

Green Notes: Saving the Planet, One Moldy Baguette at a Time

By Carmen Hamm, Missoula Food Bank

Picture this: You're restocking bread. It's the end of the month, the Food Bank is at its busiest, and there are lots of shelves to restock. You come across a moldy baguette, and instead of weaving through customers and volunteers and walking all the way down the hall to the goat bins, you decide to toss the moldy bread into the trash.

We've all been there. This scenario plays out in various settings every day across Missoula. In fact, one-third of the food produced in the U.S. is thrown out every year. The EPA reports that "more food is sent to landfills than any other single material in our everyday trash." Our Missoula landfill is 28% food waste and is on track to be full by 2035.

If the problem of food waste is so widespread, what is the impact of throwing away one moldy baguette?

The answer lies in how food decomposes in landfills. When an apple falls from a tree and decomposes on the ground, *aerobic* (with oxygen) decomposition takes place. Microorganisms break down the apple into its molecular nutrients, and the surrounding soil and plants reuse those nutrients.

However, when an apple is thrown into a landfill, it is crushed by surrounding trash, and microorganisms no longer have the oxygen required for aerobic decomposition. So *anaerobic* (without oxygen) decomposition takes place. Our food still decomposes in the landfill, but it comes at a hefty price: Anaerobic digestion releases methane as a byproduct.

If you thought emitting carbon emissions through burning fossil fuels was bad – listen up. Methane, a greenhouse gas, is 25 times more efficient at trapping heat than carbon dioxide. Yup, that's right – our atmospheric blanket just got a whole lot thicker.

So yes, every moldy baguette sent to the landfill is important because it actively contributes to warming our planet. That moldy bread represents a larger story about how humans are actively causing our own destruction, but it also represents a significant opportunity to rewrite our story. Reducing food waste is one of the simplest ways we can reduce our environmental impact. And it simply requires small behavioral changes. Check out [this blog post](#) for inspiration!

Through Grocery Rescue, Food Circle and the Goat Bins, the Missoula Food Bank diverts an extraordinary amount of food waste from our landfill every year. But with your help, we can work together to continue this effort – both at the Food Bank and at home.

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