



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

## **Food Waste: the Scale of the Problem**

KEYNOTE by Ms Rosa Rolle

### **Do Good Save Food!**

#### **Educating Future Generations for a Zero Waste World**

Organized under the auspices of  
The European Parliamentary Alliance on the Fight against Hunger  
And  
The EP Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable  
Development

- The world currently has the capacity to produce enough food so that every person on earth can benefit from a nutritious diet.
- With population growth, increasing urbanization, climate change, stagnation of land resources for food production and increasing scarcity of water resources, a critical challenge facing our world today is ensuring that the nearly 10 billion people living on this planet in 2050 will have access to sufficient supplies of safe, nutritious food.
- Sustainably feeding and nourishing the global population in the future, will necessitate a combination of many solutions
- Wasting less food to feed more in an equitable, healthy and safe way, represents an opportunity of significant magnitude to address the problem.

- Humans have always wasted food, but the scale of the problem today is unprecedented in history and is likely to continue to grow if efforts are not made to stem the problem.

So how big is the problem?

- Globally there is very limited data on food waste, partly due to a historic lack of interest and more recently due to the very real difficulties in measuring it.
- Nevertheless, a number of published estimates, highlight the magnitude of the problem.
- In industrialized countries, it is estimated that at least 40% of food is wasted at the retail and consumer levels.
- In the EU alone, around 88 million tonnes of food waste, equivalent to 20 percent of all food produced is generated on an annual basis.
- According to Fusions (2016) EU Households generate an estimated 47 million tonnes of food waste or more than half of the total food waste in the EU.
- Retail food waste, according to a 2013 report of Lipinski et al., is estimated to contribute to approximately 5 % of total food waste globally.
- Food waste is a systemic problem, meaning that it occurs at every step of the food supply chain from production to consumption – taking place in supermarkets, restaurants and in the home.
- Food waste is also a manifestation of the inefficiency, unsustainability and inequality of many contemporary food systems.
- This high level of inefficiency has economic, social, and environmental impacts.
- **Wasting food represents a waste of nutrients.**

- Indeed we learnt from the FAO 2011 report, titled Global Food Losses and Waste, that fruits and vegetables - which are rich sources of micronutrients and vitamins that could help people fulfill the nutrients they need to meet their daily recommended intakes – by virtue of their high degree of perishability, suffer the highest levels of losses and waste (an estimated 42 %) in the distribution chain, when compared to other perishable foods and to staple foods.
- A study published by the University of Edinburgh in 2018, determined that more than 50 million tonnes of fruits and vegetables grown across Europe are discarded each year, partly because they are misshapen or of the wrong size.
- While all of these nutrients are wasted, 821 million people across the globe cannot afford a quality meal every day and rates of overweight and obesity are increasing in all regions of the world.
- From an ethical perspective, there is simply no room for food waste.
- **Wasting food represents a waste of resources** (an estimated 1.4 billion hectares of land and 250 km<sup>3</sup> of blue water is used to produce food that will not be eaten).
- Food that is ultimately lost or wasted consumes large quantities of increasingly scarce natural resources, such as land and water, as well as agricultural inputs, energy, and labor used in production, harvest, processing and transport operations.
- **Food waste has huge local and global environmental impacts as well.**
- Food in landfills decomposes anaerobically, creating methane; a greenhouse gas twenty times as harmful to the atmosphere as CO<sub>2</sub>.

- Aside from the environmental price associated with food waste, there is also **an enormous financial cost to this wasteful behavior.**
- **The annual cost associated** with food waste in the EU according to Fusions, is an estimated 143 billion euros.
- Clearly, a lot needs to be done to address the significant inequities and vast waste in our food systems and to ensure their sustainability.
- By preventing food loss and waste, we can save nutritious food for redistribution to those in need; avoid pressure on scarce natural resources, help mitigate climate change; and save money for farmers, companies and households
- FAO believes that investing in educating the younger generation will contribute significantly in helping to stem the problem.

Thank you

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