

## What a Waste

Working at a restaurant has its benefits. My mom works at a local Japanese restaurant in the mall. Like most eateries, they need to get rid of the leftover food to make room for a fresh batch the next morning. The majority of the uneaten food is either be sold at a discounted rate, or given to the staff to take home. My mom always takes home the leftover chicken, rice, or sushi, because she can reuse it to make meals for my dad and me. The other staff, however, tend to reject the food offered to them because they have grown tired of eating the same dishes. Without a second thought, the pot of rice, eight pieces of chicken, and four musubis are thrown into the trash and become food waste.

Food waste is an ongoing national problem that affects us all. On average, Hawaii's citizens waste approximately 356 lbs or \$700 in food every year. Multiply this by the total population of Hawaii, and that equals approximately 237,000 tons of food, or 26 percent of the available food supply being wasted. Imagine spending your hard-earned money to buy the Hawaiian plate lunch you have been craving all day. You pay for your meal, sit down, eat  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the plate, and then throw away the other  $\frac{1}{4}$  in the form of a \$5 bill; that is what we do every day without realizing it. The perfectly edible but wilted vegetables left on the shelves, the meat with slightly more white areas of fat, and the countless canned goods that are nearing their maximum shelf life are all sent directly to the trash, because we view it as being inedible. When the wasted food reaches landfills, it will continue to pile on top of each other which restricts the necessary flow of oxygen food needs to decompose naturally. This causes methane, a greenhouse gas that destroys our ozone, to be released and harm our environment.

islands will be filled with trash, chemicals, and foul smells. Oahu will no longer be recognizable behind the wasted food that will decay at a rate slower than what we need to handle the number of items we dispose of daily.

Mr. Ching was known for taking an idea and fighting to make it a reality. As one of his greatest accomplishments, he founded and built the Kukui Gardens. The Kukui Gardens was one of the largest affordable rental projects in Hawaii, housing 2,500 residents at a prime location in downtown Honolulu. This all began as a vision to give back to the community. Mr. Ching saw that housing for many Hawaii residents was not affordable acted on it. Similar to the problem of food waste, realizing that it is a problem is the first step. If our community can have the same motivation and drive to fight as hard as Mr. Ching did to build his idea into the Kukui Gardens, we will be able to start a change.

As the children and residents of Oahu, it is our responsibility to take care of our island. We must encourage people to make compost instead of throwing away their leftover food. We must learn to donate uneaten foods to homeless shelters. We must motivate everyone on Oahu to change their wasteful habits in order to stop food waste from taking our money and misusing our space.

Word Count: 994