Zeroing in on food waste targets

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Global standard

will facilitate management of food loss and waste

Every year Australians scrape $10 billion off their plates into the garbage, according to the RaboDirect 'Food & Farming Financial Health Barometer' report. How does this compare to the rest of the world? An interesting question that would once have been impossible to answer because until recently there was no globally agreed standard on how to measure food loss and waste (FLW).

It is estimated that one-third of all food is lost or wasted worldwide as it moves from where it is produced to where it is eaten — costing up to $940 billion per year. This lost or wasted food translates into about a quarter of all water used by agriculture and requires cropland equivalent to an area the size of China.

Compounding this loss is the effect on global greenhouse gas emissions — with about 8% of these emissions estimated to arise from FLW. To put this into perspective: if FLW was a country, it would be the third-largest greenhouse gas emitter — only beaten by China and the United States.

International momentum to curb food loss and waste is growing with governments and businesses making commitments to address this issue. However, most do not know how much food is lost or wasted or where it occurs within their borders, operations or supply chains. Moreover, the definition of food loss and waste varies widely, and without a consistent accounting and reporting framework it is almost impossible to compare data and develop effective strategies.

Many countries, cities, companies and other entities currently lack sufficient insight into how much, why and where food and/or associated inedible parts are removed from the food supply chain. This makes it difficult to develop strategies and prioritise actions to prevent FLW, and to identify the most productive use of the FLW that does arise. In short, it is challenging to manage what you do not measure. Moreover, what's considered "food loss and waste" varies widely and, without a consistent set of definitions or an accounting and reporting framework, it is difficult to compare data within or among entities over time and draw useful conclusions.

Last June a partnership of leading international organisations launched the Food Loss and Waste Accounting and Reporting Standard — the first-ever set of global definitions and reporting requirements for companies, countries and others to consistently and credibly measure, report on and manage food loss and waste.

The purpose of the FLW Standard is to facilitate the quantification of FLW (what to measure and how to measure it) and encourage consistency and transparency of the reported data. The standard enables the consistent quantification of baselines and tracking of progress towards Target 12.3 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as well as other targets.

Using the terminology and requirements provided by the standard will ensure international consistency, enable comprehensiveness and support transparent disclosure of FLW inventories both within and among entities. Quantifying FLW is an important foundation for reduction efforts that can deliver a diverse array of benefits — from reducing costs associated with over-purchase and disposal, to avoiding greenhouse gas emissions or supporting efforts to eliminate hunger.

"This standard is a real breakthrough. For the first time, armed with the standard, countries and companies will be able to quantify how much food is lost and wasted, where it occurs and report on it in a highly credible and consistent manner," said Andrew Steer, President and CEO, World Resources Institute. "There's simply no reason that so much food should be lost and wasted. Now, we have a powerful new tool that will help governments and businesses save money, protect resources and ensure more people get the food they need."

The standard is designed to be practical so that entities of all kinds can develop an FLW inventory based on their particular quantification goals. Entities that prepare inventories in conformance with the FLW Standard will be better informed about how much FLW is generated and where it ends up, and therefore better equipped to take action.

Creating inventories in conformance with the FLW Standard will provide a critical foundation to develop effective strategies for reducing food loss and waste and monitor progress over time. Moreover, it can help governments and companies meet international commitments, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, SDG Target 12.3 calls for a 50% global reduction in food waste by 2030, along with reductions in food loss.

This standard addresses these challenges by providing accounting and reporting requirements that can be used consistently by entities around the world. It also includes universally applicable definitions for describing the components of "food loss and waste" included in an inventory.

The FLW Standard will also help reduce food loss and waste within the private sector. In 2015, The Consumer Goods Forum, which represents more than 400 of the world's largest retailers and manufacturers from 70 countries, adopted a resolution for its members to reduce food waste from their operations by 50% by 2025, with baselines and progress to be measured using the FLW Standard. Some leading companies, like Nestlé and Tesco, are already measuring and publicly reporting on their food loss and waste.

The Food Loss and Waste Protocol is a multi-stakeholder partnership convened by World Resources Institute and initiated at the 3GF 2013 Summit. FLW Protocol partners include: The Consumer Goods Forum, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), EU-funded FUSIONS project, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), WRAP (The Waste and Resources Action Programme) and World Resources Institute.

The Food Loss and Waste Protocol can be found at www.FLWProtocol.org.

Inghams' zero waste to landfill goal

Inghams is one of Australia's largest poultry providers, supplying Australian families with quality chicken and turkey products.

Inghams (Inghams Enterprises) believes in 'doing things right' and its commitment to reducing waste by recycling and re-using its products and waste materials is no different.

As part of the company's sustainability strategy, Inghams Enterprises has set an ambitious goal of zero waste to landfill. In 2014, Inghams enlisted SUEZ's expertise in recycling and recovery to help meet this challenge.

SUEZ Queensland State Sales Manager Liesl Hull worked with Inghams to implement complete waste management solutions at its Murarrie Processing Plant and its Advanced Water Treatment Plant.

While an initial waste audit demonstrated that Inghams started on a strong footing, the challenge was to identify simple and cost-effective ways to achieve further diversion from landfill, while maintaining overall workplace efficiency.

"By reviewing Inghams' existing arrangements, we identified a number of gaps. We introduced soiled plastics, paper towel recycling and specialised liquid services solutions at the Murarrie Processing Plant. We also provided liquid services for their on-site award winning Advanced Water Treatment Plant," said Liesl.

The Murarrie Advanced Water Treatment Plant received the Australian Prime Minister's Water Wise Award in 2010, which demonstrates Inghams' commitment to sustainability.

"At times, operations at the plant were interrupted due to overloaded waste pits. We sat down with the Inghams team to review and forecast their liquid waste volumes and together developed a reliable service schedule that fit their specific requirements.

"We also introduced a number of innovations that transform the way Inghams handles soiled plastics. Plastic waste is now washed, shredded and then recycled. A further 20 tonnes of plastics per month is now diverted from landfill.

"We have also implemented other simple but effective steps for Inghams to be more cost efficient, including introducing a cardboard compactor to make recycling much easier," Liesl said.

Engagement with over 1000 on-site employees was an important part of the change process, and included face-to-face training and regular communications on the new recycling practices.

Providing Inghams with a complete waste management solution has led to a significant cost saving of more than 30% per annum and an increased diversion rate of 95% at both plants.

With the zero-waste-to-landfill target edging closer, Inghams and SUEZ are now looking at further ways to achieve greater diversion and recovery.

Depackaging waste to recycle more

SUEZ's depackaging unit can even separate ground coffee from aluminium capsules.

SUEZ is leading the way in recovering waste materials and diverting them from landfill with the country's first depackaging unit.

The innovative depackaging unit, located at SUEZ's Camellia Resource Recovery and Treatment Facility, allows both food packaging and its contents to be recycled into valuable resources by separating the two components.

Once separated, the packaging is able to be recycled and the nutrient-rich organic material inside can be used in agricultural applications to enrich soil. The machine can handle most packaging types, as long as the material is soft and flexible, and is capable of processing up to 10 tonnes per hour. SUEZ's Camellia Facility also has a machine that is able to separate glass bottles from their contents.

The depackaging unit is used to separate and recover valuable resources from bulk quantities of consumer products that have expired or are unfit for sale or consumption — such as pasta meals, sauce bottles, powdered baby formula, coffee products, tea bags and pet food.

Previously, packaged food waste presented an environmental and financial challenge for manufacturers and retailers. With no way of efficiently separating its components, it was sent directly to landfill.

In line with SUEZ's goal to maximise resource recovery, the depackaging unit provides a solution to this challenge. Putting waste to good use is a key priority for SUEZ and the depackaging unit does exactly that. It also minimises the cost of landfill disposal or manually depackaging and separating the components. Nearly all bulk-packaged goods can achieve a 100% recycling rate with both the packaging and the organics being re-used.

The depackaging unit allows SUEZ's customers — including some of Australia's largest food manufacturers and retailers — to reduce their waste disposal costs while achieving their sustainability goals through better environmental outcomes.

SUEZ's investment in the technology was recognised in 2014 when it received top sustainability honours in the Australian Business Awards — a national program recognising organisations that demonstrate leadership and commitment to sustainable business practices.

This award-winning innovation is just one example of how SUEZ is finding smart and reliable ways to solve waste problems, further cementing its position as a leader in resource recovery.

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