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CONTACT: MARY WADE TRIPPLETT, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
MONONGALIA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
TELEPHONE: 304-598-5152  MaryWade.Triplett@wv.gov

NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH: “GO FURTHER WITH FOOD” TO AVOID FOOD WASTE

MORGANTOWN, WV — (MARCH 5, 2018)

Avoiding food waste and encouraging consumers to “Go Further with Food” is the theme for this year’s National Nutrition Month, which takes place during the month of March.

In addition to the usual emphasis on encouraging a variety of healthful foods from all food groups on a regular basis, this year’s key messages include ways to shop more carefully and store items so they keep longer, thereby cutting down on food waste.

“Most people don’t realize how much food they throw away,” said Darla Retton, Nutrition Education Liaison for Monongalia County Health Department’s Women, Infants, & Children (WIC), a supplemental food program that covers a six-county region in North Central West Virginia.

In 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that 133 billion pounds of food from U.S. retail food stores, restaurants and homes, valued at approximately $161 billion, went uneaten.

In another context, the USDA reports that estimates have placed the portion of food wasted in the United States between 30-40 percent.

When food goes to waste, that is money down the drain as well as resources that have been squandered. During the month of March, Retton said, WIC staff members will emphasize ways to reduce waste to their clients.

Tips include planning meals in advance, making a shopping list based on that menu and sticking to it, checking the pantry before a shopping trip to see what is already on hand, Retton said.
“What we’re doing is offering wasted food tracking sheets,” Retton said. “Families can keep track of wasted foods to figure out why foods went bad.”

Families also can use a meal planning sheet to figure out what ingredients are already on hand and what is needed. It is also recommended that when food does go bad that consumers try and determine why that happened to help avoid it in the future.

Retton and other WIC nutritionists also can offer handy tips on how to make the most of the food available on hand. For instance, Retton said. “Once bananas are ripe, you can put them in the fridge,” she said. “They will turn brown but they are still good. You also can put ripe fruit in the freezer and make smoothies later.”

Nutritionists also teach about correct refrigerator utilization. Retton noted that milk should be kept in the fridge, not in the door, so it will stay colder. Consumers also should learn what to keep in a refrigerator’s high-humidity drawers and low-humidity drawers. For instance, apples should be kept in low-humidity drawers. If put in a high-humidity drawer, they can release a gas that can cause other items to spoil. Finally, meat should be kept on a bottom shelf so it does not drip on other items.

Clients who receive WIC services during the month of March also can get National Nutrition Month items such as “Go Further with Food” measuring spoons, stickers and pamphlets, Retton said.

Finally, good nutrition will be part of the theme at this year’s Family Fun Night that WIC holds each year at Spark! Imagination and Science Center. At this year’s event, which will be held April 12 for WIC and Head Start families, there will be a nutrition message for children and a food demonstration, and healthy food will be served.

For more information about National Nutrition Month, visit monchd.org/wic.html or call 304-598-5181.

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