

## Dumpster Diving : The potential end of global food waste shame?

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*“We may not realise how much of a problem food waste is because we are blind to its effects.”*



**This** is the ugly truth : From every piece of bread crust to last night’s leftovers, every time we throw out any food waste, it adds up to a grand total of 122,547 tonnes of food per year from New Zealand households. Nationally, we waste \$872 million a year on food that we buy and throw away uneaten. That is, on average, \$563 a year per household. New Zealand’s yearly food waste produced 325,975 tonnes of carbon emissions, which is the equivalent of taking 118,107 cars off the road for one year or planting 130,390 trees.

Now you realise- many of us don’t see the toxic methane gas that is going to be released in the landfill when the food decomposes without oxygen, we don’t see the resources that went into producing this food that we simply throw away, nor do we see those people around the world who are hungry. All we see is simply an apple in the bin.

If we think of this whole food waste scandal as if it is a self-perpetuating system, as us humans have now accustomed to such high standards that we cannot accept wonky fruits and vegetables in our supermarkets. Within New Zealand, many people are still living under the poverty line of \$2.85 per week - this means they can only rely on a bag of potatoes for an entire week, especially in major cities such as Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. So why can’t we give away those “socially unaccepted” food to those who are in need? As in result of calling for a change, the new norm that attracts many public members to follow especially young people is Dumpster Diving.<sup>1</sup>

Dumpster diving can be defined as the modern salvaging of waste that has been discarded from large commercials such as supermarkets and residential homes and households. Traditionally, most people who resorted to dumpster diving were forced to pick out economic necessity, as for today, this is not the case. This is now the current environmental endeavour. Much of our food waste comes from the supermarket; discarded with slight imperfections, near its expiration date or simply got replaced by newer stock and tossed out when it is still edible. As retailers are reluctant to see the older stocks with fewer prices, fear that customers would only buy the cheaper price food which they can eat before the expiration date rather than the new stock that has replaced the old stocks. The continuous growth of dumpster diving attracted much more

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<sup>1</sup> Image description : BOTTOMS UP: Dumpster diving is not confined to New Zealand: Benjamin Schmitt, a supporter of the foodsharing movement searches food in a dumpster behind a supermarket in Berlin. Source taen from [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz) .

people to follow, for some may consider this lesser of a sin compared to food waste. By repurposing these resources that were destined to landfill, dumpster divers divert them to those who can make use of the items such as the homeless people and those who have a family to look after with low income.

So - could this possibly be the potential solution to end the global shame of food waste?

"I think Dumpster Diving is a good alternative way to not waste food. There's no reason why it would be considered a 'crime' when all they tried to do was to help reduce our food waste." said by a fellow student in my school. Although dumpster diving is not covered under the New Zealand law, it can be classed as theft, as it's understood that rubbish is still the property of the disposer until an operator has collected it. An online poll on press.co.NZ posed the question "Should Dumpster Diving be illegal in New Zealand?" which reached more than 1000 votes, with more than 80% agreeing with retailers and supermarkets giving away their food, the rest remained negative - saying it was theft and disgusting.

However, many locally owned supermarkets have different reactions towards food waste that has been thrown out when it is still edible. By researching on the Foodstuffs website and interviewing my local Countdown manager, I was informed that dumpster diving was not encouraged by many retailers for various reasons. "We appreciate some people see dumpster diving as a way of accessing free food, and while we acknowledge some items may still be edible, there are significant health risks associated with such an activity and we would strongly recommend against it," said Foodstuffs corporate PR director, Antoinette Laird. There are concerns such as the risk of cross-contamination and the safety of the products.

The spokesman from Countdown has also commented on the company's policy to donate food wherever it is possible through its food rescue programme. "Rather than being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff to try to save the food before it destined to landfill, we should be finding ways to prevent it happening." The student representative of the board of trustee from my school also recommends retailers selling old food stocks or food that is near its expiration dates at a lower price or donates them to community groups such as city missions or the homeless people.

Through this research, I have discovered the different perspectives within my local community on their views about dumpster diving. Like many countries around the world, dumpster diving is still an 'undiscovered' issue that yet to be unmasked in the world of environmental issues. As dumpster diving could be the potential end to the global food waste shame of 21st century, many other solutions are yet to be discovered. Rather than focusing on how we can fix the problem, potential solutions to prevent more food being wasted each day are in great need. It is important to think globally as we are all global citizens working towards the common global goals. Progress is impossible without change, dumpster diving is only the first milestone to reach the destination to the end of global food waste.

