Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FACT SHEET
Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC-32)

Reducing food loss and waste in the Near East and North Africa

The NENA[1] region relies on food imports to meet over 50 percent of its total food requirements and still experiences a food deficit.[2] At the same time, the region loses and wastes a significant amount of food, up to 250 kg per person each year, a figure that is higher than the global average.

At the last session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC-31), the region's governments recognized that food loss and waste contribute to reducing food availability, aggravating water scarcity and increasing food imports. The governments committed to reducing food loss and waste by 50 percent within the next 10 years (2014-24), a great but crucial challenge to meet NENA's food security.

KEY FACTS

- The **NENA region imports 36 million tons of wheat per year, yet it wastes over 16 million tons** every year worth more than 6 billion USD, an amount that could feed 70 to 100 million people.
- The region's average internal renewable water resource availability is **609 m³ per capita per year** (versus 6400 m³ worldwide), and **only 3.9 percent of the region's land is cultivated yet up to 30 percent of natural resources and energy used to produce food are wasted** along with the lost or wasted food.

Food loss and waste in NENA

Reducing food loss and waste is critical for countries that face limited possibilities to increase their food production, and who depend on food imports to meet their food needs, such as the case for the majority of countries in NENA.

Although the region is a net food importer and maintains a **food deficit** that reaches up to 17 percent for cereals, 45 percent for meats and 74 percent for oils, the NENA region loses and wastes:

- 14 to 19 percent of its grains;
- 26 percent of its fish and seafood;
- 13 percent of its meat;
- 45 percent of its fruits and vegetables.

In NENA, substantial amounts of loss and waste occur at all stages of the food supply chain. Notably, 44 percent and 34 percent of total losses occur in pre/post-harvest and consumption stages, respectively.

Inadequate data on commodity and location-specific loss and waste, insufficient investments, coordination gaps and lack of awareness among relevant actors, have so far hindered effective actions to reduce food loss and waste in the region.

However, for a region that is facing the challenge of feeding a growing population and has a limited ability to increase its food production, **reducing food loss and waste is an opportunity** to improve food availability, quality, safety and affordability.

When food is lost or wasted, all the natural resources used to grow, process, package, transport and market it, also go wasted

[1] Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, the Islam Rep. of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

[2] The **depth of the food deficit** indicates how many calories would be needed to lift the undernourished from their status, everything else being constant. The average intensity of food deprivation of the undernourished, estimated as the difference between the average dietary energy requirement and the average dietary energy consumption of the undernourished population (food-deprived), is multiplied by the number of undernourished to provide an estimate of the total food deficit in the country, which is then normalized by the total population.

Food loss and waste – definitions and implications

What is food loss and waste?

Food loss and waste refer to the edible parts of plants and animals produced for human consumption that are not ultimately consumed by people.

In particular, food loss refers to quantities of food that are lost along the food supply chain and do not reach the final consumer. In contrast, food waste refers to food that reaches the final consumers in the desired quality but is not consumed and instead discarded.

Why do food loss and waste occur?

Although they differ widely from country to country, the causes and origins of food loss and waste are attributed to poor farming systems, deficient infrastructure, and poor practices that occur throughout the different stages of the supply chain.

These practices include, handling operations, transportation, drying techniques, storage (especially cold storage), contamination, and infestation by micro-organisms, rodents and other pests. Inadequate markets and inefficient marketing systems, as well as inadequate financing, are also key factors.

Why make food loss and waste reduction a priority?

Environmentally, food loss and waste contribute to increasing greenhouse gas emissions and degradation of natural resources.

Every time food is lost or wasted, all the natural resources used to grow, process, package, transport and market it also go wasted. For example, **when an apple is lost or wasted, 70 liters of water used for its production go wasted as well**.

All food wastage represents a missed opportunity for food security. Food loss and waste reduction is the most feasible and quick win approach to increasing food availability and security in contrast to increasing food production.

The way forward

To address and reduce food loss and waste, a strategic approach is required that emphasizes coordination between all relevant actors, including public institutions and private sector agencies, food producers and handlers, and civil society institutions, through responsible and sustainable policies and effective compliance mechanisms.

In order to help achieve food security for NENA, FAO has developed a Strategic Framework in close collaboration with governments, civil society organizations and private sector to reduce food loss and waste in NENA by 50 percent within 10 years. FAO will continue to work with all partners in overcoming the multiple challenges of food loss and waste.

Food loss and waste reduction is considered a feasible and quick win approach to increasing food availability and security

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