

BTS ANGLAIS

So much food, so much waste

Worldwide, that works out to us humans losing or wasting about 1.3 billion tons of food each year. The trouble is that generating food is “expensive”.

Surprisingly, both the poor and the wealthy countries lose roughly the same amount of food per person per year — but for very different reasons.

In the poor countries the food is wasted at many stages. Sometimes it cannot be harvested, it cannot be transported to storage areas and it can spoil in storage areas before it gets to the markets. And of course a war makes everything worse again.

In wealthy countries, it's a slightly different story. One reason for the increasing wastage of food is the shift from a rural farming life to an urban non-agricultural life. Since 1974, the average American has increased individual food wastage by 50 per cent. We are becoming increasingly separated from our food. We don't trust our noses any more to tell us when food has gone bad. Consumers are obsessed by the appearance of their fruit and vegetables, so the greengrocers have to throw out 'imperfect' produce. In the supermarket, sometimes the packages of food are too large for us to eat it all, again leading to wasted food.

Another source of food waste is labour shortage. On average, about 7 per cent of American planted fields are not harvested each year — ranging between 15 per cent for wheat, down to 2 per cent for potatoes.

Sometimes we let the food rot in the pantry or fridge, because we chose to eat in a restaurant, not at home. In restaurants we order huge meals, which we leave half eaten. In some upmarket restaurants, the kitchen cooks two identical meals for each customer — and then serves them the better-looking one and throws away the perfectly fine, but cosmetically less appealing, meal.

But wastage also happens in more down-market restaurants. For example, in McDonald's, the unsold chips have to be thrown out after seven minutes, and the burgers after 20 minutes. So food can be wasted all through the chain that begins on the farm, then goes through the harvest, packing, processing, and retail shops, before finishing in our family households.

In the US, wasted food makes up the single largest component of US municipal solid waste. As a result, decomposing uneaten food makes up about one quarter of US fugitive methane emissions.

But on the positive side, we can reduce the waste.

We can shop more wisely. We can learn to know when food has actually gone bad. We can buy fruit and vegetables even if they have tiny spots. We need better standardisation and clarification of date labels on food, so that we don't throw out perfectly good food. We can cook only what we need — and if there is any left over, we can recycle the food into that prince of foods, the leftover.

Adapted from <http://www.foodwise.com.au/so-much-food-so-much-waste/>, by K.Kruszelnicki

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