REPORT URGES CONGRESS TO SAVE THE U.S. BILLIONS IN RESOURCES BY TACKLING PERVERSIVE FOOD WASTE IN THE 2018 FARM BILL

The Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic, with support from ReFED and Food Policy Action, Release Report on Actionable Food Waste Solutions in the Upcoming Farm Bill

(Cambridge, MA – May 3, 2017) The United States spends $218 billion each year on food that is never eaten. The nation’s staggering food waste problem reflects chronic inefficiencies in the American food system—40% of food produced in the U.S. ends up in the landfill at the same time that one in seven Americans faces food insecurity. The U.S. currently uses 20% of its agricultural water, cropland, and fertilizers just to produce wasted food. In Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill, the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic (FLPC), with support from ReFED and Food Policy Action (FPA), identifies opportunities to reduce food waste that Congress can implement through the next farm bill, the nation’s most influential food and agricultural bill, which is up for reauthorization next year.

The farm bill is an omnibus piece of legislation that shapes our entire food system, regulating a range of programs from crop insurance to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps). The last farm bill was passed in 2014, allocating nearly $500 billion over five years to food, nutrition and agriculture. Yet, none of these funds went toward efforts to ensure that the food produced was actually consumed.

Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill focuses on recommendations that provide ways to reduce food waste at its source, help surplus food get to hungry people, and divert food waste from the landfill. “The U.S. simply does not have policies in place to manage food waste and its ramifications. It’s time for Congress to demonstrate its leadership by addressing this pervasive national challenge,” says Emily Broad Leib, Director of the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic. “By adopting just some of the measures we suggest, Congress can benefit the American people, the planet, and our economy all at once.”

Many of the report’s recommendations are based on groundbreaking food waste reduction research conducted by ReFED and published in their 2016 report, A Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste by 20 Percent. Chris Cochran, Executive Director of ReFED, explains, “The U.S. food waste problem is so systemic that it seems overwhelming. Our Roadmap identified implementable steps for reducing food waste across the food system. Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill takes that a step further, locating policy opportunities to incorporate the Roadmap’s solutions into the next farm bill.”

The report presents a range of different solutions, from small modifications that incorporate food waste reduction efforts into established programs, to new initiatives that could catalyze larger-scale food waste
action and awareness. “It’s not every day that Congress has the chance to support proposals that have such overwhelming public support and will do so much to reform existing food policy,” said Willy Ritch, acting Executive Director at Food Policy Action. “Congress can either create an entirely new Food Waste Reduction section of the farm bill to adopt these recommendations or incorporate them into the existing titles in the bill—either way this is a great opportunity to significantly reduce the amount of food that goes to waste in this country.”

Food waste reduction has all the ingredients necessary to become a successful bipartisan effort. Executive agencies and the private sector have both taken action against food waste. In 2015, the USDA and the EPA jointly announced the nation’s first-ever food waste reduction goal, and last year 15 major companies, including Campbell Soup Co., Kellogg, PepsiCo, and Walmart, pledged to cut their food waste in half by 2030. Food waste is also frequently appearing on the agenda for state governments, with food waste legislation pending in more than a dozen states. Even so, goals to reduce food waste will not be met without concerted action from the federal government. **Opportunities to Reduce Food Waste in the 2018 Farm Bill** offers Congress a menu of specific policies, all implementable in the upcoming farm bill, to reduce the astonishing amount of U.S. food waste for the good of the American people, the planet, and the economy.

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**The Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic** (FLPC) was established in 2010 to address growing concerns about the environmental, health, and economic consequences of the laws and policies that structure the food system. FLPC attorneys provide action-learning opportunities to Harvard Law students, who conduct legal and policy research focused on increasing access to healthy foods, assisting small-scale and sustainable farmers in breaking into new commercial markets, and reducing the waste of healthy, wholesome foods. For more information about FLPC, visit chlpi.org/flpc or email flpc@law.harvard.edu.