

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-391](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Natural Resources Defense Council reported that in the United States up to 40 percent of the food supply goes uneaten. FLW has significant economic, environmental, and social effects on various stakeholders, including businesses and consumers. In 2015, EPA and USDA announced a national goal to reduce FLW in the United States by half by 2030. In 2018, FDA joined EPA and USDA in these efforts.

GAO was asked to examine efforts by federal agencies to reduce FLW. This report (1) describes nonfederal stakeholder views on key challenges to reducing FLW in the United States, (2) describes actions EPA and USDA have taken to address key challenges to reducing FLW in the United States, and (3) examines federal planning efforts toward achieving the national FLW reduction goal. GAO reviewed federal reports on FLW; analyzed agency documents; interviewed officials from EPA, FDA, USDA, and states and representatives of nonfederal stakeholders, such as academic institutions, industry, international organizations, nonprofit organizations, and a tribal organization, based on their demonstrated expertise on FLW; and attended conferences on FLW.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations in this report. GAO is recommending that EPA, FDA, and USDA incorporate leading collaboration practices as they implement their interagency strategic plan to reduce FLW.

View [GAO-19-391](#). For more information, contact Steve Morris at (202) 512-3841 or morris@gao.gov.

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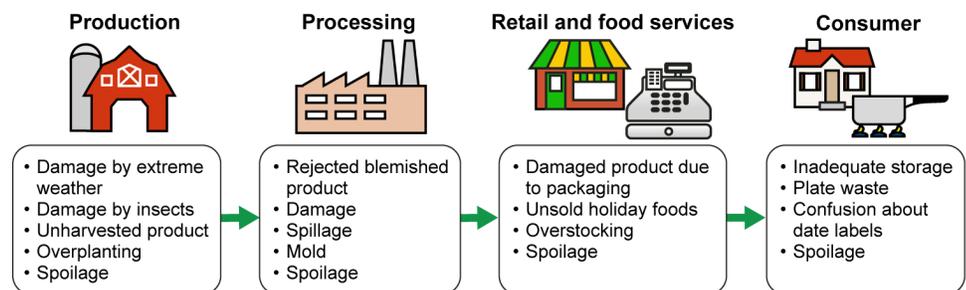
FOOD LOSS AND WASTE

Building on Existing Federal Efforts Could Help to Achieve National Reduction Goal

What GAO Found

GAO identified three key areas in which challenges exist to reducing food loss and waste (FLW) in the United States: (1) limited data and information about FLW; (2) a lack of awareness and education about FLW; and (3) limited infrastructure and capacity. For example, the causes of FLW vary across the stages of the food supply chain (see figure), but the share of total FLW due to each of these causes is currently unknown, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report. GAO identified these challenges through interviews with selected stakeholders.

Food Supply-Chain Stages and Examples of Causes of Food Loss and Waste



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service data. | GAO-19-391

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and USDA have taken initial actions to address key challenges to reducing FLW in the United States since announcing a national FLW reduction goal in 2015. These actions include conducting a study to identify gaps in information about farm-level FLW and building public awareness about ways to reduce FLW.

EPA, USDA, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have taken some actions to plan and organize their efforts toward achieving the national FLW reduction goal. For example, EPA developed an internal plan that established action areas, goals, and activities for reducing FLW, and USDA designated an individual to guide USDA's FLW efforts. In October 2018, EPA, USDA, and FDA signed an interagency agreement committing them to developing a strategic plan to improve their collaboration and coordination in reducing FLW. In April 2019, the agencies announced an interagency strategic plan with prioritized action areas to reduce FLW, but this strategic plan does not address how it will incorporate key practices for interagency collaboration that GAO identified, including (1) agreeing on roles and responsibilities; (2) developing mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results; (3) clearly defining short- and long-term outcomes; (4) identifying how leadership commitment will be sustained; and (5) ensuring that the relevant stakeholders have been included in the collaborative effort. By incorporating such practices as they implement their interagency strategic plan, EPA, USDA, and FDA would have better assurance that they were effectively collaborating toward achieving the national FLW reduction goal.