NEW SURVEY: AMERICANS CONCERNED ABOUT NATION’S WASTED FOOD, BUT UNDERESTIMATE IMPACT ON ENVIRONMENT

WASHINGTON (June 24, 2015)—According to a national survey today, 70 percent of Americans surveyed say they are bothered by the amount of food wasted in the U.S. Most cite money lost as the leading cause for concern (79 percent), while nearly half of respondents also are bothered by others not having enough to eat (45 percent).

In contrast, only 15 percent made the link between food waste and adverse impacts on the environment. Yet the U.S. EPA says that wasted food is the most prevalent material in our landfills and contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. EPA also notes as major concerns the wasted energy, water, and other resources that are used to produce the 30-40 percent of food that goes uneaten in the United States.

Conducted in April by TNS Global, the survey of 1,000 adults on attitudes toward food waste and packaging revealed that 76 percent of households say they throw away leftovers at least once a month, while 53 percent throw them away every week. And 51 percent say they throw away food they bought but never used. Americans overall may underestimate the value of that wasted food; survey respondents estimated wasting $640 in household food each year—U.S. government figures are closer to $900.

“People from all walks of life and around the globe understand that wasted food is a critical issue,” said Steve Russell, vice president of plastics at the American Chemistry Council, which sponsors the Plastics Make it Possible® initiative and this survey. “Improving the way we protect and preserve foods can help consumers save money, get more food to people who need it, and significantly reduce our environmental footprint.”

Fortunately, nearly all Americans surveyed (96 percent) say they take one or more steps to prevent food waste, such as eating leftovers and avoiding over-buying of perishables. Although only 46 percent of Americans say they actively use proper packaging to keep food from spoiling, plastics can play a significant role in minimizing food waste and its environmental impacts.

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Plastic packaging helps prevent food waste by providing barriers to oxygen, light, temperatures, moisture, microbes, and other factors that lead to spoilage.

“Proper packaging is essential,” Russell continued. “Just a little bit of plastic packaging can prevent a whole lot of food waste. This survey demonstrates that we must raise awareness of the negative impacts of wasted food and the positive role lightweight packaging can play in prevention.”

NOTE: A recent survey by Johns Hopkins University similarly found that environmental impacts ranked last among those reasons stated by participants as a reason to reduce wasted food.

For more information on plastics and sustainability, visit plasticsmakeitpossible.com.

Plastics Make it Possible® highlights the many ways plastics inspire innovations that improve our lives, solve big problems and help us design a safer, more promising future. This program is sponsored by America’s Plastics Makers™ through the plastics industries of the American Chemistry Council.

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