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In Abu Dhabi, Ramadan a time for fasting and food waste awareness

Brian Roewe | Jul. 11, 2013 Eco Catholic

Monday marked the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Traditionally a time of fasting, prayer and introspection for Muslims worldwide, the month has an added focus this year in one Arab nation, where they have connected the religious period with the theme from World Environment Day 2013 ? ?reduce your foodprint.?

To that end, the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi has partnered with a charitable organization and a food-and-beverage chain to donate each day for the next five years 250 meals of untouched, safe leftover food to the capital city?s homeless. The agency introduced the campaign at the start of Ramadan, and will launch it in full at its conclusion. Islam's holy month continues through Aug. 7.

According to the *Khaleej Times* [1], Quattro Group, a food service company, will provide approximately 250 unsold meals each day from its Mocha cafes and restaurants to the Saving Grace project, which will deliver them to low-income communities. Saving Grace director Sultan Al Shehi told the *Khaleej Times* that its list of families in need exceeded 175,000 in 2012.

The collaboration, Al Shehi said in a press release [2], plays ?a significant role in raising awareness among community members on the importance of conserving our environment by reducing food waste at social events, restaurants, hotels, governmental organizations and in private entities.?

The agency estimates that organic waste composes 39 percent of household waste in Abu Dhabi. Worldwide, approximately 1.3 billion tons of food ? or a third of global food production ? goes wasted each year, according to the U.N.?s Food and Agriculture Organization.

To combat that figure, the U.N. dedicated this year?s World Environment Day [3] (June 5) to the theme of ?Think.Eat.Save.? The consumption-cutting campaign encourages responsible food decisions at a time when global food production outpaces demand [4], but yet one in seven still goes to bed hungry each night.

In addition to the food donation program, the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi has launched its own awareness campaign to encourage people throughout the country to consider waste when making food decisions. Fozeya Ibrahim Al Mahmoud, director of the agency?s environmental outreach division, said that ?instilling a culture? of waste reduction becomes a key priority in a country with limited water resources and food production capabilities.

?We must adopt the best use of available resources, as well as raise awareness about reducing our collective ?foodprint? during Ramadan,? Al Mamoud said in the press release.

The campaign includes 10 tips on reducing food waste, recycling some of the practices from World Environment Day while also incorporating their own religious values.

One suggestion, to cook in proportion to those present at each meal, emphasizes the point with a quote from the

prophet Muhammad: ?The food of two people is enough for three, and the food of three people is enough for four.?

Other tips include measuring portions, planning meals to minimize buying already-stocked or unnecessary items, avoiding grocery shopping while hungry, finding creative recipes for leftovers, composting organic waste, and donating safe, unused food to those in need.

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[1] http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/todayevent/2013/July/todayevent_July10.xml&section=todayevent
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