

An appalling waste of food

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An alarming new report estimates that between 30 and 50 percent of all the food produced in the world is lost and wasted. This is a shocking finding given the scale of malnourishment and hunger on our planet. While it is tempting to blame governments for this appalling state of affairs, the truth is that almost all of us contribute to this problem. While governments must do the majority of the work, individual citizens can also help to reduce loss, waste and hunger.

The new report is by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, a British-based independent organization. The two-year study concluded that about half of the 4.4 billion tons of food that is produced worldwide annually is never eaten. With 870 million people already suffering from chronic malnutrition, the world population exceeding 7 billion and climbing, and climate change altering agricultural production, there is no room for such practices.

The causes are many: Some food is left in the fields, more is wasted because of poor storage and transportation. Still more is wasted by markets and consumers. Ultimately, the scale of waste is large enough to prevent the world from "sustainably meeting our future food demands," especially when it is estimated that food production must double by 2050. In the developed world, much of the food loss occurs on the corporate end because the food does not meet aesthetic standards. Incredibly, as much as 30 percent of the British vegetable crop is not harvested because it does not meet marketing standards for size and appearance. Food scandals of recent years have also encouraged consumers — and supermarkets — to keep a close eye on sell-by dates. Food retailers all over the world adhere strictly to such warnings, resulting in severe losses.

The Japanese should understand that problem, as consumers here are some of the pickiest in the world, demanding products that are "perfect, pristine and pretty." Estimates of the amount of waste in Japan range from 17 million to 23 million tons a year; the low end of that forecast is equivalent to 30 percent of the country's domestic production, a stunning number in light of the oft-cited goal of obtaining "food security." The high end — which comes from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries — is worth almost ¥11 trillion and is the monetary equivalent of Japan's annual agricultural output. Experts think it costs another ¥2 trillion to dispose of that waste.

Tokyo alone produces about 6,000 tons of food waste a day, an amount sufficient to feed 4.5 million people a day. In total, some 40 percent of all food in Japan ends up in the garbage. And this occurs when 750,000 people in Japan lack food security and 60 percent of food is imported into the country. Short sell-by dates for prepared foods — often just several hours long at convenience stores — also results in tremendous waste of perfectly good food.

Homework: *Examine your kitchen*

In this class, we began to discuss food waste in Japan. For homework, please examine the food in your kitchen and take some notes on the following topics:

- Local versus imported (What does your family buy?)
- Leftovers (What does your family do with leftovers?)
- Sell-by dates (Does your family keep food past its sell-by date?)
- Frozen and bulk food (Does your family use these?)
- Food that is in the garbage *now*
- Any other comments



LOVE
FOOD
hate waste