

Tesco CEO heads up global food waste campaign launched at Davos

A coalition of 30 leaders from business, governments and NGOs wants to halve the amount of food wasted globally by 2030

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A high-profile global campaign to halve the amount of food wasted on the journey between farm and plate has launched today at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Tesco CEO Dave Lewis is chair of a coalition of 30 leaders from business, governments, UN agencies, foundations and NGOs who want to prompt action to reduce the third of all food produced which is never consumed. Such volumes result from a combination of overproduction and wastage in the west and spoilage in developing countries.

Craig Hanson, global director of food, forests and water at the World Resources Institute (WRI), says the aim of the campaign, Champions 12.3, is to build political momentum towards sustainable development goal 12.3 to halve per capita global food waste levels by 2030. Hanson likens this to the way global leaders rallied behind the millennium development goal of reducing the number of women who die in childbirth, helping contribute to a 45% decrease in maternal deaths since 1990.

Alongside the launch of Champions 12.3, Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, launched YieldWise, a seven-year, \$130m (£92m) initiative to tackle post-harvest losses of food due to spoilage in sub-Saharan Africa, starting with mango crops in Kenya, maize in Tanzania, and cassava and tomato crops in Nigeria.

Mamadou Biteye, head of the Foundation's work in Africa, says hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers in Africa lose 15-42% of their fruit and vegetable crops due to issues such as improper storage, lack of access to finance and inability to link to sustainable markets. The World Bank estimates (pdf) that just a 1% reduction in post-harvest losses in sub-Saharan Africa could lead to economic gains of \$40m a year, most of which would go directly to farmers.

The announcement of the Champions 12.3 campaign is a gratifying moment for UK food waste campaigner Tristram Stuart, who has been lobbying for retailers and consumers to cut food waste volumes. His 2009 book, *Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal*, argues that less than one-quarter of the food wasted in the US, UK and Europe would be enough to end malnourishment in the world, while just the bread and cereals UK households throw away could feed 30 million people.

At a recent conference, WRI president Andrew Steer also highlighted the significant contribution food waste makes to greenhouse gas emissions. “If food loss and waste was a country, it would be the third worst polluting country in the world, behind China and the US,” he said.

According to Wrap, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, the UK wastes an estimated 15m tonnes of food a year, (pdf) nearly half of it (7m tonnes) by householders, and an estimated 3m tonnes is destroyed by farmers before it leaves the farm gate.

Stuart, who was involved in setting up the Champions 12.3 coalition and recruiting its members, says consumers daily buy more food than they need, and most supermarkets refuse to give leftover food from their overstocked shelves to food charities. They also reject tonnes of food from suppliers for strictly cosmetic reasons - an issue recently highlighted by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall in his War on Waste series on BBC One.

The plight of parsnip sellers in Norfolk who said they were considering selling up because 30-40% of their crop was being rejected by Morrisons is also playing out in countries like Kenya, where cancellations and amendments to orders by supermarkets can occur at the last minute, says Stuart.

“They get a cancellation order. They have to destroy their crops. Day labourers don’t get paid and literally they can’t put food on the plates of their children. And that is happening in our supply chains. We are paying for that. We are using Kenyan land and Kenyan water, in a country where there are millions of hungry people and where agriculture competes for habitat with elephants and lions ... To then waste 50% of what those farmers produce, we can all agree, is obscene.”

But Stuart says UK supermarkets have responded to pressure from his Feedback campaign group and from Wrap, and now lead the way on cutting food waste from their supply chains. Dave Lewis’s position as chair of the Champions 12.3 coalition is a reflection of how far Tesco has come in tackling the issue. It is the only supermarket to report on its food waste to its investors (the others report to Wrap) and has moved forward with initiatives such as committing to use the entire crop of its banana suppliers.

This has big financial implications for producers. Tesco’s decision to stock Kenyan beans that haven’t been chopped down to size to fit into supermarket plastic packets saved one supplier €70,000 (£50,000) a year in extra income, says Stuart.

“That’s the kind of responsibility we want all retailers to take, to look into their supply chains, see how their policies are causing their suppliers to waste food and take responsibility for it.”

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