



Food Waste in India

The Food Not Eaten

Did you know that **about 40 % of the food produced in India is wasted?**

CERAG

Despite adequate food production, the UN has reported that about **190 million Indians remain undernourished**. It is further **estimated that the value of food wastage in India is around ₹92,000 crores per annum**.

These are some bleak statistics, but they should help us realise the magnitude of the problem of food waste, as much as inequity, in India.

The world recognises that no truly sustainable and developed country can exist without tackling the issue of food waste, and while the challenge in front of us may be monumental, some steps need to be taken sooner than others.



Findings

- On an average, 18.7 kgs of food was disposed off by one Safal outlet daily. This suggests that an estimated **7.5 tonnes of food is discarded daily** across the 400 Safal outlets in Delhi.
- **Approximately 84.7% of the total food waste recorded was thrown** in the bin, while the rest was either fed to the poor or some animals.
- A significant portion of the food waste binned was **still in edible condition**.
- If the edible food waste generated by Safal is diverted, we estimate that it could **feed at least 2000 people daily**.
- Only 2 of the 10 outlets surveyed were partially waste conscious, i.e., they separated the edible from the inedible, and ensured that food in consumable condition reached empty stomachs. One of them disposed their food at noon, so that it could be fed to the cows in the area. The other claimed to give away all edible food waste to the local labourers and workers, for free, at the end of day.

Overall, we could conclude that, across the city, **a lack of consciousness around food waste is evident**.

It is true that the issue of food wastage is much more rooted in the actual handling, storage, and transport of food grains and vegetables, before they even reach the consumer's plate. However, the matter of food waste at the retail level cannot be ignored, especially when an estimated 7.5 tonnes of food is wasted per day, that too only across the 400 Safal outlets in Delhi.

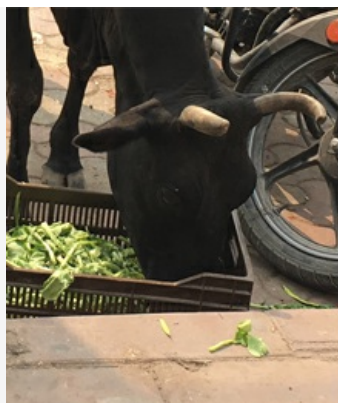
One can only imagine how large the number is across all food retail outlets in Delhi, and how much more across India.

What Safal Can Do?

If the waste generated is dealt with premeditatedly, Safal can pioneer the zero food waste movement in the retail sector in India. These must be institutionalized and made part of the process in every Safal outlet.

Feed people with edible food: Edible food should be made available every day, for free, at the latest in the last opening hour, so it can be picked up and consumed by those in need. The option of distribution through food banks can also be explored, as can tie ups with private actors so that food can reach hunger hotspots.

Feed Animals, then Compost the rest: Not all food is fit for human consumption, but almost all of it is fit for cattle and piggeries, which should be channelled via local actors. Only the remaining food waste should be composted.



What is already happening in India and around the World?

Some problems in the Indian food supply chain include inefficiency of government programmes, lack of transparency in revenue generation, insufficient storage facilities, and lack of comprehensive and accurate inventories.

While the Indian Government had voiced the **need for regulation of food wasted** at hotels, restaurants and weddings, in early 2017, it hasn't yet specifically addressed concerns posed by the retail sector.

In a report on food wastage caused by the hospitality industry, the Department of Consumer Affairs **acknowledged the complexity of regulating overindulgence**, in terms of purchase and consumption. It presented education and increased awareness of food wastage, driven by print and electronic media, as the main solutions to India's food waste problem. Yes, **early awareness about our duty to minimise food waste is critical** in changing the way our society addresses hunger and food scarcity. However, we must also adopt **easy-to-implement and efficient measures that retail sectors** in other countries have already developed, while continuing to understand how our unique distribution system can cope with the needs of millions of hungry fellow Indians.

We can look to **best practices and laws in countries like France, Norway, Denmark, UK**, etc., in order to check spoilage and destruction of edible food waste in India. For example, in France, **supermarkets prioritise reduction**, reuse and recycling of extra food.

Similarly, in India, **partnerships with charity organisations and food banks are integral to ensuring donation** of extra food from retail outlets to those in need. Food that has crossed its sell-by date, and can't be donated, can either be composted or converted into biofuel for retail outlets' delivery trucks.

Some other initiatives that can help reduce food wastage include removing expiration dates from non-perishable commodities (like salt, sugar, etc.), allowing discounts on single items (such as a separated banana), removing general store promotions (such as buy-one-get-one-free), and making mandatory messages about food waste in retail advertisements. In addition, mandatory employee-training on food waste prevention can really change how the retail industry approaches food supply.

Cities like Chennai, Kochi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and even Gurugram, are increasingly embracing the use of **community fridges** in combating hunger. Installing community fridges outside retail outlets is indeed a compassionate way of providing free daily access to extra food, to those in need.

Finally, **India has had a rich tradition**—one that we are fast losing—of using almost every part of a fruit or vegetable as food. **Chintan's recipe book - Tasty Frugal Green** - is based on reviving traditional ways of avoiding food wastage. You can download it by clicking on the button

below.

Chintan's Recipe Book - Tasty Frugal Green

Way Forward

Time-bound, stringent and measurable actions are necessary at all levels.

Reducing and eventually eliminating food waste needs to be **incentivised** and **encouraged** across key sources such as restaurants, banquets, weddings, canteens, and retail outlets. **Partnerships** should be formed with all stakeholders to identify how to do this. Eventually, each city should have a **plan** in place to tackle food waste.

Consciousness around the extent and types of food waste needs to be raised. **Recipes** for leftovers, fines for wastage in restaurants, reduced prices for misshapen fruits and vegetables and community fridges are some ways to engage and inform.

Everyone must join hands if we are to work towards a truly sustainable India that does not have millions undernourished despite having adequate food production.

To end, here's a short documentary film that will inform and inspire you to act on food waste.



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