

by Karen Nachay

## Waste Not, Want Not

Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, developing technologies to minimize pre-harvest and post-harvest losses, and more are top concerns among global food organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) dedicated to improving the lives of people around the world. One of the FAO's newest projects addresses the issue of food loss and waste, specifically offering information on how consumers and food retailers can significantly reduce the amount of food wasted in homes, retail outlets, and restaurants.

Launched in January 2013 by the FAO, the United Nations Environment Program, and partners, the Think.Eat.Save Reduce Your Foodprint campaign will examine food waste from a global perspective and serve as a resource for those running initiatives to combat food waste. It actually supplements a larger endeavor, the FAO's Save Food Global Initiative on Food Losses and Waste Reduction, which began in 2011 as a partnership between public and private food industry-related entities to develop and implement programs to reduce the amounts of food lost and wasted around the world.

While a troubling amount of people around the world lack access to enough food because of poor agricultural methods or unstable political situations that may make it difficult for them to receive the food they need, many

other people waste the food that they do have. FAO's data show that about one-third of all food produced, which amounts to about \$1 trillion, is lost or wasted. FAO adds that in developing countries, much of the food lost or wasted occurs early in the food supply chain due to financial, technical, and logistical reasons, while in the developed

*FAO's data show that about one-third of all food produced, which amounts to about \$1 trillion, is lost or wasted.*

world, much of the food is wasted by the consumers and retailers themselves mainly because they purchase more than they can use or sell and they are too concerned with the quality standard of appearance.

"In industrialized regions, almost half of the total food squandered, around 300 million tonnes annually, occurs because producers, retailers, and consumers discard food that is still fit for consumption," said José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General, in the press announcement for the Think.Eat.Save Reduce Your Foodprint campaign. "This is more than the total net food production of sub-Saharan Africa, and would be sufficient to feed the estimated 870 million people hungry in the world."

Initiatives like Think.Eat.Save Reduce Your Foodprint and Save Food hope to cast a global spotlight not only on the cost implications that food waste has

on the food industry, consumers, and retail but on the environmental effects as well. Money is spent on water, energy, labor, feed, and fertilizer to grow and process food, some of which is ultimately lost or wasted, and this food ends up in landfills to decompose, adding to greenhouse gas emissions, states the FAO.

solutions to the food waste problem. In one report, it discussed how food waste tracking software may help restaurants reduce the amount of food wasted (restaurants throw away about 10% of the food they buy).

A CNN.com article published in January 2013 highlighted food waste recycling projects designed to help reduce the

Issues like these are being discussed by various organizations and have received press coverage recently. For example, the Natural Resources Defense Council in August 2012 published a report that found 40% of the food supply—about \$165 billion worth of uneaten food—is thrown away in the United States yearly and that grocery stores lose \$15 billion a year in unsold produce. The organization suggests grocery stores reduce the amounts of fresh produce for display cases and stands, consumers refrain from purchasing more food than they can consume before it spoils, and government set national goals to reduce food waste. The European Commission along with its member states has set the goal of cutting the amount of food waste by half in the European Union by 2020. NPR in its broadcasts and *The Salt* blog has covered how the restaurant industry is slow to develop

3,500 tons of food waste produced each day in Hong Kong. Currently, most of that waste is sent to landfills that will reportedly reach capacity by 2018. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in his 2013 State of the City address that the city sends 1.2 million tons of food waste to landfills in a year, which costs taxpayers about \$80 per ton. He proposed a pilot program to collect curbside organic waste from single-family homes in Staten Island for composting. If successful, it could go citywide.

These are small steps, but they are the steps that FAO's Think.Eat.Save Reduce Your Foodprint campaign wants organizations and governments to learn from and build upon to achieve results with local and global implications. **FT**



Karen Nachay,  
Associate Editor  
• knachay@ift.org