



January 23, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

## The Big Waste

Paula and I watched a special on the Food Network called “The Big Waste” on January 8. If you get a chance to see it, take it; I’ll let you know when I see it on the schedule again. The network challenged four top chefs who have regular programs on the Food Network to obtain food that is being thrown away and make gourmet meals for 100 from it.

Who throws away good food? Supermarkets and specialty food stores. Restaurants large and small. The reasons are many from blemished vegetables and fruit, meat and fish that aren’t attractive enough, cheese and cookies too close to the expiration date, and unsold grain products. But the one that really surprised to me were the farms.

You know the premium you pay for organic fruits and vegetables. One of the chefs visited an organic farm, and learned that they throw away 40–50% of their crops—actually they put it in the compost heap to recycle the nutrients. The question is why? Because a carrot may not be straight or a tomato has a bruise. If they send it to a market, it won’t sell. Why? Because we want perfect-looking produce.

At the you-pick farms, people cut an item, then saw a better one and dropped the loser in the row. A large section of sweet corn was composted because the stalks were blown over, and people wouldn’t go near it. At both types of farms, there were rows of produce that was still perfectly good to eat if the blemished part was cut away, and the compost piles looked delicious.

During the next growing season, I’m going to visit farms and see if I can buy some tomatoes for canning and apples to make apple butter that are in those compost heaps—yes, we’re busy, but that’s something we enjoy doing once a year. If I can get the produce at a reduced price, I don’t mind cutting out what’s bad to get the taste of fresh fruits and vegetables.

There are many other areas covered in “The Big Waste” that are just as troubling. The focus in society today is sustainability. We can each do our part to help with that and maybe save some money on our food bill as well as long as we’re willing to do a little paring.

And the meal prepared by the four chefs was a huge success—food critics, foodies, other chefs, and celebrities were all tremendously impressed and couldn’t believe all the food was headed for the trash.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

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