

Seeking end to loss and waste of food along production chain



FAO estimates that 30-40% of total food production is lost before it reaches the market.

Key facts

Each year, the world loses or squanders a third of the food it produces. This means that globally, around 14 percent of food produced is lost between harvest and retail. Significant quantities are also wasted in retail and at the consumption level. These numbers are simply untenable in a world where, according to FAO, some 870 million people do not have enough to eat. In fact, according to the FAO-commissioned study that tallied these numbers, if just one-fourth of lost or wasted food were saved, it could end global hunger. When the study results were released, they focused global attention on the need to improve the efficiency of food-production systems. In parallel, FAO has established SAVE FOOD, a global initiative involving a coalition of partners from the public and private sector focused on reducing loss and waste.

When the food-packaging industry chose food loss and food waste as the theme of its 2011 international trade fair, it approached FAO, seeking a definitive study to highlight the importance of the issue. The goal was to quantify how much produce was lost or wasted along the food chain, and

to identify ways in which the packaging industry could help reduce the numbers. Although there was certainly awareness that loss and waste had dire effects on food security, this would be the first study to tally numbers globally.

When completed, the study showed colossal loss and waste along farm-to-fork production – enough, in fact, to feed all of the world's 870 million hungry people four times over. In response, trade fair organizer Messe Düsseldorf added a global conference on the topic during the trade fair, Interpack 2011.

It invited representatives of the public and private sectors to attend the conference, held 16-17 May 2011, to discuss how they could work together to alleviate some of this untenable waste. That conference, called Save Food, inspired participants to form a broad partnership and global initiative aimed at reducing loss and waste.

Today, that partnership has become SAVE FOOD, an initiative led by FAO with more than 150 public and private sector partners along with sister UN food agencies, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). All are committed to bringing their expertise and technical know-how into the mix, working together to find new approaches to improving the efficiency of the world's food systems.

Food loss differs from food waste

With FAO's guidance, SAVE FOOD has established a field programme to look at supply chains in individual developing countries and advise governments on ways to improve their efficiency.

In developing countries, food losses occur in the production chain and hit small farmers the hardest. FAO estimates that 30-40 percent of total production can be lost before it reaches the market, due to problems ranging from improper use of inputs to lack of proper post-harvest

storage, processing or transportation facilities. These losses can be as high as 40-50 percent for root crops, fruits and vegetables, 30 percent for cereals and fish, and 20 percent for oilseeds.

In industrialized countries, waste refers to food that has reached the market. Shopping habits of affluent consumers who have “throw-away mindsets”, and buy more food than their families can possibly eat, are just a part of the problem. Waste also includes overproduction, which often stems from availability of crop subsidies and leads to more supply than demand, and the removal of safe food from the market or from the supermarket shelves due to stringent regulations. When all aspects are added together, waste by consumers in Europe and North America is almost 10 kg per capita a month, compared to consumers in sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia who do not even waste that much in a year.

Loss and waste affect economy and environment

In an even bigger picture, whether it is production loss or retail waste, such squandering reduces the food supply available in the market. This in turn is likely to raise prices, especially in developing countries where consumers cannot afford such increases. At the same time, when that food is wasted, so are all of the energy and resources such as land and water that went into growing or producing it.

In a world that needs to double food production in order to meet the demand of a population expected to increase from seven billion today to nine billion in 2050, this colossal loss of food during the farm-to-fork production chain is tragic. Overall, this is quite simply a scenario the world cannot afford, a fact recognized by SAVE FOOD'S partners who have taken on the responsibility of seeking ways to improve production efficiency and, in turn, world food security.

In-Depth

- [Global Initiative on Food Losses and Waste Reduction – Save Food](#)

At a glance

Working for food producers and consumers

Working to reduce food loss and waste and improve food security

Working with private sector, UN, NGOs, IGOs and civil society partners

Working thanks to Ireland, European Union, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Messe Düsseldorf GmbH

Publications

- [Global Food Losses and Food Waste](#)
- [Food Wastage Footprint](#)
- [Global Initiative on Food Losses and Food Waste](#)
- [The Role of Producer Organizations in Reducing Food Loss and Waste](#)
- [Appropriate food packaging solutions for developing countries](#)