reflection.
- The lessons were piloted with 14 youth members through 9 weekly one-hour zoom project meetings.
- Advisors conducted a focus group to evaluate project aims and gain youth feedback on the lesson plans.



4-H Food Busters Project Flyer



Results

- 4-H youth articulated their favorable response to the project.
- Capstone projects (poem, slide show, fact sheets) revealed that 4-H youth learned about food waste's impact on the environment and strategies to reduce household food waste.

Food waste poem

Food waste is not fun,
Food waste don't waste that burger bun,
Do not haste to waste
If you look in the trash, and there is all that hash
Well, that's a bad thing,
Go outside and tell the sky that you are going to stop
wasting stuff like the burger bun.

A poem by a 4-H youth

- Youth shared changes they or their family made as a result of participating in the project:

"We realized how much food we wasted and we're trying to waste less."

"We are trying to have one meal of leftovers every week."

"We stopped cooking so much food so we don't have so many leftovers that would go to waste."

"We buy less food unless we really need it."

Conclusion

Through the 4-H Food Waste Busters project, youth developed the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to reduce household food waste and live a sustainable lifestyle.

The project contributed to conversations and learning about:

- Household-level behaviour that can impact local, state, national, and global levels of food waste
- The environmental impacts of greenhouse gases that are produced in landfills

