



National Food Policy Briefing Note: Addressing food waste in Canada

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Summary of the issue:

Globally, about one-third of all food produced is wasted. In Canada, this amount is closer to 40%, of which nearly half (47%) is from consumers. High levels of food waste negatively impact the environment, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient loss, and the inefficient use of resources for food production.

In September 2015, the United Nations announced a target of halving global food waste per capita by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, which almost all countries in the world, including Canada, have committed to. With such an ambitious target, all levels of government, industry associations, businesses, non-profit organizations and citizens are talking about the issue and looking for solutions to reduce food waste.

In this frenzy of activity, most solutions are being developed in a hurry by individual entities or special interest groups, without careful consideration of root causes or all of the stakeholders that are affected, especially marginalized groups. Without a systems approach to addressing food waste, deeply held assumptions may not be challenged, critical features of the broader system may go unnoticed, and opportunities for innovation and collaboration may be missed.

Vital Stats:

- Canada wastes \$31-billion-dollar worth of food annually;
- 47% of food is wasted at the household level, 10% at the retail, 10% at the farm, 20 percent at the processing, 4% during transport and 9% at restaurants;
- Canadian households throw away an average of \$100 worth of food every month;
- Global food waste emits 3.3 G tonnes of CO₂ equivalent;
- Decomposing food waste in landfills generates the greenhouse gas methane, which is 20 to 25 times more potent than CO₂

Solutions: What needs to be done:

Current food waste reduction strategies have relied on food charities to “process food waste”. Studies have shown that despite 30 years of relying on food donations through food banks, a growing number of Canadians are food insecure. Institutionalizing food insecurity as a core part of the food system to divert surplus food to ‘Hungry People’, creates further dependency and does not address the root cause of food waste.

Canada should address food waste systematically and apply the concept of a circular economy. A circular food system has no waste and is regenerative in nature. A closed loop food system can be developed by supporting an enabling environment (e.g. a lab or accelerator program) for innovators to develop new ideas, prototype, and incubate solutions.

Inclusive cross-sectoral collaboration requires input from a diversity of voices and invest in solutions at different scales of the food system. Canada should recognize the value of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in promoting a closed loop food system. Moreover, Canada should invest in social innovation and include collaboration with diverse stakeholders such as small-medium scale farmers, migrant farm workers, food-service workers, food bank recipients, faith-based communities and civil society groups to hear their perspectives on food waste.

National Food Policy Action

1. Be Systems-Based
2. Use Circular Thinking/ Closing the Loop
3. Support Reconciliation with Indigenous Communities
4. Promote Innovation and Inclusive Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

International Innovation

[INFARM](#) in Germany is a great example of best practice in closed loop food system. INFARM is one of the pioneers of a self-sufficient vertical farm and zero waste food system in an urban centre. INFARM's approach is a systemic approach to addressing food waste while also encouraging self sufficiency and employment.

Key Resources for Further Reading

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