

Curbing Our Carbon Footprint with New Holiday Traditions

November 22, 2019 | Doria Lotan

Of all the traditions celebrated in the US, Thanksgiving is arguably the most quintessentially American one. And of the many components that make up what we as a culture collectively consider a typical part of the Thanksgiving tradition, the turkey main course undoubtedly tops the list. Unfortunately, one of the unwanted byproducts that we as a society tend to overlook is the tremendous amount of waste that takes place around the holidays when we are confronted with more food than we can possibly eat.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council, Americans annually throw away 40 percent of the food they purchase, or an estimated \$165 billion of wasted food. In fact, wasting food is such a prevalent habit that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranks it as the third-largest source of methane gas emissions in the US.¹ At a time when climate change is threatening

our individual well-being and collective prosperity, there is an opportunity to improve, evolve, and expand the traditions we hold dear.

In 1980, when Tofurky was first introduced as the plant-based alternative to the traditional turkey main course, no one could have predicted that the company would still be a household name. Astonishingly, according to Tofurky, Thanksgiving 2018 marked the sale of their five millionth tofu and wheat-based turkey, proving they have managed to become an integral part of the American Thanksgiving tradition.

Since Thanksgiving is all about community, it feels like the perfect opportunity to focus on ways we can better serve our community through conscious environmental choices. The following are three traditions you can introduce this November that will serve to usher in a new era of Thanksgiving traditions.

Add Composting to Your Recycle, Reduce, and Reuse Repertoire

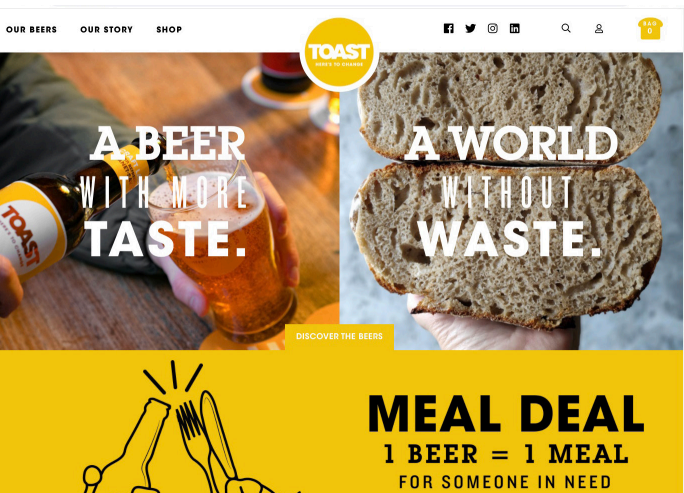


By now, we are all aware of the important role recycling and reducing waste plays in climate protection. But while many of us picture plastic bottles, batteries, and disposable food containers as trash, how many of us think of organic waste as a problem? According to the EPA, “In 2017 alone, almost 41 million tons of food waste were generated, with only 6.3 percent diverted from landfills and incinerators for composting. EPA estimates that more food reaches landfills and incinerators than any other single material in our everyday trash, constituting 22 percent of

discarded municipal solid waste.”² Keeping trash out of incinerators and landfills where it will otherwise produce destructive greenhouse gas emissions is therefore crucial.

According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), “Each year, about 200 million pounds of turkey meat are thrown out over the Thanksgiving holiday week.”³ This Thanksgiving is the best time to change that. Instead of rotting in a landfill, organic waste could easily be transformed into fertilizer and reintroduced into our soil to give life to new plants and more food. Cities across the US are adopting composting programs that allow people who don’t have access to big backyards the possibility of composting their organic waste. There is **Grow NYC** in New York, **Project Oscar in Boston**, as well as pick-up services and drop-off locations posted on the **Zero Waste Chicago** website, just to get you started. Part of the tradition could be sitting down as a family and researching the different composting solutions in the city you live in, sharing the information with friends and family, and making the act of composting an enjoyable part of not only your holiday but your everyday life.

Support Local Brands and Contribute to Circular Economy



We hope this next suggestion helps remind us all that making environmentally conscious choices can be a fun thing and add a positive edge to our Thanksgiving traditions. The yearly challenge would be to find one new brand that you are interested in trying out during

or after the Thanksgiving feast. This year we are highlighting a company called **Toast**.

The brilliance of this company is that they have taken a problem, high quantities of wasted bread, and turned it into a solution, a product that a vast majority of people enjoy—beer. But their use of discarded waste as the core ingredient of their ale is just the beginning. This NY-based company then pays it forward by donating all the profits to, as they put it, “fixing the food system.”

Companies like Toast are popping up all over the country, and the only way for them to grow is for people like us to learn about them, try them, and share what we have found with others. The more we choose to purchase products such as this one, the faster they will go on to become staples in our kitchens year round and the more other companies who are less environmentally driven will be forced to get on board.

Get Back to Basics in the Urban Farm Nearest You



If you have lived in a city long enough, chances are you crave the occasional nature getaway or outdoor activity. Pumpkin and apple picking, for example, have long been favorite family pastimes during the pre-holiday season. But when it comes to our everyday urban life, rarely do we consider the options we have right in our city for some direct contact with nature.

While it is true that some of the urban farms in major cities across America are largely overshadowed by high-rise buildings, growing our own food is a very practical way to return to the source, engage in some good old-fashioned planting, and become an active part in not only consuming locally farmed foods but in producing them.

Part of the path toward change relies heavily on taking responsibility and educating ourselves about the challenges we face and how we can become part of the solution. This Thanksgiving, we suggest finding out how you can do more to get your hands dirty at the urban farm closest to you. The impact of being part of growing the food you eat is in being reminded of just how much work goes into something we often take for granted. Furthermore, supporting local urban farms that promote organic environmentally friendly farming techniques is an excellent way to positively impact your local community.

Make Thanksgiving a Communal Affair

When it comes to our approach toward climate change, our individual choices influence everyone from our family and friends, neighbors next door, colleagues at work, and the many strangers we will fleetingly cross paths with or never even meet.

Jørgen Randers, a BI Norwegian Business School professor, said that the objective of a forward thinking

and environmentally oriented city should be how to increase the average well being of the majority. This Thanksgiving, the question we are asking is how we as individuals can increase the well-being of the community we live in. We hope some of the suggestions we have made will help inspire you to find the answer.

¹ Overview of greenhouse gases. EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases>.
² Sustainable management of food basics. EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics>.

³ A.S. Collins. [Nov. 13, 2018]. A thankful feast, not a wasteful one. NRDC. <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/andrea-spacht/thankful-feast-not-wasteful-one>.