



Eastern and Southern Africa  
Small Scale Farmers' Forum  
**ESAFF - UGANDA**



*Amplifying Small-scale  
Farmers' Voices*

# KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD LOSS AND WASTE





# STOP

## FOOD LOSS & WASTE. FOR THE PEOPLE. FOR THE PLANET.

This publication addresses key questions regarding food loss and waste, including: What is food loss and waste? How and when does food loss and waste occur? What are the impacts of food loss and waste on the population and our food system? How can food loss and waste be addressed? Furthermore, this publication aims to foster a comprehensive dialogue that leads to actionable insights and effective interventions by exploring these inquiries. Food loss and waste being a pressing global issue that affects not only food security but also environmental sustainability, economic stability, and social equity. Understanding the complexities of this phenomenon is essential for policymakers, businesses, and consumers alike as they strive to mitigate the negative consequences associated with it.

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This publication was compiled by Julius Engwedu and Andrew Adem.



# KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD LOSS AND WASTE

## BACKGROUND

In 2019, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) designated 29 September as the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste. The assembly recognized the observance of the day to raise awareness of the importance of understanding the problem and generating possible solutions at all levels and encourage global efforts and collaborations for collective efforts towards achieving SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and achieving food security and availability thereby contributing to resilient food systems in the world. As we observe the fifth International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste 2024 under the theme **“Climate Finance for Food Loss and Waste Reduction”** stakeholders involved in the food value chain deserve to be an informed society.

Therefore, several questions linger in the minds of the population and we are committed to providing answers to them in this informative document. These key questions are what is food loss and waste, how and when does food loss and waste occur, what is the impact of food loss and waste on our food system and population, and how can food loss and waste be addressed? This will create awareness to the various stakeholders especially for producers, consumers, and policymakers to achieve a more resilient and sustainable agrifood system in Uganda where over 70% of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and are more vulnerable to impacts of food loss and waste compared to other developed economies.



## WHAT IS FOOD LOSS AND WASTE?

Food loss refers to the reduction of food quantity or quality caused by inefficiencies in production and supply chains, while food waste denotes the discarding of safe and nutritious food that is fit for consumption at the retail and consumer stages of the food value chain. This rampant wastage not only poses a threat to the global food systems but also raises critical questions about sustainability, resource management, and social equity. Food loss and waste occur at different stages of the food value chain including production, harvest and post-harvest, transportation, storage and processing, distribution, and at the consumer level.

In Uganda, 30-40% of food produced is estimated to be lost or wasted indicating an alarming state for a nation where food insecurity is still a great concern with 70% of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods (UNEP 2024). Food loss and waste are contributing 8-10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions making it the major contributor of greenhouse emissions (FRA 2021). Addressing food loss and waste at all stages of the food value chain is a critical step towards achieving sustainable agrifood systems



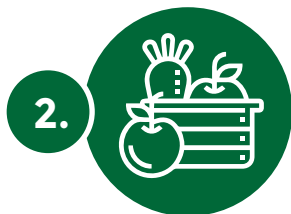
# HOW AND WHEN DOES FOOD LOSS AND WASTE OCCUR?

Food loss and waste occur in various stages of the food chain due to many factors categorically examine each of them to understand the gravity of food loss and waste in our communities, especially among the vulnerable small-scale farmers in the developing countries, Uganda inclusive.



## PRODUCTION STAGE

Food loss at the production level occurs due to poor agricultural practices such as poor field management, and poor or delayed harvesting. Food loss can also occur at this stage due to inadequate infrastructure, pests, diseases, and poor weather conditions which cause significant yield loss, this is exacerbated by a lack of access to modern technologies that could help to improve productivity and reduce loss.



## POST-HARVEST HANDLING STAGE

According to the Food Rights Alliance 2021, up to 40% of food especially fruits and vegetables is wasted/ discarded due to poor post-harvest handling practices. Most small-scale farmers have limited access to modern and reliable post-harvest handling facilities, resulting in high food perishability. The risk is worsened by poor transportation systems and networks in rural communities as well as a lack of proper processing and preserving equipment.



## PROCESSING STAGE

During processing 14% to 21% of food losses and wastage occur due to due to lack of appropriate technologies and infrastructure, and improper packaging (FRA 2021). On the other hand, most food losses at processing facilities are generated while converting produce items into packaged products, trimming off edible portions, such as skin and peels from particular fresh produce items, along with potential product damage that can occur during handling and processing technology.



## TRANSPORT AND DISTRIBUTION STAGE

During the transportation and distribution stage losses and wastages of about 7% to 15% (FAO 2015) occur due to supply Chain Inefficiencies as a result of improper storage, transport challenges, and poor coordination between producers, suppliers, and consumers. This is made worse by the designing of stringent and unrealistic distribution systems designed to prioritize cosmetic standards, leading to the rejection of perfectly edible food due to superficial defects. Furthermore, Market Dynamics characterized by fluctuating demand and prices coupled with excessive supply result in a surplus in the markets which is often unsold and ends in waste. Also, Retail Practices account for 10% (UNEP 2024) of the food waste the need to maintain aesthetically attractive and fresh produce on the shelves always results in large quantities of food being discarded by retailers, restaurants, and food dealers. Lack of communication between the various actors in the supply chain results in delays and poor coordination of the logistics.



## CONSUMPTION STAGE

Consumer Behavior significantly contributes more to Food waste due to over-purchasing, misunderstanding expiration dates, unplanned meals, and poor food storage practices. Moreover, they are lacking, lacking awareness of how to utilize leftovers or preserve food leading to perfectly edible food being discarded. In addition, Cultural Practices and habits can also exacerbate food waste, especially when some parts or forms of the food are culturally not acceptable in the community and end up being discarded.



# WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF FOOD LOSS AND WASTE ON OUR FOOD SYSTEM AND POPULATION?

Subsequently food loss and waste have resulted in several issues in communities, especially among the small-scale farmers whose livelihoods have been frustrated. The impacts can be economic, environmental, and social.

## 1. ECONOMIC IMPACT

Food loss and waste result in profound economic loss, especially in a country like Uganda where agriculture is a critical driver of the economy. This causes a waste of valuable resources, including time, labor, and capital which are invested in the production of the food.

## 2. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

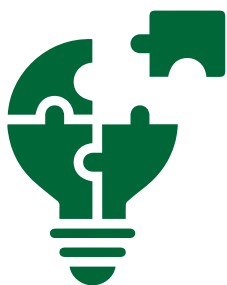
The environmental impacts of food waste are equally alarming, decomposing food in landfills generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. Decomposition is also characterized by intense pollution of the environment including air, water, and land pollution as a result of smell, and flooding from the discarded food. This results in the wastage of resources used to produce food that is lost or wasted especially the water, land, and energy used to produce wasted food represents an unnecessary burden on natural resources, contributing to deforestation, biodiversity loss, and depletion of water sources.

## 3. SOCIAL IMPACT

Food waste is also an ethical dilemma, especially when considering the number of people suffering from hunger in Uganda due to Food Insecurity, particularly among vulnerable populations especially children and elderly who always have limited access to sufficient and nutritious food. In Uganda, 12% of the population is food insecure (FAO 2020) while perfectly edible food is discarded. This imbalance highlights a moral responsibility to reduce waste and redirect surplus food to those in need, thereby improving food security and equity. Increasing cases of malnutrition due to loss of nutrients through food loss that would benefit the needy population particularly children and pregnant women.

## 4. HEALTH IMPACT

Findings indicate that emissions from food waste, such as hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, and volatile organic carbons, can affect human endocrine, respiratory, nervous, and olfactory systems. Also, health issues can arise due to nutritional deficiencies caused by food insecurity characterized by kwashiorkor, marasmus, and rickets. The severe human health effects can eventually result in death if not addressed.



## HOW CAN FOOD LOSS AND WASTE BE ADDRESSED?

To attain a sustainable agrifood system, food loss and waste must be addressed among small-scale farmers in Uganda and other parts of the world through a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach involving various stakeholders including government, civil society, farmers, processors, and consumers to come up with some interventions such as:

1. Improving Infrastructure such as storage facilities, transportation, and market infrastructure are vital through community-based warehouses, improving road networks, and low-cost preservation technologies to reduce losses and wastes at various stages. This can be achieved through government and other development partners investing resources to revamp the agricultural sector.
2. Education and awareness campaigns: development partners, NGOs, and government entities should embark on capacity building through training and awareness sensitization on existing and affordable modern agricultural practices, post-harvest handling equipment and tools, and food preservation methods that can greatly enhance their ability to reduce losses. Consumer education on responsible consumption “serve what you can finish” and food purchases including proper meal planning, storage, and innovative use of leftovers. This will significantly reduce the amount of food wasted due to irresponsible consumption, and poor food handling and distribution.
3. Establishment and implementation of policies that ensure and encourage efficient and effective food production and distribution including price stabilization measures, supporting the farmer cooperatives innovations, and incentives for food recovery organizations that redirect food surplus to those in need. Governments should establish grants and schemes for farmers to adopt sustainable practices, create frameworks that guide retailers and food dealers on responsible management of excess food, and establish standards that promote the redistribution of surplus food to minimize food wastage and losses.
4. Community Awareness Campaigns: we call upon the various stakeholders especially the government, NGOs, producers, and consumers among others to embrace raising awareness about the importance of reducing food waste. This will result in the establishment of sustainable community-driven initiatives to address the community food security challenges.
5. Exploring existing Technologies to address some of the issues causing food loss and waste for example use of mobile applications to ease communication and linkage between farmers and consumers to ease supply. Furthermore, innovations in food preservation, such as solar drying and packaging technologies increase the shelf life of the food produced and reach the consumers.
6. Implementing Effective Waste Management Practices: Enhancing waste management systems to recover food waste can yield positive results in mitigating FLW. This involves establishing food recovery networks that connect food donors such as supermarkets and restaurants with charities or organizations that redistribute surplus food to those in need.

Furthermore, ensuring that unavoidable food waste is redirected through composting or anaerobic digestion can enrich soil health and reduce landfill contributions, thus closing the loop in the circular economy.





## CONCLUSION

In Uganda and the entire world, Food loss and waste is a complex issue that requires the attention of all stakeholders, including the government, civil society, farmers, processors, and consumers. With concerted efforts in infrastructure improvement, education, policy-making, and community engagement, a significant reduction in food loss and waste can be achieved. To alleviate food insecurity there is a need to ensure optimum resource utilization, this will also contribute to the enhancement of economic outcomes and a sustainable environmental future. Addressing the challenge of food loss and waste will present an opportunity for immediate relief and access to sufficient and nutritious food to all populations thereby achieving a sustainable agrifood system among the farming communities and the consumers.



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## About ESAFF Uganda

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) was formed during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in 2002 in South Africa. This was in an effort to create a Forum to bring together small-scale farmers into a social movement to influence favorable agriculture policies and practices at global, continental, regional, national and local levels.

ESAFF Uganda became operational in 2008 and has since become the largest small-scale farmer-led advocacy movement in Uganda. ESAFF Uganda works to enhance the SSFs ability to make informed decisions and participate meaningfully in development processes. ESAFF Uganda currently has a membership of 12588 small-scale farmer community organisations in 54 districts representing over 765,560 individual small-scale farmers of which 67 percent are women.

ESAFF Uganda is also part of a bigger network of small-scale farmers in 15 other countries in Eastern and Southern Africa including South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, Lesotho, DR Congo, Madagascar, Seychelles and Mozambique.



### VISION

A just and resilient food system led by small-scale farmers.



### MISSION

To create an enabling environment where small-scale farmers lead in building a just and resilient food system through advancing agroecology and food sovereignty, securing Small-scale Farmers' rights to productive resources, safeguarding consumer rights, fair economic opportunities for all, promotion of public accountability of resources, and strengthening collaborative social movements at all levels.



### STRATEGIC GOAL

Increased political rights, social and economic stability and sustainability of small-scale farmers hence ensuring that small-scale farmers especially women, youths and marginalized groups can thrive and contribute significantly to a just and resilient food system at all levels.



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## VISIT OR CONTACT US



### Physical Address:

Plot 266, Muvule Avenue  
Buye - Ntinda, Kampala  
P.O Box 34420 Kampala - Uganda  
Telephone: +256 393 247195



### Write to the National Coordinator:

Ms. Nancy M. Walimbwa  
Email: [coordinator@esaffuganda.org](mailto:coordinator@esaffuganda.org)



### Social Media:

Twitter: @ESAFFUG  
Facebook: ESAFF Uganda  
YouTube: ESAFF Uganda TV  
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