



**EVERY AMERICAN WASTES
290 POUNDS OF FOOD A YEAR**

COOK IT, STORE IT, SHARE IT.
JUST DON'T WASTE IT.

SAVETHEFOOD.COM



Kitchen Conservation

With a little help from the Ad Council and SapientNitro, the National Resources Defense Council hopes to make reducing food waste the next great conservation effort

By Sarah Steimer

Turn off the lights. Don't leave the water running. Separate the recycling from the garbage.

What about the dinner leftovers?

Social awareness campaigns have tackled everything from saving the rainforest to stopping animal abuse to vaccinating children. The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is now aiming to add food waste reduction to this list, potentially making "Cook it, store it, share it" the next "Reduce, reuse, recycle."

The ball is rolling on the undertaking, with the "Save the Food" campaign one year old as of April. The posters have gone up, the media partners have come aboard and, quite importantly, the audience has taken note and asked questions. Once everyone has learned the issue and acknowledged the role that they play in an issue, the definition of social awareness has been accomplished. Truly successful campaigns, though, actually change consumer behavior. It's difficult to say how many consumers have reduced their food waste, but the table has been set.

PLANTING THE SEEDS

The "Save the Food" campaign was sparked by research from Dana Gunders, an NRDC senior scientist in the food and agriculture program. Gunders kept seeing statistics on food waste during her research, and the findings were so impactful to her that she shifted the scope of her work. The result was a 2012 report titled "Wasted: How America Is Losing Up to 40 Percent of Its Food from Farm to Fork to Landfill." The paper explores all parts of the supply chain in which food is wasted and found the largest amount of waste occurs at the consumer level.

"Because of all that waste, there's a huge amount of environmental impact that takes place," says Nora Mango, senior integrated marketing manager at the NRDC. "Everything from the amount of methane

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released based on the amount of food that would be decomposing in landfills—food is the single largest contributor to landfills in the U.S.—to the amount of wasted water, fertilizer and crop land that is being dedicated to a product that never goes anywhere.”

This \$162 billion in wasted resources seemed to the NRDC an issue easily fixable and apolitical. The potentially wide appeal of the matter seemed the perfect fit for partnering with the Ad Council, whose bread and butter is looking at which issues need a spike in awareness.

“We felt there was a really good opportunity to use communications to reach people with tangible tips and tools, so they could start mobilizing in their homes to not waste food,” says Michelle Hillman, head of campaign development at the Ad Council. “Right away it’s one of those issues where it wasn’t on people’s radar. And the minute that you raise awareness about it, people start thinking about things they can do to change their behavior.”

The Ad Council, in turn, pulled in ad agency SapientNitro to design the campaign pro bono. The imagery is simple and highlights statistics from the NRDC. Many of the campaign assets include a photo of a food item—a milk carton, bread, eggs, chicken breasts—stamped with “Best if used.” The abbreviated version of the common food label phrase is intended to underscore the idea that consumers should spend less time trying to decipher labels and more time actually using the product. Each asset also includes the “Save the Food” slogan, “Cook it, store it, share it.”

The “Save the Food” website takes these simple instructions much further, providing tips for food storage, cooking and more. Gunders even published a how-to on the topic, “Waste-Free Kitchen Handbook: A Guide to Eating Well and Saving Money By Wasting Less Food.” David Serrano, client services director at SapientNitro, says his agency has worked closely with Gunders on the campaign.

“This is a combination of Dana’s knowledge at the NRDC, coupled with research that we did internally to understand what the common thread is in food that

consumers are wasting and the tips they were looking for,” Serrano says. In year two of the campaign, Serrano says the team is considering how to evolve the content.

FERTILIZING THE CROPS

The team chose to target mothers and millennials, the former being household gatekeepers often pressed for time, and the latter in the early stages of food decision-making, which was seen as a key intervention point to make a food waste behavior change.

“What we didn’t know going into this, and that we’re learning from our continuous tracking, is that PSA awareness and the recognition on the creative is shifting more significantly among millennials,” Mango says. “Not only are they developing habits that could help to make a real long-term impact in this [by] teaching their growing families and their friends, but they’re more aware of what’s happening.”

Millennials’ obsession with food has been well-documented. Author Eve Turow told *The Atlantic* in 2015 that the millennial focus on food is largely the result of technology. Constant screen time has caused some sensory deprivation, she said in the interview, noting this generation senses an increased feeling of isolation. Food creates a near-perfect answer to these two issues: Grab a meal with all its sensory fulfillment, and make it a communal experience.

The “Save the Food” campaign is reaching out to these demographics on the platforms they already use when seeking recipes or other food advice. The Pin Factory from Pinterest, which acts as a creative studio for brands, implemented “Save the Food” messaging on its site, adding to the campaign’s presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. NRDC has partnered with Upworthy, Social Native and BuzzFeed. The campaign also worked with the Food Network for a special episode of “Chopped Junior,” in which contestants cooked with food scraps.

“From a media community perspective, every time we pitch food waste among our other campaigns, it just rises to the top,” Hillman says. “People are coming out of the woodwork to partner on this. It’s an issue that is attractive to the media community because it’s an easy consumer action that can have a great environmental payoff.”

Serrano says the campaign aims to inspire consumers by engaging with them through the relevant channels and touch points they use throughout the day. But the messaging matters as much, if not more, than the platforms used, and the team aimed to motivate without shaming their audience.

“There was research done prior to the campaign that broke down these four reasons why people waste food,” Mango says. “A lot of it has to do with people wanting



BEST IF USED.

40% OF FOOD IN AMERICA IS WASTED

COOK IT, STORE IT, SHARE IT.

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to take care of other people; making sure you're prepared to provide food if someone came over. It had to do with aspirations when shopping; you hope that you're going to eat better that week. There's confusion around storage; a lot of people don't understand how to store something properly so it doesn't go to waste or they don't understand the date labels."

Whatever the reason for over-shopping or tossing food, the NRDC and its partners wanted to educate the audience because people reported that food waste is an issue, but didn't believe they, themselves, waste food.

"I think that part of this issue is the lack of awareness that people have," Hillman says. "The crux of the campaign is to say, 'Despite your best intentions, you're wasting food and it has this impact.' The good intentions piece is really important and deliberate. How do we help people take good intentions and

translate that into saving the environment [and] putting more money into their pocket?"

The campaign determined four buckets to focus on that can cause food waste—self-improvement, comfort, security and thoughtfulness—and created tips based on these. Mango says the campaign references back to these tips every time new creative debuts. These tips tend to be widely appealing, Mango says, because of consumers' great food memories, food storage tips or recipes for leftovers that are passed down through generations.

"It came down to offering tips on how to keep your food the freshest the longest or how to store it properly in your refrigerator or how to use it when you think it might be going bad," Serrano says.

What motivates people, however, is not one-size-fits-all. For some, the monetary aspect of wasting food will be the most impactful, so the campaign offers



estimated figures for how much money a household could save by reducing food waste (a family of four could put \$1,500 back in its wallet). Some find the environmental figures the most compelling, so the campaign offers those details (the water wasted when throwing out a single banana amounts to 42 minutes in the shower). For others still, the campaign tapped into an emotional component—by way of a strawberry.

SapientNitro created the spot, “The Extraordinary Life and Times of Strawberry,” that follows a single strawberry through its lifecycle. The fruit is picked on a farm, packaged and sent to the grocery store where a little girl begs her mother to purchase the package. Despite the mother’s brief reluctance, the strawberry is purchased, refrigerated and eventually forgotten before it is thrown out. The strawberry even fell in love with a nearby lime along its journey.

The NRDC and the Ad Council aren’t asking people to not shop or purchase the things they need. Rather, they’re urging consumers to only purchase what they know they’ll use.

“For some people, creating that emotional journey and being able to show the life of the strawberry and the different touch points along the continuum that were wasteful, that really spoke to them,” Hillman says. “And then there are some people who are driven more from that rational facts and figures place. There are some people who were interested in the dichotomy between hunger as an issue in America and the idea of food waste, and we haven’t even tapped into that piece yet on the campaign.”

Whatever the tactic or motivator, Hillman says they’ve consciously ensured “Save the Food” isn’t an anti-consumerism campaign. The NRDC and the Ad Council aren’t asking people to not shop or purchase the things they need. Rather, they’re urging consumers to only purchase what they know they’ll use.

“It’s anti-abundance,” Hillman says.

TIME TO HARVEST

The campaign is only a little over a year old, but the audience appears to have taken note:

- Since its launch in April 2016, the “Save the Food” website has garnered more than 1.2 million sessions.
- About 55% of general market adults strongly agree that food waste is a major problem in the U.S., compared with 51% before the campaign.
- Recognition of the campaign among mothers grew from 20% in April 2016 to 26% in December 2016. Among millennials, this number grew from 31% to 41%.
- 57% of those aware of the “Save the Food” PSAs sought information.

Mango says many people will send the campaign photos of the “Save the Food” posters and billboards they see in their town. They’ve also reached out to the campaign with questions for how to take action on a local level.

“We want to be sending people posters, more tips, linking them with other partners on the ground,” Mango says. “We start to address some of the next steps into donations and things like that through our community management and social channels.”

She acknowledges that it’s tricky to direct people appropriately because awareness campaigns are supposed to be broad efforts. As a result of requests,

Mango says the team has been brainstorming ways people can leverage the national campaign locally by creating templated pieces for use in schools or designing draft letters. The campaign worked with the Nashville mayor's office on the "Restaurant Food Saver Challenge," for example, creating window clings and signs that offer half orders or reminders to take leftovers home.

"We want to engage cities and we're saying, 'We want you to tackle waste on every level. Here's our staff that can help you do that,'" Mango says. "But the easy way to start is implementing our campaign's assets in the city." By way of cities, "Save the Food" has made its way onto the sides of waste trucks and into farmers markets. Engagement and education have led the campaign efforts.

Mike Walker, president and founder of Alter Action, a behavior-change marketing and consulting group, says with so many people who are unaware or haven't given much thought to food waste, marketing is an appropriate first step. He argues, however, that

marketing and advertising can only go so far when it comes to social behavior change.

"If the only tool you have as an advertising agency is coming up with clever, catchy ads, then that's what you're going to throw at a behavior change challenge," Walker says.

Studies on the efficacy of public service advertising campaigns show they're relatively ineffective at changing behavior. Walker says these campaigns are particularly good at the early stages of raising awareness about a problem and providing examples of explicit directions for what the audience should be doing.

"Those two things are insufficient," he says. "What you really need is a third piece of the triangle to drive behavior change, and that's sometimes called choice architecture. The concept is that no decisions happen in a vacuum, so if you really want to have an impact, you need to understand and investigate the point at which people make decisions or act. Sometimes they make them subconsciously, sometimes they don't think about them at all. You need to understand all

Making Friends with Ugly Food

Stand up for ugly food.

SHARE WITH FRIENDS TWEET #GETSHELVED BUY UGLY FOOD

Do you think your food is nutritious?

YES KALE NO KALE

Get Shelved.

PERFECTION IS OVERRATED. ENTER THE WORLD OF NEGLECTED PRODUCE.

PLAY

It starts with a seed.

Pick yours.

Apple
CRISP. FRESH. JUICY.
Life goal: Make it to a teacher's desk.
Note: Keeping berries away.

Lemon
SOUR. TART. ACIDIC.
Life goal: Soothe any and every ache.
Note: Tasting like extra lemonade.

Carrot
CRUNCHY. SWEET. EARTHY.
Life goal: Inspire some raisins, before water dies.
Note: Tasting great in a soup or a salad.

SapientNitro's interns were impacted by the "Save the Food" campaign's messaging. The summer interns are assigned the task of conceiving and seeing a project the entire way through. The summer 2016 group chose to promote ugly food.

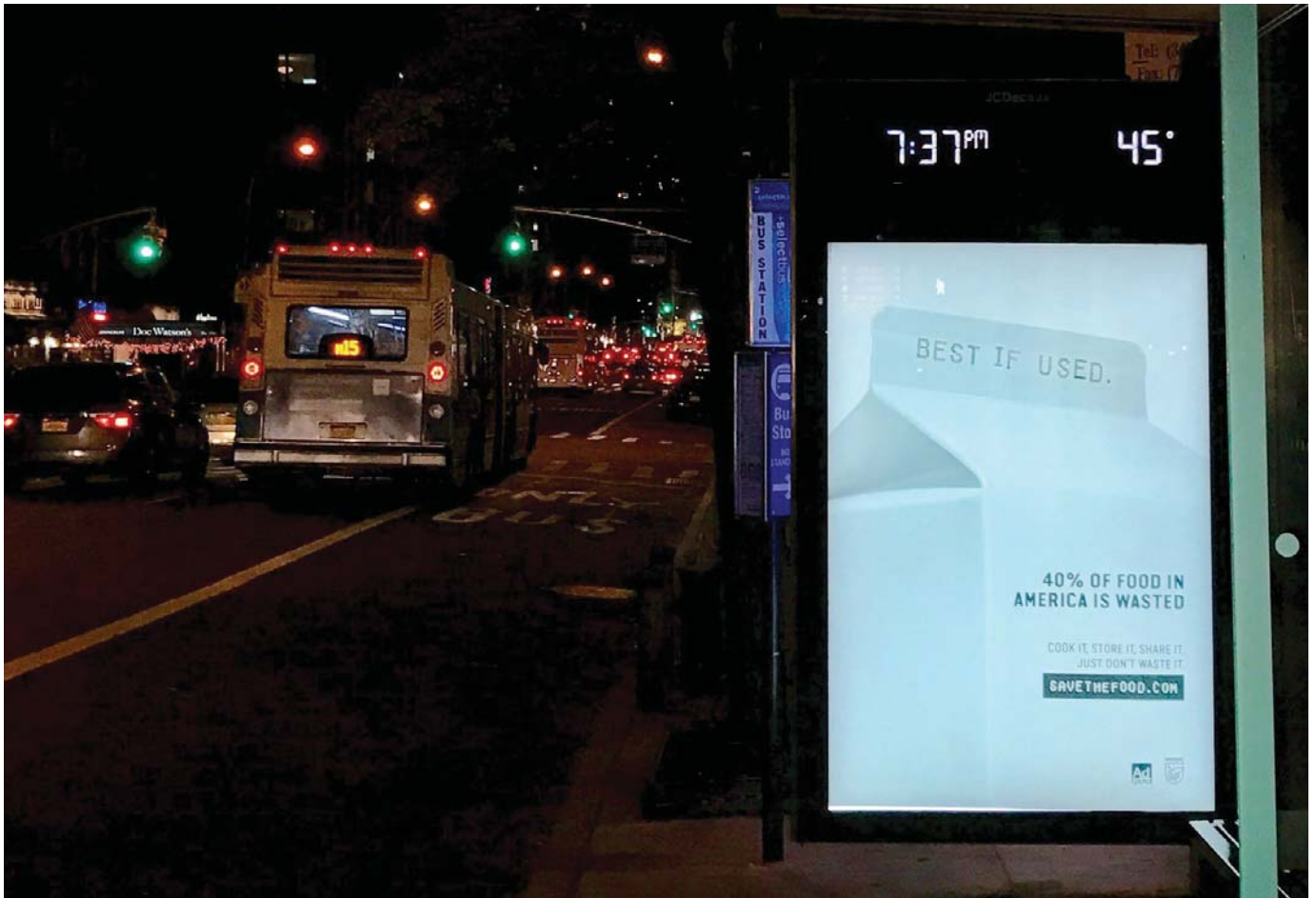
Former intern Jake Wexler, who helped manage the project, says the group landed on the topic of ugly food because it was something they were largely unaware of, but grew to love. They wanted to make it their mission, he says, to boost awareness of the topic among young millennials. Plus, they were inspired by all the talk they heard about "Save the Food."

"From talking to the employees around the office about the impact the [Save the Food] campaign had on them, it inspired us to make that same impact on our target audience," Wexler says. "We felt like our project was a little brother project to 'Save the Food.'"

The "Go Get Shelved" website takes visitors through a choose-your-own-adventure-style game consisting of a land of forgotten produce. On the journey, users learn the benefits of so-called ugly foods and that they are just as nutritious and edible as the rest. Plus, these somewhat unsightly foods are often marked down by the grocer.

The end of the game provides three calls to action, including sharing the game on Facebook, tweeting at a local grocery store with the #GetShelved hashtag or actually purchasing ugly food. According to Wexler, the project received more than 1 million digital impressions and received high praise from users.

"Presented in the wrong way it can be a dry topic, but presented in the right way it can be an aha moment," Daniel DeSimone, an account coordinator intern for SapientNitro, told AdWeek.



the forces that are bearing down on that decision and that's where you find opportunities.”

Walker uses an example from his organization's past work, which aimed to increase organ donors in the U.S. on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services. They found that the more anyone talked about organ donation, the more squeamish people became. They also learned of a decision point barrier: when the body came into the hospital. The emergency medicine doctors and transplant surgeons they spoke with said they would estimate that 70% to 75% of people who show up to the emergency room have no identification, making the “organ donor” label on a person's ID basically null. The point of decision actually came down to what the next of kin had to say. As a result, the campaign focus shifted to educating these decision-makers on organ donation.

Walker says the food waste issue has multiple decision points, including those at the store when purchasing food and at home when choosing how to store and cook it. The goal is to approach people at these critical points. The home is a much less complicated environment than the grocery store, he says, because the consumer has far more control and fewer influencers.

“One thing that I like to see in campaigns like this

No decisions happen in a vacuum. You need to understand and investigate the point at which people make decisions or act. You need to understand all the forces that are bearing down on that decision and that's where you find opportunities.

are very explicit instructions for what people should do, and that's one thing that advertising is great at,” Walker says. “I really like one example on the [“Save the Food”] homepage to keep herbs like cut flowers with their stems in a glass of water. That's awesome advice. And it's specific enough that I could do it. What goes wrong a lot of times with behavior change campaigns is we assume people know [what to do next] or we assume that they can translate from a broader goal to a specific behavior. You have to make that translation for them.”

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Walker praises numerous parts of the “Save the Food” campaign, but says one statistic—that each person wastes almost 300 pounds of food every year—may have an unintentional effect: It may normalize the practice.

“That’s probably an ineffective message,” Walker says. “It’s social norming the wrong behavior. This isn’t guilt necessarily, but what we think the research suggests is that if you look at this you conclude, ‘If we’re all throwing 300 pounds of food away, I’m not doing anything different than anybody else. So what?’ But a more effective approach is to show examples of how people are doing the right thing.”

Another crucial piece of behavior change is to strip away all possible barriers on the path to making the correct decision. Walker says he would be thinking very hard about what happens once consumer meets food, and he says the prompts provided on the “Save the Food” website are an excellent start. He offers a few of his own examples that could reduce barriers to saving food: asking food grower associations to include tips on the produce stickers to make food last, or creating products that assist in keeping food fresh longer, such as freshness-preserving containers.

Walker says he has told clients to dismiss what consumers should be doing and consider what would actually make a difference in their current behaviors. If a consumer is handed a simple cup intended for herb storage, the barrier of rummaging through the pantry is eliminated. It doesn’t have to be a major barrier, he notes, but campaigns need to consider a “whatever it takes” approach.

One such solution could be through technology. “Save the Food” just partnered with Amazon’s Alexa to launch a skill whereby users can ask the device how to store food longer, determine if food is still edible and learn how to revive foods that are past their prime. Hillman says in the future, the ultimate integration could be looping in Amazon Fresh. Consumers could order their groceries through Amazon, and Alexa would know what was bought and could offer information on those items.

“In the consumer journey, what are the different pieces we can look at or the tools we can give



people?” Hillman says. “When they’re in their kitchen and they’re preparing food, what if they had a cutting board that has the right portions so they know how much to use and what is waste? How do we plug in and tie in? There are a lot of tech tools that will probably be part of the next iteration of this while we’re continuing to build awareness.”



Whether reducing food waste will be the result of enough tips, tricks or web-connected kitchen tools is, as yet, unknown. Enough attention has been drawn, though, that Mango believes reducing food waste could be the next wave of environmental awareness.

“Food is universal, it’s lifelong, it’s life-sustaining,” Mango says. “That is something that people care

more about, whether it’s organics or sustainable or wasted. All of those issues, people are really passionate about. It’s connected to their daily life, it comes into their home and invokes memories. It’s an emotional connection they have. If that’s the way you need to find an emotional connection to greenhouse gases and climate change, great.” **m**