

Finding a Way to Food Sustainability

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There's much to think about regarding food this month. April is Reducing Food Waste Month in the United States, as efforts mount here to reduce food loss and waste, while globally Sunday Apr. 7 was World Health Day.

In dustbins across America, food is the single largest type of daily waste. More than one-third of all available food in the U.S. goes uneaten through loss or waste, a proportion replicated globally.

Increasingly there is an acceptance that when food is tossed aside, so, too, are opportunities for economic growth, healthier communities and environmental prosperity. The hope is that this can change through partnership, leadership and action, underpinned by education and outreach.

“There is increasing recognition of the need to sensitive and educate consumers, particularly in urban centres, to value food and reduce food waste,” Florian Doerr from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations tells IPS. “Recognising that children and young people are the consumers that will shape the food waste scenario of the future, investing in their education to reduce food waste will help in creating a culture of change toward sustainably stemming the problem.”

Hence the work being done by the likes of the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition Foundation (BCFN), a non-profit research centre studying the causes and effects on food created by economic, scientific, societal and environmental factors.

It has produced for the U.S.—as well as for another 66 countries—a food sustainability index profile that dives into all the relevant sectors, ranging from the likes of management of water resources, the impact on land of animal feed and biofuels, agricultural subsidies and diversification of agricultural system, to nutritional challenges, physical activity, diet composition and healthy life expectancy indicators.

“We want to provide tools for all the stakeholders involved, ranging from those deciding policy to students becoming better informed,” BCFN’s Katarzyna Dembska tells IPS. “The goal is to enable people to make more informed choices, both nutritionally and in terms of the impact on the environment.”

The stakes are high. Food production is the largest contributor to climate change (31 percent), exceeding the heating of buildings (23.6 percent) and transportation (18.5 percent), according to global estimates.

The consequences of climate change on agriculture and human health are one of the most significant problems we will face in the coming years, says the World Health Organization (WHO), due to the increase in temperatures and atmospheric pollutants. According to recent estimates, air pollution in Italy causes the death of over 90,000 people a year, a record in the European Union (EU).

“People are starting to realise that the food system is built into so many other sectors,” Brian Lipinski from the World Resources Institute tells IPS. “Agriculture has implications for land use, what we eat, and so many other aspects of our lives.”
