

**Forum on food and waste reduction and recovery waste management on
Friday 29 September at 09.15 hrs at the University of Mauritius**

**H.E. Mr Oskar Benedikt, Ambassador of the European Union to the
Republic of Mauritius (presence to be confirmed)**

Professor Sanjeev SOBHEE, Vice Chancellor, University of Mauritius

Associate Professor Daneshwar PUCHOOA, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture

Associate Professors

Faculty members

Academics

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear Students

Good morning

I feel greatly honoured by the privilege that the University extended to me in inviting me to the opening of this workshop in the context of the **International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste Reduction.**

The world's farmers produce enough food to feed everyone on the planet. So why hasn't world hunger been eliminated? A big reason is that a third of all food is lost or wasted.

In fact, every year, roughly 1.3 billion tons of the edible parts of food produced for human consumption are lost or wasted globally. Food loss and waste have become a complex phenomenon, attracting the attention of scientists and activists alike.

Food loss is mainly caused by inefficient production practices and food being grown but not properly preserved. Food waste, on the other hand, is largely driven by consumers and retailers as a result of short shelf life and unsustainable consumption practices.

Food loss and waste contribute to the three planetary crises we face: the climate crisis; the biodiversity and nature crisis; and the pollution and waste crisis – wasting inputs such as land and water and causing greenhouse gas emissions.

Within the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) on Responsible Consumption and Production sets out a target **“by 2030 halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level, and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses”**. The reduction of food losses and waste, will positively affect many other SDGs.

We lose and waste absurd quantities of food in a world where over 800 million people go hungry each year. When food is lost or wasted, all the resources that were used to produce this food - including water, land, energy, labour and capital - go to waste.

In addition, the disposal of food loss and waste in landfills, leads to greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change. Indeed, according to the Circularity Gap Report 2023, food systems are one of the largest contributors to climate change and ocean acidification accounting for up to one third of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission,

While livestock rearing alone being responsible for around 14.5%.

Food loss and food waste account for between 8 and 10% of global Greenhouse Gas emissions.

Food loss and waste can also negatively impact food security and food availability, and contribute to increasing the cost of food.

Reducing and preventing food loss and waste is not easy – but it is increasingly important with the environmental challenges we are facing and the global population projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2025.

In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak has offered the opportunity for a reflection on the importance of building the resilience and enhancing the sustainability of our food systems by transitioning from a linear model of “take-make-waste” to a circular model.

Indeed, we need to look at our entire food systems and work together to tackle every step of the value chain by supporting solutions that encourage sustainable production, processing, packaging, distribution, and consumption of food.

We must start by setting concrete food loss and waste reduction targets, either specific or ones that go across the full value chain.

Improve factories and plants: With the right food processing solution, factories and plants can use the whole product in the manufacturing process, and thereby upcycle production waste.

Prevent loss at farm-level when crops become infested or wasted during transportation. Simple measures such as transporting packaged food in crates instead of bags can help reduce the amount of food that is bruised or ruined, which means it is less likely to be discarded and wasted.

Engage consumers: By informing and inspiring consumers about what they can do, about product quality and shelf life, more food can be saved.

Ladies and gentlemen

According to the statistics published in the 2021 Report of the United Nations Environment Programme, food waste in Mauritius per year amounts to 118,632 tons, equivalent to 325 tons of wasted food in a day or 279 kilos going to waste every minute.

However, it is comforting to note that concrete actions are being taken both by the public and private sector to minimise food waste.

Mauritius with the support of the European Union and United Nations Environment Programme, has developed a Roadmap and Action Plan for a Circular Economy to chart the way for the next 10 years for integrating circularity principles in key sectors.

One of them being the Agri-Food sector and the Roadmap has identified four overarching objectives, namely:

1. Prioritizing local food production that is efficient and promotes the regeneration of nature.
2. Minimizing food waste throughout the entire production and distribution process.
3. Repurpose commonly wasted resources for productive use.
4. And responsibly and sustainably source imported food.

In terms of policies, the Roadmap advocates for the formulation of national strategies for addressing Food Loss and Food Waste, as well as, the management of nutrients that will lead to a regenerative agriculture.

In this journey towards a more sustainable future, I must also acknowledge and commend the efforts of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Mauritius for championing actions to that effect.

The Faculty participated in the “**Food Loss and Waste Reduction and Recovery**” initiative (FLoWeR Initiative), which covered the period February 2018 to March 2019. This project created national awareness on food loss and food waste reduction and recovery among all stakeholders along the agri-food value chain.

In order to achieve meaningful results, information dissemination remains a vital attribute. Generation and appropriate dissemination of land, soil and crop information is crucial for effective decision-making and innovation.

The Faculty is now involved in the EU funded project “**Development-Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture**” (DeSIRA) initiative.

This project is meant to foster a strong climate-relevant, productive and sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems research for development.

A concomitant of the tourism industry is the generation of a large percentage of food waste. Worldwide, hotels produce an average of 289,700 tons of waste each year, including 79,000 tons of food waste.

The hospitality and food service industry in Mauritius has long prioritised resource efficiency by cutting energy use and water waste.

Hotel operators have realised the many benefits of reducing food waste.

Zero Food Waste, launched by LUX Le Morne, is an innovative project to eliminate food waste in all Mauritian hotels with an ethical, human, environmental and economic aspect.

There is the spirit of partnership and commitment aimed at reducing food waste in the various hotels. The concrete result is the redistribution of 15,653 meals amounting to the significant total of 3,913 kilos of food for the month of October 2022 alone.

Ten organizations have participated with their restaurants on a nine-month journey to cut on food waste, reduce unnecessary costs and negative environmental impacts. At the end of this project all the participants reached the international certification The PLEDGE on Food Waste.

Ladies and gentlemen

I understand that the aim of today's forum is to provide a platform for stakeholders from Academia, Government, Civil Society, private sector, food operators, hospitality sector, education sector and NGOs to discuss about actions food waste/loss reduction.

We must hit the target set out in SDG 12.3 to halve per-capita food waste by 2030 at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

Let's use this opportunity to inform – consumers, producers and traders; individual and family; young and senior; men and women; decision makers and implementers; – Action now and not to be too late.

We need to start at the family-level: educating our children to respect and appreciate foods.

Food loss and waste reduction must be a collective responsibility for all of us.

Let us be reminded of the wise words of Pope Francis, who said: "**To throw food away means to throw people away**".

Food waste is money lost. Food waste is time lost. Food waste is resources lost. Together let us save food to save money, time and resources, while also creating impact.

I shall conclude by congratulating once more the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Mauritius, and all the other partners for their initiatives to sensitise our Nation on this issue of food waste.

THANK YOU