

Food Waste Reduction's Vital Role in a Greener Future

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Executive Summary

Food loss and waste contributes not only to food insecurities and socio-economic issues, it also causes a threat to the environment. Food waste that decomposes in landfills ultimately degrades throughout a period of time to form methane, a greenhouse gas that is many times more powerful than carbon dioxide and is therefore harmful to our earth and poses a threat to increase global warming. With increasing amounts of food loss and waste nationally and globally, it is inevitable that the amount of methane in our atmosphere will rise as well.

This essay researches two targets initiated by the United Nations to slow the rising numbers of food loss and waste and reduce those numbers to 50% by 2030. Canada has committed to "halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses" (Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada, 2019) by 2030.

Retailers across the country have started taking on initiatives to lower their food loss and waste and many companies, such as Walmart Canada, have lowered their food waste significantly. In order to reduce the amount of food loss and waste in our country, retailers and governments alike must combine resources to educate consumers on the negative impacts of overconsumption and food waste.

Supporting local, environmentally sustainable farming practices is one way that the government, retailers and consumers can lower their carbon footprint and reduce food waste from its source. Canada is moving in the right direction when it comes to halving its total food waste and provinces with small farming practices like Nova Scotia have the potential to strengthen our chances of reducing our total food waste by 50% by 2030.

Throughout the years, the recorded amounts of food wasted has risen exponentially around the world. It is estimated that approximately 1.6 billion tons of food waste is thrown away globally each year and according to a study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, this number is estimated to rise to 2.1 billion tons by the year 2030 (EcoWatch, 2018). Not only is food waste an environmental issue, but it is also a societal, economic, and nutritional affair (“Addressing Food Waste Reduction in Denmark”, 2014). Food waste in landfills eventually degrades over time and becomes methane, a greenhouse gas that is far more powerful than carbon dioxide. “Reducing food loss and waste prevents the generation of methane, as well as ensures that energy, water, and land resources that go into growing our food and sustaining the population are not wasted.” (Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada, 2019). Governments across the globe have recognized the issue of food loss and waste and many have taken action to reduce the amount of food wasted at the local and national levels. Canada, along with other countries, has committed to the United Nations’ targets to “halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses" by 2030 (Cision Canada, 2020). If successful, these two targets will substantially lower greenhouse gas emissions caused by food waste along with eliminating many issues surrounding food security on a national and global scale.

Approximately twelve percent of Canada's avoidable food loss and waste happens at the retail stage (Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada, 2019), as well as contributing globally to fourteen percent of all food loss and waste during the retail stage (Food Loss and Food Waste). Canada has already taken steps to lower these statistics and achieve the United Nations target to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level. Canadian retailers such as Walmart Canada, and Sobeys Inc, have set realistic and successful food waste

reduction goals that are projected to help Canada reach their food waste targets by 2030. Walmart has taken steps such as discounting repackaged bruised or peak-freshness produce, improving bakery production operations, providing additional processes and training to associates, as well as implementing organic recycling programs across Canada (Walmart Canada, 2018). Walmart is one of the largest retailers in Canada, therefore it is imperative to our natural community that they continue to work to lower their food loss and waste. With such a large number of customers nationally and globally, it is their responsibility to be a sustainable and affordable option that consumers can rely on.

Although retailers nationally and globally are taking steps to lower their food loss and waste, many consumers still lack important knowledge and education on the effects of overconsumption and wastefulness. According to the government of Canada, “organic and kitchen waste makes up about 30% of the waste disposed by Canadian households.” (Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada, 2019). Sobeys Inc is a predominant founding partner of the Love Food Hate Waste Canadian National Campaign, an initiative that aims to help further educate Canadian citizens on the ways in which they can make their food last longer and prevent it from going to waste (Sobeys). Although this campaign had a very positive impact, governments and retailers must take additional steps to ensure that consumers are aware of the negative impacts that they may unknowingly have on the environment when it comes to food loss and waste.

Not only does food loss and waste represent the amount of food that ends up in landfills, but it also represents the amount of energy, natural resources, water and land that are wasted during the production and supply process (Rezaie M, 2018). Moreover, an estimated thirteen percent of fruits and vegetables grown in Canada go unharvested or are discarded after harvest.

This occurs due to overproduction as well as possible seasonal fluctuations in supply and demand (Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada, 2019). In Nova Scotia and other places in Canada and the United States programs such as Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, aim to help connect community members with local farms and encourage local, sustainable, and environmentally friendly farming practices. Supporting local farms is one of the best ways that an individual can reduce their food loss and waste, and shopping at large retailers for groceries does not guarantee that your produce will be local. Purchasing foods that are shipped from other countries has a greater impact on the environment due to the use of gas, preservatives, and pesticides needed to ship the food and keep it edible for longer periods of time. Despite supporting local being a great voluntary way to reduce food waste, governments and retailers must continue to support local as well as encourage these sustainable farming practices.

Voluntary commitments such as composting, reducing meat consumption and meal planning are great ways that individuals can reduce their personal food waste. Unfortunately not many people have the resources, education, or financial stability to take on these tasks. Governments and retailers must continue to provide more sustainable food alternatives and support local produce and farms in order to reach their target to halve per capita food loss and waste. Sustainable and local food selections need to be accessible for all consumers as well as the education and guidance towards a waste free life.

Despite Nova Scotia being one of the more advanced provinces in terms of recycling (JUSTJUNK, 2017) and one of the first provinces to ban organics in landfills (Logan, 2019), we are still the most food insecure province in Canada (Cousineau, 2021). Many food waste reduction initiatives aim to donate food that would otherwise be wasted to those in need, which

is something that Nova Scotia should consider since many Nova Scotians struggle with food security everyday. Large retailers should be donating foods that are still consumable, such as organics that have reached peaked-freshness or bruised items that would not sell otherwise. This also relates back to supporting local farms, as many CSA's also allow for shareholders to donate money so that families in need can receive farm fresh foods that may have been too expensive or inaccessible otherwise.

Canada's commitment to the United Nations' targets to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses, would notably lower Canada's carbon emissions and improve our country's food security. Through initiatives such as those taken on by Walmart Canada and Sobeys Inc to reduce food waste and help educate the public on ways to reduce food loss and waste, Canada is slowly moving towards a future with less food waste and insecurities and reducing its carbon footprint through means of food waste reduction.

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