



10 Minutes for the Planet
A Shameful Waste part 1:
And People Still Go Hungry ©
by Sarah Heath

Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation has put an estimate on the number of people worldwide who go hungry: out of a global population of around 7.6 billion, 815 million are suffering from starvation or chronic undernourishment. That means 10.7% of all those living on our planet are going without regular food - the vast majority of whom live in developing countries. Shamefully for those who govern western societies, there are around 11 million who live in these so-called developed nations who are nevertheless also going hungry.

Which makes the fact that the staggering amount of food lost or wasted each year – approximately 1.3 billion tonnes – all the more scandalous and immoral. This food waste equates to €2.3 trillion every single year and is enough to feed those 815 million starving people four times over! If this food were not wasted, world hunger would be a thing of the past.

Not only is this obscene amount of food wasted, so is the energy to produce it, package it and transport it. If food waste were to be transposed into a country, it would be the third largest carbon polluter on planet Earth.

The World Resources Institute has compiled a study on the differences in how food is wasted in different countries and there is a striking difference between those on opposite ends of the income scale. They calculated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, 83% of food waste occurs during production, handling and storage, and processing with just 5% being wasted by consumers. However, in North America, 32% is lost during earlier stages of production while a huge 61% is wasted by consumers.

In France, the statistics are also a cause for concern: the French population squanders just over 100 kilos of food per person every year according to a report by the Barilla Centre for Food and Nutrition. This figure is however, dwarfed by the stats in the US which are almost double that, at just under 200 kilos per person per annum.

The French Agency for the Environment and Energy (ADEME), has revealed that 10 million tons of food is wasted here in France each year at a cost of €16 billion. This has a knock on environmental impact – wasted food emits 15.3 million tonnes of CO2 which is a third of France's total CO2 emissions.

So why is so much food being thrown in the bin by consumers in first-world countries? There are several contributory factors. One entirely superficial reason is that produce is too ugly! Aesthetic standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, as specified by EU law until 2009, meant that almost half of fruit and vegetable crops were deemed too visually unappealing and thus discarded. While this law is no longer in place, supermarket chains have continued to insist on the same requirements meaning produce is still being wasted.

Another key reason is misleading information on sell-by and best before dates. In the EU these are arbitrarily set by the manufacturers themselves and are largely meaningless being a “guesstimate” of how long the produce should last. The European Commission has estimated that of the 88 million tons of food waste in the EU, 10% is entirely down to date labelling which results in consumers throwing away perfectly edible food.

Perhaps the most shocking of all, is a train of thought which suggests that people in westernised nations can simply afford to waste food. The amount of food available per person in both the EU and the United States is gradually increasing through both retail and restaurant sectors with, for example, ‘buy one get one free’ offers and ‘eat all you can’ buffets, meaning over-consumption is being encouraged.