5. Conclusions

This study has compiled and analyzed a magnitude of data and reports on food losses and waste. Waste levels and waste volumes in each step of the food supply chain were estimated. Causes of and possible ways to prevent food losses and waste in each step of the food supply chain were reported.

Due to lack of sufficient data, many assumptions on food waste levels at foremost the distribution and consumption levels had to be made. Therefore, the results in this study must be interpreted with great caution.

The studies first reveal the major data gaps in available knowledge of global food waste, especially with regard to the quantification of food losses by individual cause, and the cost of food loss prevention. And when data are available, they are often accompanied with major uncertainties.

Further research in the area is urgent, especially considering that food security is a major concern in large parts of the developing world.

While increasing primary food production is paramount to meet the future increase in final demand, tensions between production and access to food can also be reduced by tapping into the potential to reduce food losses. Efficient solutions exist along the whole food chain, for reducing total amounts of food lost and wasted. Actions should not only be directed towards isolated parts of the chain, since what is done (or not done) in one part has effects in others. In low income countries, measures should foremost have a producer perspective, e.g. by improving harvest techniques, farmer education, storage facilities and cooling chains. In industrialized countries on the other hand, solutions at producer and industrial level would only be marginal if consumers continue to waste at current levels. Consumer households need to be informed and change the behavior which causes the current high levels of food waste.

Another point to be stressed is that the food supply chain of today is more and more globalized. Certain food items are produced, transformed and consumed in very different parts of the world. The impact of growing international trade on food losses still has to be better assessed.


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