
What is Table-to-Farm?

Most are probably familiar with **farm-to-table**, but what is table-to-farm? Table-to-farm is the second half of the **food cycle** that focuses on putting uneaten or unused food to good use to nourish livestock and the land — instead of sending it to landfills which adds to greenhouse gases — so the cycle can continue in a way that is mindful of resources. This part of the cycle also involves how individuals can be part of the solution through reducing food waste.

The table to farm concept can be explained in three parts:

Feeding Livestock

Even if you are a person who says they “eat everything,” you probably don’t eat orange peels or almond hulls – but that doesn’t mean they have to go to waste. **Dairy cows thrive on food we don’t eat** or can’t digest. The cow’s unique four-chambered stomach allows it to transform nutrients from those foods into nutritious milk. In addition, some food that goes unused by grocery stores, restaurants, universities and hospitals can also be reclaimed to **feed livestock**.

Feeding the Land

Plants grow best when they have the right kind of nutrient-rich soil, which is why **composting** is another way to recycle food’s nutrients back into the land. As food scraps and yard waste from your home — working within your communities composting guidelines — or cow manure from the farm break down, they can be transformed into rich organic matter to fertilize home gardens, farmer’s crops and more, maximizing natural resources.

Recapturing Energy

Technology now exists to transform uneaten or unused food, recycled water and manure into **sustainable renewable energy** in the form of methane gas (biogas) to power farms and communities. The science of anaerobic digestion, the degradation of organic material in the absence of oxygen, has been understood for a long time, but today the **anaerobic digester** is being used more and more to further drive the table to farm cycle.

And, as a reminder that we all have a role in this cycle, read more about how you can contribute by reducing food waste at home and in your community **here**.

Whether feeding their animals, feeding the land or recapturing energy, dairy farmers have long been known for their strong **commitment to sustainable food systems**. View the slideshow and meet the dairy farmers who were **2016 Sustainability Award winners** this year.



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