

The paradox of waste

The responsibility for environmental disasters cannot always be blamed only on natural causes. A normal natural event, which is part of the force of nature, can lead to catastrophic consequences when man interferes in its process, accelerating or altering them with irresponsible behaviour. It is necessary to be aware of the interaction between natural phenomena and environmental management and of the urgency to re-establish a balance which has been lost due to excessive and often irrational exploitation of the resources.

"We already produce enough food today to feed the entire population in the world. And, yet, around 800 million people are hungry." (José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General)

Food waste

Food waste is one of our present-day afflictions.

The simultaneous scarcity and abundance of food is a paradox that witnesses a deep unbalance between the world's economies and access to resources.

Every year, 30% of global food production is lost or wasted, both in developing and industrialized countries, for a total of 1,3 billion tons.

This quantity is four times more than what is necessary to feed the almost 800 million people worldwide that suffer from chronic hunger every day.

At the same time, 42 million children under 5 years of age are overweight and more than 500 million adults suffer from obesity.

Today, almost one third of the volumes of food produced for human consumption at global level is lost or wasted. Just one quarter of that mountain of food could feed all the hungry people of the earth.

Food losses and food waste are very different issues.

In industrialized countries, the problem is essentially one of food waste. Food waste occurs more at the end of the supply chain and is linked above all, although not exclusively, to consumers.

In developing countries, losses happen throughout the supply chain and are caused by inadequate harvesting and processing techniques, adverse weather, poor infrastructure and transporting systems, and the lack of efficient cold storage systems.

Storing food is fundamental to the sustenance of humanity. It enables people to consume food outside of the period when it is produced, and helps regulate price fluctuations by taking surplus product out of the market and bringing it back in times of shortages.

In many developing countries, large quantities of food are lost due to a lack of adequate storage facilities. More than 25% of food produced is destroyed by pests, parasites, fungi and high temperatures long before it reaches people's plates.

In 2050 there will be more than 9 billion people on earth. In order to fight hunger in the world it is essential that we produce more food and waste less.

The United Nations is fighting against both food waste and food losses. It is organizing awareness-raising campaigns to promote more balanced forms of consumption and, together with local institutions and other partners, is implementing projects aimed at modernizing food storage and

distribution systems and making them more efficient. One of the objectives of the great “zero Hunger Challenge” launched by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is in fact to cut all food losses and stop all food waste in the world.