

International Day of Zero Waste 2026

Key Messages

ZERO
WASTE
DAY

UN 
environment
programme


UN-HABITAT


ZERO WASTE
FOUNDATION

Zero waste starts on your plate

The global waste crisis threatens climate stability, ecosystems and human well-being

- The world is facing a growing waste challenge linked to unsustainable production and consumption.
- Globally, humanity generates between **2.1 billion** and **2.3 billion** tonnes of municipal solid waste each year.
- By 2050, **nearly 70%** of the world's population – over 6.5 billion people – will live in cities; 80% of all food consumption is expected to take place there.
- If current trends continue, cities will generate **3.8 billion tonnes** of solid waste annually by 2050— making local governments key partners in addressing the crisis.

Food waste exacerbates food insecurity and weakens resilience at a time of global instability

- In 2022, while 783 million people faced hunger, **1.05 billion tonnes** of food was wasted – 19% of all food available to consumers. An additional 13% was lost post-harvest and before retail.
- Most food waste happens within households (60%), followed by food service (28%) and retail (12%), equating to one billion meals wasted every day.

By reducing food waste, countries and communities can ease climate stresses, protect limited resources, and reinforce food-system stability

- In a moment when conflict and economic pressures are placing additional strain on global food security, reducing food waste offers a practical and immediate way to bolster resilience and protect vulnerable communities.
- Food loss and waste generate **8-10% of global GHG emissions**, nearly five times the emissions from the aviation industry.
- Food waste alone accounts for **up to 14% of global methane emissions** – a gas 84 times more potent than CO₂ over 20 years.
- As methane leaves the atmosphere faster than CO₂, reducing organic waste is a strong near-term solution to minimizing the length and strength of 1.5°C overshoot.
- Avoiding food waste upstream offers a meaningful near-term opportunity to ease climate impacts while also limiting the emissions associated with producing, transporting and storing food that ultimately goes unused.

Reducing food waste can boost food security, livelihoods and environmental stability

- Reducing food waste is a pathway not only to environmental protection, but to greater economic stability, stronger community resilience and more accessible, efficient food systems at a moment when these benefits are urgently needed.
- Embracing innovation and fostering circular economy approaches in agrifood systems to prevent, reduce, reuse and repurpose food waste also creates new job opportunities, improves livelihoods and generates financial benefits for a range of stakeholders.
- Food loss and waste cost the world **US\$1 trillion (USD) per year**. Preventing food waste reduces methane emissions and lowers the demand for land, water and energy needed for food production.
- The economic returns are significant: for every dollar a city invests in preventing food waste, local authorities save about **US\$8**, households save about **US\$84**, and businesses typically see strong returns too – with half of sites saving US\$14 for every dollar they invest.

#ZeroWasteDay

ZERO
WASTE
DAY

UN 
environment
programme


UN-HABITAT


ZERO WASTE
FOUNDATION