



# Reducing Food Loss to Combat Food Insecurity



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## Introduction

Over 800 million people worldwide are starving or malnourished, with many more considered food insecure. At the same time, around one third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted at some point in the supply chain, amounting to over 1 billion tonnes every year. Reducing the amount of food lost by 25% would be enough to feed all the world's hungry.

## Developing countries

Food loss in developing countries occurs mostly at the production end of the supply chain. These losses directly threaten the food security of smallholder subsistence farmers, and also leads to reduced incomes for the farm owners, negatively impacting their welfare. Nutrient-rich foods such as fruit and vegetables have the highest rates of loss due to their perishability. These nutrient losses can have significant impacts on efforts to reduce hidden hunger and undernutrition. The main causes of post-harvest losses are due to poor infrastructure, poor temperature management, low levels of technology and low investment in the food production system, especially the cold chain.

In order to address food loss in developing countries, a whole value chain-wide approach is necessary, to offer greater nutrition and lower prices to consumers, while also supporting and bettering farmer livelihoods. Infrastructural investments in improved storage and transport capacity are vital, but policy innovations could also have a real impact on smallholder farmers. It is estimated that if developing countries had the same level of refrigeration in the supply chain as developed countries, approximately one quarter of all food loss could be saved. Other fixes can be as simple as getting farmers to use boxes instead of bags for transport to avoid bruising. Export standards also lead to food going to waste:

- 80% of the mangoes grown in Senegal are unsuitable for export to Europe due to skin blemishes that have no effect on the overall quality of the fruit
- 35% of beans produced in Kenya are discarded due to European standards

While Europe continues to reject and waste food due to cosmetic standards, an estimated 20% of the African population is undernourished.

- One third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted at some point in the supply chain, amounting to over 1 billion tonnes every year
- Increased investment and policy innovation is required to tackle the issue of food waste in developing countries
- Consumer attitudes towards the appearance of food, failure to plan meals and a misconception that “best before” dates are “use-by” date, cause a great deal of food loss and waste in the developed world
- A new approach to the issue can help reduce food insecurity and reduce our reliance on increasing agricultural production to feed the world's growing population

While food loss also occurs at production level in developed countries, a far larger proportion of food is wasted at the tail end of the value chain due to retail and consumer behaviours when compared to the likes of Sub-Saharan Africa. Per capita food waste by consumers in Europe and North America is 95-115kg per year, while in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, waste per consumer is only 6-11kg per year. This is caused by consumer attitudes towards the appearance of food, failure to plan meals and a misconception that “best before” dates are “use-by” dates. Food insecurity is most often associated with developing countries, however, the USDA reported in 2019 that 37.2 million Americans live in food insecure households. By reducing waste at consumer level, food can be redistributed through food banks to help feed the vulnerable in society.



## The Significance of Reducing Food Loss

Reducing food loss and waste can improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and help feed millions of food-insecure people right across the world. The greenhouse gas emissions released by producing mountains of food waste is currently equivalent to 8% of global emissions, and if food waste were a country, it would be the third largest GHG emitter behind the US and China. Food loss therefore perpetuates the likelihood of future food loss and decrease in production capacity through accelerating climate change. By reducing food waste, we are improving food security for people today and in the future.

## Conclusion

Through increased investment and policy innovations in developing countries, as well as a systemic shift in attitudes in developed countries, food waste and loss can be reduced to help mitigate threats to food security for millions of people. The food currently wasted can be redistributed. This will in turn reduce our reliance on increasing agricultural production to feed the world's growing population.



### Expert in this Insight

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