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The Food Waste Footprint – Impacts on Natural Resources Press Conference

My friend Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Program, members of the podium, members of the press, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to FAO. Today we are presenting a new report on food wastage. Let me start by explaining what food wastage means: it is the sum of food loss and food waste.

It is important to differentiate between food lost due to inadequate harvest practices, storage and transportation from food that is wasted due to consumption habits and practices.

This study builds on previous work that we have done on the subject. Two years ago FAO presented a document on food waste and loss. I think that we can say that report helped place food loss and waste in the global food debate by showing that about one-third of all food produced gets lost or wasted. And that, every year, consumers in rich countries waste almost as much food as the entire net food production of sub-Saharan Africa.

The implication of this massive food wastage for food security and for sustainability is huge. If we reduce loss and waste we have more food available without the need to produce more and putting less pressure on our natural resources.

At the Rio+20 Conference in Rio de Janeiro this relationship between food security and sustainability was highlighted. And the debate also emphasized that to make food security sustainable, we need to look not only at food production but also at food consumption.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon picked up on both of these issues in the Zero Hunger Challenge, launched during the Rio Summit. The Challenge calls on us to commit to end hunger; to eliminate stunting; to make all food system sustainable; to eliminate rural poverty; and to zero food waste and loss.



One response to the Zero Hunger Challenge is the Think Eat Save campaign of the Save Food Initiative, a partnership between UNEP, FAO, Messe Dusseldorf and a number of other actors, including international agencies, and the non-governmental and private sectors.

The “Food Wastage Footprint – Impacts on Natural Resources” report that we are launching today helps us better understand the magnitude of food wastage, how and where it happens, and what we can do to reduce it.

Let me highlight a few points from this report. The first important thing to note is that we confirm the food waste and loss numbers: it remains at 1.3 billion tons, one-third of the annual production

We now know that 54 percent of food wastage occurs “upstream” during production, post-harvest handling and storage; and 46 percent of it happens “downstream,” at the processing, distribution and consumption stages. Developing countries suffer more food losses during *agricultural production*, while in higher-income regions, food waste at the *retail and consumer level* tends to be higher: up to 40 percent of total wastage, compared to 4-16 percent in low-income regions.

We also now have a better idea of the economic impact of losses due to food wastage: around \$750 billion per year. This impressive figure is the equivalent to the GDP of Switzerland. And the number still excludes fish and seafood and the economic costs associated with environmental and social impacts of food wastage.

This report also looks at specific regions and products. It shows that wastage of cereals, especially of rice, is a significant problem in Asia. It also shows that while meat wastage volumes in the world is comparatively low, the meat sector generates a substantial impact on the environment in terms of land occupation and carbon footprint, especially in high-income countries and Latin America. Together, they account for 80 percent of all meat wastage.

What can we do about it?

All of us – farmers and fishers; food processors, restaurants and supermarkets; local and national governments; individual consumers – can and must do a lot of things to help prevent food wastage from happening in the first place, and re-use or recycle it when we can't. Many of the possible actions are mentioned in the study, as we will show you.



To end, let me point out that food wastage puts unnecessary and unsustainable pressures on the world's most critical natural resources, and must be reversed. We simply cannot allow one-third of all the food we produce to go to waste or to be lost because of inappropriate practices, when 870 million people go hungry every day.

Thank you very much.