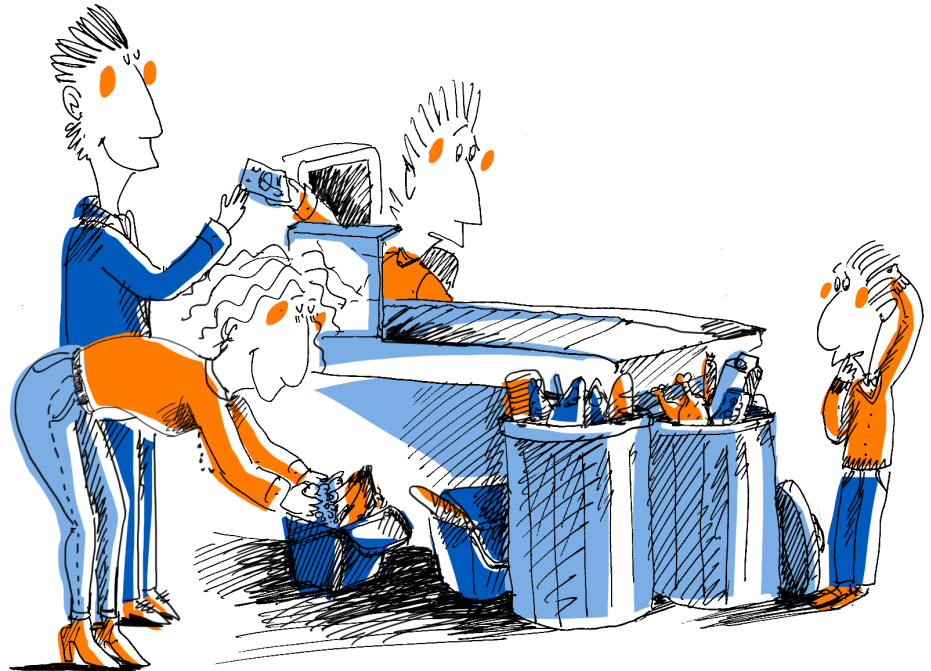


Scandal of massive global food wastage revealed

A new study has disclosed that up to 50% of the food produced every year never makes it to the plate. With billions of hungry people to feed, how can we stop this horrendous waste?



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Every year, around four billion tonnes of food is produced on earth. From orchards, cornfields and pastures, an abundance of fruit, meat, grains and vegetables is constantly being farmed to feed more than seven billion hungry people.

But according to a new study, a shocking percentage of that produce will never make it to the plate. Each year, up to half of all the food produced around the world will get thrown away.

From 1.2 to 2 billion tonnes of food – between 30% and 50% of the total produced – is wasted annually. That's enough to satisfy the needs of the world's one billion malnourished people several times over.

Some of the blame lies with the consumer: in Western households, half of all purchased food gets thrown away. Many shoppers are taken in by two-for-one deals, then find their bargains go mouldy. Over-cautious 'best before' dates also encourage consumers to dispose

of purchases early – more than half of binned food is actually safe to eat.

Produce is lost at every stage of a complex food industry. In the UK 30% of vegetables rot in the field because they do not meet the perfect, uniform standards of appearance that supermarkets demand. Globally, that results in 1.6 million tonnes of wasted food. Each year, meanwhile, the average UK restaurant bins food weighing the equivalent of three double decker buses.

In the developing world, food is lost before reaching the market for different reasons. Where fruit must be driven thousands of miles in baking hot trucks, 20% will often be thrown away; because poor infrastructure makes refrigeration difficult, more is lost in storage. India wastes more grain than Australia produces and more fruits and vegetables than Britain consumes.

The problem is not just about what we eat. Some 550 billion cubic metres of water is wasted to produce the world's

uneaten food, and crops that get thrown in the bin use as much land and carbon-emitting fossil fuels as those that feed the planet. And with the global population set to rise by 3 billion by 2075, the need for this wasted food has never been greater.

FROM BARN TO BIN

There are many approaches to tackling the problem. Multinational supermarkets keen to tap the lucrative Indian market, for example, plan to establish sophisticated infrastructure that would vastly reduce waste. Could industrial progress provide the answer to this food scandal?

No, some say: a mass produced, globalised food industry is the problem, not the solution. A system that demands consumers buy more than they need, demands unnatural standards of perfection and sets up a myriad production system between field and plate makes waste inevitable. A simpler, more modest approach to eating will put a stop to throwaway food.



Q How can I avoid wasting food?

A It's easy to take simple steps to limit the amount of food you throw away. Planning the meals you're going to eat throughout the week and carefully organising your shopping lists will make things much

easier; if you buy more than enough of one food for a meal, make sure you can use the rest later in the week. Don't get lured in by buy-one-get-one-free offers, and reuse leftovers by making stock or putting them in the freezer.

Q What's in it for me?

A As well as helping the planet, cutting down on food wastage can save you

money. In the UK, the average household spends £250 to £400 every year on wasted food. What could you buy with that cash?



SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'It's impossible not to waste food.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

► Scandal of massive global food wastage revealed

WORD WATCH

Four billion tonnes – This refers to metric tonnes, which are equivalent to 1,000 kg. They should not be confused with a ton in the USA, which is equal to about 907 kg.

According to a new study – The study, released this week, was carried out by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. The group has over 100,000 members and

carries out research into sustainability, growth and efficiency in manufacturing, energy, transport and the environment – areas that are central to the work and aims of many engineering professionals.

Over-cautious ‘best before’ dates – A ‘best before’ date is about quality rather than safety: it shows when a product will be at its freshest and tastiest, not when it will go off. If a product looks and smells fine, it is usually okay to eat it regardless of

its ‘best before’ date. This should not be confused with the ‘use by’ date, which is shown on food that goes off quickly, like meat or fish, and shows when a product will no longer be safe to eat.

Infrastructure – This refers to the basic structures that should be in place for a society or organisation to work. It includes ‘hard’ infrastructure – like power, roads and sewage systems – and ‘soft’ infrastructure, which includes things like systems of government, parks or cultural facilities.

YOU DECIDE

1. What is the best way for you and your family prevent food wastage in your everyday life?
2. Can industrial development provide the answer to food wastage, or do you think it will make the problem worse?

ACTIVITIES

1. Keep a diary recording the food you buy, consume and waste. Using that information, create a pamphlet to advise others about the importance of reducing food wastage.
2. Create a graphic that shows the stages of food production and manufacture, and explains how wastage occurs.

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 **NOTES**

