

**FOOD LOSS AND WASTE REDUCTION &
RECOVERY INITIATIVE**

BURRENCHOBAY LECTURE THEATRE

UoM

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think the title of this initiative could not be more appropriate.

More and more people are beginning to think, and to realise just how staggering the figures of food waste and losses are.

While “Food loss” refers to the decrease in quantity or quality of food, “food wastage” is part of food loss and refers to discarding or alternative use of safe and nutritious food for human consumption all along supply chains.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to the FAO, roughly one-third, about 1.3 billion tons per year, of the edible parts of food produced for human consumption, gets lost or wasted globally.

In 2014, FAO estimated that the total cost of global Food Loss and Waste is around 2.6 trillion dollars, of which 1 trillion dollars is in economic

costs, 700 billion dollars in social costs and 900 billion dollars in environmental costs.

In an age where almost a billion people go hungry, food wastage of any kind or scale whatsoever is unacceptable, and as a nation, we need to ensure that our resources are utilised efficiently towards optimum food production so that there is no wastage of labour, water, energy, land and other resources that we commit to food production.

My Ministry has been much involved with food loss that is happening throughout the food chain, starting from agricultural production, going through harvesting, sorting, handling, processing,

storage, transport till it reaches the consumer for consumption.

There are a number of factors which can potentially lead to food loss.

These include overproduction, lack of communication among stakeholders, differences harvesting times, consumer preferences, poor marketing structures and facilities, lack of food safety, lack of post-harvest facilities, climate change.

Moreover, during times of falling prices, farmers find it cheaper to dispose of surplus food produce rather than putting it on sale.

A reduction food loss would lead to a more efficient land use, better water resource management, more sustainable use of resources and it would help mitigate impact on climate change.

From an ethical point of view, there is simply no place for avoidable food waste in a resource constrained world, a world where we still have a billion hungry mouths.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Mauritius, we do not have a good estimate of the magnitude of food loss and wastage and this is an area that needs to be researched.

Though in Mauritius we do not have any records of people dying of hunger, we, however, have cases of undernourishment which may not always be directly related to affordability/accessibility to food.

Reducing food losses and waste is gathering increasing global interest and action.

A global initiative, called “SAVE FOOD” has been launched sometime back.

It is a joint **initiative** of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Messe Düsseldorf, and Interpack, the leading **global** trade fair for packaging and processes.

There is also recognition within the Sustainable Development Goals – SDG - to address this issue.

SDG 12.3 calls for cutting in half per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level, and reducing food losses along production and supply chains (including post-harvest losses) by 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is good for you to note that some countries, namely Italy and France have enacted relevant legislations to tackle the issue of food loss and food waste.

The problem of food loss/wastage is a very complex one and involves a number of stakeholders.

Our work fits perfectly with the launch of this initiative.

I am delighted to see the issue of food waste and losses, and the impact of our food system, being put together with the issue of global hunger.

Regarding food wastage, I am aware that to prevent food wastage at the consumption level, there is one Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which is benevolently and actively engaged in a food sharing project.

Food which would otherwise have been wasted such as buffet leftovers in hotels, restaurants, caterers, hypermarkets and bakery shops are

collected by this NGO and supplied to people in need (local NGOs, community centres, orphanages and retired homes) through a simple and no-cost food sharing system.

This NGO assesses and selects possible food donors and receivers by laying emphasis on food safety.

In addition to this precautionary measure, the food is distributed immediately after the closure of buffet/restaurant or other food donors' premises and transported to beneficiaries in hygienically sealed containers within three hours after having left the donors premises "kitchens".

The persons involved in this process are all holders of a food handler certificate which legally enables them to carry the food with them until the donation point.

Moreover, all the food donors are protected through the use of a liability disclaimer.

This minimizes any risk of controversy between food donors and beneficiaries in terms of food safety.

It is well past time the average person starts to fight back on food wastage.

People need to become more connected to their food and this will avoid waste.

For instance, whenever you grow your own food, you are simply more conscious and you are less likely to waste.

In that respect, kitchen gardening is an initiative which should be promoted.

At this point, I would like to share with you, possible causes of food losses and measures undertaken by my Ministry to minimise such losses.

Firstly, due to climate change, there is emergence of new pests and diseases which affects crops and livestock.

Farmers are unable to control diseases, leading to food wastage and losses.

Climate change is having severe impacts in fields over the world and constant research should be carried out so that preventive measures to control new pests and diseases are found.

With better control of pest and diseases, food wastage can be reduced significantly.

In addition, farmers should get access to extension services so that losses can be avoided.

Just to be on the safe side in case of unfavourable climatic conditions, leading to damage of the produce or infestation of pests and diseases in the

field, farmers tend to produce a bit more than their demand is.

As a result, supply is greater than the actual demand and the remaining food is wasted.

In certain cases, due to over-production of specific commodities, the price of the products decreases and only those of best quality are sold out to fetch higher prices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are also assisting farmers to reduce food losses through the adoption of good agricultural practices that minimize post-harvest losses.

In this respect, Maurigap standard has been developed and those standards are being certified by the Mauritius Agriculture Certification body.

Farmers are encouraged to engage in agro-processing activities so that the extent of losses at the farm level can be minimized.

Several schemes are in place such as one to encourage the purchase of agro-processing equipment and capacity building being given to entrepreneurs at the FAREI Farmers Training School.

We are encouraging more communication among stakeholders.

The food industry is a complex one with various stakeholders involved in the food supply chain.

Food is produced in surplus mainly because of the lack of communication among these stakeholders.

If it is clear about how much food is required by who at a particular time, there would not be the need for producing more food than required.

So, the solution is for stakeholders to collaborate more and contribute in preventing food loss.

Where industrialised countries are concerned, some may say that they can afford to lose a little portion of food, but as it has been mentioned, food

loss is also linked to deterioration in natural resources.

Therefore, sensitization of the population and the stakeholders involved is crucial to remedy the situation.

I am happy to see that there is an element of sensitization within the initiative of the University of Mauritius.

Sometimes, in order to get some money, smallholder farmers tend to harvest their crop prematurely, which is not ready for human consumption and due to poor quality such products are then disposed of.

On the other hand, some farmers harvest their produce too late with the same consequences - these products must be disposed of due to their poor quality.

To keep the good quality of the product and at the same time get a good price for it, smallholder farmers must collaborate and produce according to the demand.

In this way, food surplus and wastage can be prevented.

However, it is to be noted that regrouping of farmers is not an easy task (at least in Mauritius)

and much effort is required by extension services for this system to be implemented.

In this particular case, processing is a promising avenue to reduce food loss.

In meat production, the by-products are sent for processing and same applies for vegetables and fruits are sent for further processing (pickles, jam etc.).

It is a fact that in many cases, food supply is not a problem, but the problem lies in ACCESS.

Due to poor marketing structures and facilities, food does not reach the whole population in a country.

Fortunately in Mauritius this is not a major issue.

There is a tendency of over-production and wastage on one side, while on the other side, people are not getting access to food due to high prices.

The Ministry of Agro-Industry & Food Security, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, is investing in marketing structures and facilities so as to ensure that safe and nutritious food is easily accessible to each and every citizen of the country at an affordable price.

In this context, the setting up of a National Wholesale Market is underway.

Given the proper facilities, sub-standard products can also be used for processing and value addition.

Investments can be made in food processing equipment and markets can be developed so that these value-added products can be sold at a higher price, hence increasing profit.

Improper food production and food handling leads to risks linked with food safety.

If a food is contaminated or there has been any kind of adulteration, the food should not reach the consumer and has to be disposed eventually.

In order to encourage, food safety, my Ministry has invested in the setting up of a state-of the art

laboratory which is internationally accredited since 2015 for some 25 parameters by the National Accreditation Board of Testing and Calibration Laboratories of India.

It is also the COMESA regional centre for food safety.

All stakeholders involved in the food chain should also be trained on standard procedures (for example ISO, HACCP) so that food does not have to be disposed of because of issues related to food safety.

On this issue, my Ministry has invested in upgrading our Central Abattoir to become HACCP certified.

Lack of facilities related to post-harvest, storage, transport and processing are important factors to be considered as each one of these leads to large amounts of food losses.

These cases are mainly from developing countries where smallholder farmers are cultivating on a small-scale and do not access to these facilities.

In order to fight against hunger and food insecurity in the world, it is the responsibility of each and

every one of us to contribute in preventing food wastage.

I therefore provide my full support on food loss and waste reduction and recovery and encourage all stakeholders in the agriculture food value chain to join in this initiative.

Thank you for your attention