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**March is National Nutrition Month: Make food ‘Go Further’**

To celebrate National Nutrition Month in March, the National Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is promoting the theme, ‘Go Further with Food.’ In today’s world, it’s a worthwhile call to action, says Kansas State University nutrition specialist Sandy Procter.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which is about 1.3 billion tons of food – and just under $1 trillion in equivalent U.S. dollars – each year.

Not all of that is food lost in the home, but Procter said that’s a good place to start.

“It’s not just the people with higher incomes who waste food,” said Procter, who is with K-State Research and Extension. “Folks that are trying really hard to save money and do all of their grocery shopping just once a month are likely to have more food waste than if they were able to get to a store on a regular basis.”

To maintain good nutrition and reduce the amount of food wasted, Procter shared these ideas for helping to make food go further:

**Fruits and vegetables.** “The way you store fruits and vegetables is part of the art of reducing waste,” Procter said. Extension educators often conduct tours with shoppers to help them identify good quality fruit and vegetables, and then how those will be stored. For example, tomatoes don’t need to be refrigerated, but strawberries certainly do.

Selecting quality produce and storing them correctly “work together to keep food at its best as long as possible,” Procter said.

**Meats.** Buying in bulk may help you save money at the store, but “it takes a little bit of discipline,” Procter said. A five-pound package of chicken thighs may be on sale, but “unless you’re doing a banquet, you’re probably going to want to re-package for freezing and have those ready in a size that you can thaw out for a meal’s worth.”

**Make a plan for cooking meals.** It takes some planning, but if you can take time on the weekend to cook and then freeze individual meals, it saves time and helps to use up available groceries.

Others may choose to shop for ingredients as they’re needed, though Procter says “that can create a problem with access to the right ingredients, in addition to more time spent shopping.”

**Use the foods you have.** Everyone tends to build up extra cans of food or other items that were originally intended for another purpose. As those build up, think of how you can pair foods to make another meal.

“Maybe you have a protein, and maybe you have a vegetable and sometimes it can be incorporated into a one-pot meal,” Procter said. “Or, maybe you have a can of tuna and corn, and you can do a similar type meal with ingredients that you wouldn’t normally choose but would fill all of the components of a healthful meal.”

There are many other ways that consumers can contribute to making food go further, she said, including trying a variety of foods, purchasing at local farmer’s markets, and supporting the local food pantry.

“Eating a variety of foods is a way to ‘go further’ in a healthy lifestyle,” she said. “The body does amazing things; if we make choices from a variety of colors and variety of foods, our body is going to get most of the nutrients that it needs just from the variety that we choose.”

Procter noted that farmer’s markets give consumers a chance to talk directly with the person who has grown a certain food. “And the foods are going to be at their prime, and we’re probably not going to be able to experience them at a more tasty level than what we might find at the farmers market,” she said.

For more information on health and nutrition, contact Kathy at kmcewan@ksu.edu or by phone at 620-365-2242. Information about National Nutrition Month is available at <https://www.eatright.org/food/resources/national-nutrition-month>.