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***Addressing Food Waste in Times of Crisis***

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**Food Losses and Food Waste – A Global Perspective**

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***Executive Summary***

**Food losses and waste levels are high and depend on specific conditions**

Food losses refer to the decrease in edible food mass available for human consumption throughout the different segments of the supply chain. In addition to quantitative losses, food products can also face a deterioration of quality, leading to a loss of economic and nutritional value. Food losses resulting from decisions to discard food that still has value to others are also called “food waste”. Food waste is most often associated with the behavior of retailers, the food service sector and high income consumers.

Recent studies commissioned by FAO estimated yearly global quantitative food losses and waste at roughly 30% for cereals, 40-50% for root crops, fruits & vegetables, 20% for oilseeds, meat and dairy, and 30% for fish.

The causes of food losses and waste in low-income countries are due to wide-ranging managerial and technical limitations in harvesting techniques, storage, transportation, processing, cooling facilities, infrastructure, packaging and marketing systems. The main sectors of concern are small and medium scale fisheries, agricultural production and processing.

The causes of food losses and waste in medium and high-income countries mainly relate to consumer behavior as well as to policies and regulations put in place (e.g. agricultural subsidies) to address other sectoral priorities. Food safety and quality standards can be applied in ways that remove food that is still safe for human consumption from the food supply chain. At the consumer level, insufficient purchase planning and failure to use food before expiry dates also lead to avoidable food waste.

**The impacts of food losses and waste are multi-faceted**

Total food losses globally have been estimated at 1.3 billion tons per year, which is roughly one-third of the world food production for human consumption.

Food losses have a high *impact on* *food security*, especially for the poor smallholder food producer and the poor food insecure consumer. Qualitative food losses may cause a *reduced nutritional value*; low quality products may also be unsafe with adverse effects on the health, wellbeing and productivity of the consumer. *Economic and distributional impacts.* The distribution of economic benefits from reductions in food loss and waste depends critically on market circumstances and where in the supply chain losses are reduced. Food losses and waste have negative *environmental impacts* due to the water, soil, and other resources embedded in the food no one consumes, as well as the emission of greenhouse gases.

**Strategies for reducing food losses and waste are being adjusted**

New strategies and intervention approaches are needed due to a number of factors such as the growing influence of private sector led enterprise, global market integration, urbanization, growing south-south food trade, and the associated ‘lengthening’ of food chains.

Cornerstones for the new strategy are the *integrated supply chain approach*, the *viable business case* (cost-effectiveness) for food loss reduction, and *partnerships,* both with food chain actors and the public sector, to mobilize the required resources for action and to implement and/or support the intervention strategy. To build the partnerships and promote action FAO has launched the *Global initiative on food loss and waste reduction.*