



Motivation factors for food waste reduction

Lack of management and infrastructure are only two of the reasons why a substantial share of food ends up in the dustbin. Societal norms and acquired behaviour play a crucial role as well. Our authors have taken a look at what drives individuals to discard edible treasures and how change could be motivated both at consumer and industry levels.

By Neha Gupta and Manita Arora

Several factors contribute to the alarming rates of food waste at household level. One significant culprit is the modern lifestyle, where convenience often takes precedence over sustainability. Lifestyle choices are a factor in the development of habits. The latter are ingrained behaviours that can be performed with little

to no thought due to previous reinforcement. They are the consequence of random events rather than more purposeful activities such as making a decision. This means that routine acts are governed by reflexes rather than intentional choices. Individual behaviours cause a huge part of food to be wasted. Several studies have

revealed that people who waste food do it regularly. In this way, modern culture is much to blame since it prioritises short-term gratification over long-term sustainability far too often. The desire for perfection in aesthetics also plays a role – consumers tend to discard fruits and vegetables that don't meet stringent cosmet-



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ic standards. Moreover, the lack of awareness about expiration dates and proper storage techniques contributes to unnecessary disposal.

From numerous research papers on consumer behaviour, we figured out twelve key motivating factors that inspire individuals to actively reduce food waste. These include attitudes, perceived behavioural control, having experienced scarcity, past food waste behaviour, connection with food, awareness and knowledge about the food waste problem, subjective norms, financial motives, going for planned buying, lack of time, knowledge and skills about proper food management at home, and good household skills. Besides these, emotions also play a role. While qualitative research in-

dicates that emotions could be associated with consumers' food waste behaviour, it is unclear whether the emotion is the cause of food waste or a consequence of it. The participants in such studies expressed regret at squandering food and felt guilty or concerned about avoiding wasteful behaviour. Several surveys have found that people feel awful about throwing away edible food. In India, cultural and religious values also play a crucial role. For instance, the practice of *annadanam* (donating food) in Hinduism fosters a sense of responsibility towards minimising food waste.

Tailoring strategies for India

In India, according to the United Nations Environment Programme's Waste Index Report 2021, 50 kilograms of food is thrown away per household and year, causing the country to rank seventh in the world on overall food waste. Addressing food waste requires a nuanced approach. Given the above factors, it is above all awareness for the positive effects on society and the natural world which should be created or made use of. Educational initiatives could be employed to raise household awareness of food waste. Public awareness campaigns should emphasise the cultural significance of minimising waste and educate consumers about traditional practices that align with sustainability. Additionally, leveraging technology to disseminate information about proper storage and preservation methods can have a significant impact on household behaviour. Here, research could play a crucial role. For instance, nanotechnology offers promising approaches for the development of environmentally friendly and healthful applications for maintaining the freshness of agricultural produce and extending the shelf life of food.

There is no doubt that policy-makers hold a pivotal role in steering the ship towards a zero-waste future. In addition to promoting food education in schools and hastening research efforts, implementing and enforcing regulations that mandate clearer expiration labels and incentivising businesses to donate surplus food can create a conducive environment for change. However, eating establishments and grocery stores must also contribute to this. Some restaurants have already taken measures to track and cut down on food waste; but random and inconsistent effort never yields positive results in the long run. In order to lastingly and comprehensively lower food losses, it is important to determine which approach is going to be most successful. While some eateries have implemented programmes they identify

with, others might reap financial, social, and ecological rewards by doing the same. In order to ensure that the measures are not haphazardly and inconsistently carried out, businesses need to provide their staff with training on the most effective methods for waste management and then strictly enforce the guidelines that they have established.

To reduce food loss and waste in the early stages of the supply chain, businesses must acknowledge the importance of technology. By fuelling innovation in areas like logistics and supply chain technology as well as blockchain, AI, data monitoring, storage and packaging, investments in India's growing start-up ecosystem can aid in the removal of systemic barriers. Implementing sustainable packaging practices, adopting technologies to extend shelf life and establishing partnerships with food banks for surplus redistribution are tangible steps which the food industry can take. Collaborative efforts, such as sharing best practices and success stories, can further catalyse positive change.

A prerequisite for food security

Tackling food waste is a complex challenge that demands a multi-faceted approach. By understanding the drivers behind wasteful habits and tailoring strategies to local contexts, we can foster a culture of mindful consumption. Minimising food waste will reduce ozone-depleting substance outflows, mitigate the obliteration of nature through land change and contamination, and enhance food accessibility, hence reducing hunger and saving money. With policy-makers and industry leaders leading the charge, we can aspire to build a world where every morsel is valued, and no one sleeps hungry. Preventing food loss and wasting less food ought to be an inherent aspect of any national or regional strategy for achieving food security in a country.

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