

Tackling Fish Waste in North Africa and the Near East

Reducing high food losses and waste will be critical to improving food availability, achieving food security, and reducing stress on natural resources in the fast-growing Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, the FAO said.

The region relies on imports to meet over 50 per cent of its food needs, yet it loses up to a third of the food it produces and imports, including about 14-19 per cent of its grains, 26 per cent of all fish and seafood, 13 per cent of its meat, and 45 per cent of all fruits and vegetables.

FAO has proposed a Regional Strategic Framework for reducing food losses and waste, which was discussed at the agency's 24-28 February Regional Conference for the Near East, taking place in Rome.

Governments have made the commitment to reduce food losses and waste in the region by 50 per cent in 10 years. Resource and labour losses in their countries translate into lower economic returns for agri-business and farmers and higher food import bills.

Eleven per cent of the region's population suffers from chronic hunger, many of them vulnerable rural families who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Research suggests their livelihoods could benefit from support in reducing food losses and waste throughout the food value chain.

Broad collaboration needed

FAO's research shows a lack of sufficient and accurate regional information on how food is lost and wasted and why, and the Strategic Framework recommends data-gathering as one of the priority areas for action. Still, information available on the Near East and North Africa region shows that roughly 44 per cent of food losses and waste occur during handling, processing and distribution of food, while waste at the consumption stage is estimated to be 34 per cent, most of it in urban areas.

The Regional Strategic Framework calls for the full participation and cooperation of a broad range of institutions and stakeholders to reduce food losses and waste all along the food chain in the 19 FAO member countries, as well as a heightened public awareness campaign to stem food waste by consumers.

The Strategic Framework also points to recent experiences and accomplishments in the region, including national and regional consultations; the adoption of national initiatives to reduce food losses and waste in Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and, significant measures that have also been taken in some countries of the region, such as Iraq, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Tunisia.

Information, training, infrastructure

Long before food reaches the consumer's home, losses in quantity and quality occur due to poor farming techniques, a lack of cold storage and transport, high exposure to

heat and sunlight at open-air markets; non-existent or inappropriate policies; and, regulations and gaps in institutions and coordination.

Regional Conference participants have endorsed the Regional Strategic Framework, recommending the following broad areas for action:

- improving data gathering, analysis and information;
- raising public awareness and promotion of good practices among farmers, consumers and those who handle food all along the supply chain;
- developing policies and regulations and strengthening collaboration and coordination among people, institutions and countries;
- promoting investment and engaging the private sector.

The proposal was drawn up in keeping with FAO's Global Initiative on Food Losses and Waste Reduction, or SAVE FOOD, but is tailored to socio-economic and other characteristics of the NENA region.

Source: <http://www.thefishsite.com/fishnews/22642/tackling-fish-waste-in-north-africa-and-the-near-east#sthash.HKmFEM76.dpuf> (04/03/2014)