

## Anneliese Irby

I write to you in support of the Food Waste Reduction Act. This act which was passed in 2019 has the goal of reducing food waste by 50% by 2030 based on 2015 standards. Washington state has always been a leader of ecological initiatives. While many states and cities are only now thinking about composting, Seattle has successfully implemented it into our daily lives. Yet, we are still seeing mass amounts of food waste end up in our landfills. The 2019 Food Waste Reduction Act (RCW 70.95.815) not only focuses on reducing food waste but focuses on other factors that come along with overall reduction in waste. My comment will focus on how the current coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the shortfalls of the current food system. How reducing food waste is not only about preventing food from ending up in the landfill. But, making sure it ends up on the plates of those who are hungry. Making sure that farmers are being paid for their crops and food is not being thrown away. I also write to encourage current practices such as composting, redirection of edible food stuffs and upcycling.

The current coronavirus pandemic has highlighted many shortfalls of the U.S. and the world's food system. Recent News reports of dumped milk in Wisconsin, Smashed eggs in Nigeria and Rotting grapes in India highlight the current short-term effects of the pandemic has had on food waste around the world. For Washington State to truly cut waste by 50% 2030 it needs to change how food gets from farm to table and farm to restaurant. In particular the pandemic has highlighted the issue around farm to restaurant. With many restaurants being either completely closed or only doing take out the shipments of food that would have normally shipped during the past two months have either been destroyed, left to rot, throw out and in some cases sold or donated. The pandemic has highlighted that there is no "Plan B". Before the crisis over half of Americans food dollars was spent at restaurants. Farmers have been unable to find a market for their crops. The issue is the inflexible supply chain that is specialized towards the restaurant industry. Contracts in place designate how the crops will be packaged and processed. Ideally these crops should be redirected to food banks grocery stores. The pandemic has highlighted the first step to a reduction in food waste in Washington state. Reviewing packaging and processing processes and creating a "Plan B" for unsold crops. Preventing these crops from ending up in landfills but more importantly making sure these crops end up on consumers' plates. A letter signed by the likes of Nestle and Pepsi stated that World hunger could double as a result of the pandemic. With food insecurity reaching 265 million worldwide according to the World food Programme.

If we are serious as a state about cutting food waste and in doing so carbon emissions, then we need to think about our exports as well. Washington state is one of the biggest exporters of multiple different food stuffs (Apples, Cherries, potatoes, etc). The coronavirus impact on our exports for food stuffs. Washington state needs to create a buyout system for the farmers in time of crisis. That instead of the food stuffs being destroyed or left to rot. The state buys the food stuffs and donates them to food shelters. Or even better create a system that if farmers have leftover food stuffs, they can reach out to the state for a buyout of the product. For this policy to truly have an impact there needs to be "Plan B" for edible food stuffs. In other words, if restaurants close (like they have now) and the farms have excess food stuffs the state needs to be prepared to step in and help the farms. The coronavirus has highlighted a weakness in the food industry. What happens if restaurants close and the specialized food products they ordered are no longer needed? (cheese, fruit, etc.) So, far the food industries answer has been to destroy the food products. In cases where a restaurant closes or cancels the order of restaurant specified food. Much of this food stuff is not something that can be then sold in a grocery store is the unfortunate truth. To prevent food waste there needs to be

stipulations that if the food is safe to consume then it should either be donated or sold elsewhere. Otherwise the likelihood of it ending up in a landfill (like now) is high.

The coronavirus has also highlighted another devastating reality about food security. Right now, we are seeing prices rising on items such as meats and eggs. There have been multiple news articles about hoarding style buying of not just toilet paper but items such as milk and eggs. Items that do not have a long shelf life and most likely have already hit our landfills. For Washington state to slash food waste by 50% in the next ten years it needs to first make sure every Washingtonian has food security. The current pandemic and mass unemployment (Washington unemployment rose from 3.8% to 5.1% from March 2020 to April 2020) has highlighted the importance of food security. Washington state is and was ahead of the game when Seattle started mandating composting. Yet, this is a Seattle based policy. One of the easiest ways for Washington state to reduce food waste is to make this a statewide initiative. I am always shocked and confused when I see my coworkers throwing their banana peels into the garbage or their wrappers into the compost bin at work. Usually I step in and I politely tell them what goes in what. Or point to the sign that that explains what goes into the compost bin. But every time I receive almost the same answer. "I don't live in Seattle. I don't have to compost where I live". I remember when as a high schooler my high school became the first high school in Washington state to compost. As students we had to learn a different sort of self-awareness. And when Seattle eventually adopted composting as a city-wide policy everyone had to learn to adapt. But it has made a difference. And a statewide composting initiative would greatly help reduce food waste in landfills. It would not be the only answer and it would be a learning curve. But, just as people have learned to drink a soda without a straw, they can learn to throw a banana peel in a green bin.

Upcycling is a term that has been around for a few years without a clear definition. A recent Forbes article defined it as "Upcycled foods used ingredients that otherwise would not have gone to human consumption, are procured and produced using verifiable supply chains, have a positive impact of the environment.". Examples of upcycling asks the question "what about the fruit produced by the coffee plant, pulp from juice, where does it go?" The idea behind upcycling is instead of the byproduct of a company's product being thrown out and ending up in a landfill it is used for something. Whether that is taking the and turning it into mulch or creating a whole new product. A 2019 Future Market Insights report estimated the current value of upcycled food industry to be at more than \$46 million with a projected 5% annual growth rate. This is a market that few companies and even fewer states are invested in. By creating funding through grants for farmers, educating consumers about how to upcycle food scraps we are preventing food stuffs from ending up in the landfill.