

FAO launches platform to help global community reduce food loss, waste

Gearing up for the inaugural International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste on 29 September, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has unveiled a new platform to help the global community step up action to reduce food loss and waste.



Image source: www.pixabay.com

The Technical Platform on the Measurement and Reduction of Food Loss and Waste brings together information on measurement, reduction, policies, alliances, actions and examples of successful models applied to reduce food loss and waste across the globe.

"Wasting food means wasting scarce natural resources, increasing climate change impacts and missing the opportunity to feed a growing population in the future," said FAO director-general Qu Dongyu at the launch of the platform.

Contributing to sustainable development

The event provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the upcoming International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste, which aims to sharpen focus on the need to reduce food loss and waste, and how doing so can contribute to sustainable development.

The FAO chief urged the public and the private sector and individuals to promote, harness and scale-up policies, innovation and technologies to reduce food loss and waste, and ensure that the first international day will be meaningful and influential.

He was joined in his call for greater efforts to reduce food loss and waste - especially at a time when Covid-19 further exposed the vulnerabilities of and need for more resilient food systems - by representatives of a range of partner organisations and FAO member states.



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16 Jul 2020



"Food loss and waste is a sign of food systems in distress," said Lawrence Haddad, executive director of The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), whilst pointing out that "nutritious foods are the most perishable, and hence, the most vulnerable to loss. Not only food is being lost but also food safety and nutrition are being lost as well".

"Addressing food loss and waste with accurate information and evidence at the country level is an attempt to create a food system that delivers on planetary health and human health," said Geeta Sethi, advisor and global lead for food systems at the World Bank, adding: "But to know what is a policy priority for a country, and therefore, investments and interventions that are needed requires good data and evidence. This platform is very relevant."



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The platform at a glance

The platform is as a gateway to all FAO food loss and waste resources, including: the largest online collection of data on what food is lost and wasted and where; discussion forum on food loss reduction; examples of successful initiatives; e-learning courses; food loss and waste policy brief in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic; and tips on what everyone can do to reduce food waste.

It also connects to related portals from development partners, serving as a one stop shop for all food loss and waste knowledge.

The consolidated platform was made possible thanks to funding from the Swiss Development Cooperation.

Why reduce food loss and waste?

Reducing food loss and waste can bring about many benefits: more food available for the most vulnerable; a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; less pressure on land and water resources; and increased productivity and economic growth.

To make this happen, the FAO director-general and partners called for applying innovation - both technological and operational - for example, finding technological solutions for post-harvest management, new ways of working together, better food packaging - as well as relaxing on regulations and standards on aesthetic requirements for fruit and vegetables; better consumption habits; government policies aimed at lowering food wastage like guidelines to redistribute safe surplus food to those in need through food banks; and building alliances, including outside of the food sector, for example with



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The FAO believes that interventions like informing the public to reduce food waste, investing in supply chain infrastructure, training of farmers in best practices, and reforming food subsidies that unintentionally lead to more food losses and waste are a bargain compared to other measures.

Fixing the negative cycle of food loss and waste would bring the world closer to the 2015 Paris agreement target of limiting global heating to below 2°C. For example, cutting food loss by 25 percent would offset the environmental damage that would be caused by future land use for farming. It means not having to destroy more forests with devastating consequences for climate change and biodiversity to produce more food.

Technological innovations can also tackle undesirable environmental impact while saving food. In Kenya and Tanzania, for example, solar-powered cooling technology for chilling milk - through a project supported by FAO and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) - helped prevent milk losses without creating any additional greenhouse gas emissions. The same technology saves three million liters of water per year in Tunisia.



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Food loss and waste explained

Food is lost when it is spoilt or spilled before reaching the final product or retail stage. For example, dairy, meat, and fish can go bad in transit because of inadequate refrigerated transport and cold storage facilities.

FAO estimates that 14% of food is lost this way, valued at \$400bn annually. In terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the food that is lost is associated with around 1.5 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent.

Losses are higher in developing countries, for example, 14 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 20.7% in Southern Asia and Central Asia, while in developed countries, for example, Australia and New Zealand, they average at about 5.8%.

Major losses are in roots tubers and oil-bearing crops (25%), fruits and vegetables (22%) and meat and animal products (12%).

Food is wasted when it is discarded by consumers or is disposed of in retail owing to its inability to meet stringent quality standards, or quite often due to a misunderstanding of the date marking on the product.

Food waste measurement is a complex issue. We know, however, that food that never gets eaten represents a waste of resources, such as labour, land, water, soil and seeds, and it increases greenhouse gas emissions in vain.