

Making Ripples

Swap Thanksgiving Leftovers

by Amanda Bancroft

Stuffed like a turkey after thanksgiving, but don't want to waste delicious food? There's an app for that. At LeftoverSwap.com, you can download an app for your phone that lets you find or get rid of tasty (and not expired!) leftovers without wasting food. Critics say Americans, who are often finicky about their own leftovers, are not going to consider eating someone else's food – especially someone they don't know! Who is going to risk eating expired or germ-contaminated food from strangers?

Of course, using the app doesn't necessarily mean you're taking expired food from strangers who have had their forks in it already. You could actually be eating your neighbor's leftover turkey or the excess produce from the garden three blocks down.

Refusing to eat leftovers is an argument from the land of privilege and plenty. But for those without food allergies, this is another welcome way to acquire literal sustenance. It's not all about survival of the least picky eater: building community around local food is a way to unplug from the phone and talk to your neighbors more often. In fact, sustainability at the local level is about much more than landfills and CO₂. According to Leftover Swap:

- 40% of the food we produce goes to waste.
- 25% of us don't know our neighbors' names.
- 70% of us are overweight.
- 16% of Americans lack enough food for a healthy lifestyle.
- 99% of us don't need a second helping of the beef lo mein.

App users need common sense as they would on Craigslist: don't give away food you wouldn't eat yourself, check food to ensure safety, and properly prepare received food before eating (like washing produce or heating meat to the appropriate temperature).

Fortunately, for those like myself who can't access the app, there are local options of neighbors organizing food exchanges with others on their block. You could see if your block is interested in starting a leftovers swap, or use Facebook to reach a bit more distant "neighbors."

NWA Food Share is a Facebook group where residents post pictures or descriptions of food abundance they don't want to waste. Interested members can then accept the food by posting a comment on the offer. No food requests are permitted, but all offers are welcome! According to their Facebook page, "In the U.S., we produce more food than we consume, and so much is going to waste, so this group helps that food get into the mouths of people who could use it, rather than it rotting on the vine, or being tossed in the bin." To see what's currently offered and post your own bounty this Thanksgiving, visit www.facebook.com/groups/NWAFoodShare/

Ripples is a 100% solar-hosted website that includes a blog, newspaper column, resources and services for individuals and non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org.