

SPAZIO APERTO

OPEN SPACE

Reduction of Food Loss and Waste provides an extremely in-depth and multi-faceted look at the global food waste crisis, collecting the proceedings of a conference held at the Casina Pio IV in Vatican City. We all most likely have some inclination that we waste food unnecessarily, even if it is just on the household level. But to read the extent of how much food is wasted on a national and global level, and see the impact it has both environmentally and financially, is staggering. It is hard not to feel some shame or guilt at humanity's collective carelessness. The book does well to highlight food waste as a moral issue, with the inclusion of the perspective of religious groups. Yet, at the same time, it is also deeply encouraging and comforting that a book such as this exists and can demonstrate the work being done, by organisations around the world, to reduce food waste.

With the many perspectives presented in this book, readers can see how extensive a problem food waste is, and what can be done to prevent it at every stage, from farmers, to retail and to consumers. It also details the differences between the causes of food waste in both the developed and developing world, and what policies, technologies, funding and campaigns are needed to curtail it.

Reading *Reduction of Food Loss and Waste* was particularly appealing to me, as I work in a popular UK food retail outlet. So, in my position as a Customer Service Assistant, everyday I deal with the removal of food waste. Whilst I can attest to attempts being made to mitigate it, by reducing in price food that would soon be out-of-date, still so much perfectly edible food can and is discarded. That is to say nothing of the amount of food that must be thrown away due to damage or not meeting aesthetic standards, either in delivery or on the shop front.

I also personally appreciate the understanding the book shows towards needing to change people's attitudes and behaviours towards food in the developed countries, even if much of the book concerns itself with the issue of food waste in the developing world. Since my ability to comment on the potential effectiveness and implementation of the strategies in that part of the world is lacking, I will limit myself to commenting on what I wit-

ness of food waste from my own position, that being on the retail and consumer level in a developed country. Accordingly, I believe from my experience, as both a retail worker and consumer, that societal values and attitudes are what need to be worked on to reduce food waste.

In my retail outlet, I often observe customers wasting food because of how busy they are, or buying far too much food compared to what they actually need. I witness first hand how these attitudes become ingrained in the culture, spread amongst communities, and propagated by supermarket franchises. It is a complex situation that will not be easily solved. Therefore, when I read Mickey Gjerris' essay entitled *Food Waste – Some Ethical Reflections*, I was gratified to see a perspective which hits upon what I see to be the exact issue. It is the conflict between our hyper consumerist Western culture, that promotes individuality and freedom of choice, and our communal and environmental responsibilities. 'A conflict between duty and preferences' as Gjerris aptly puts it.

It seems to me to be a form of cultural naivety, that we seem to think we all can, 'have our cake and eat it too.' That it will not require us to sacrifice some of our luxuries for those less fortunate to have enough to eat. From my experience in retail, especially during the past two years of COVID restrictions, I have seen just how much consumers are not willing to sacrifice even their smallest luxuries. Hearing stories of the Second World War, where UK citizens came together to support one another during rationing and the Blitz, I hoped something similar might happen during the lockdowns. Instead, I experienced abuse and lack of understanding from customers when told we were low on stock due to drivers not being available to deliver because of quarantines.

Hence, I see this to be a truly central issue. And I am gladdened to see it clearly addressed, as I felt many of the essays in the book, written by scientists, politicians and heads of NGOs, seemed somewhat too optimistic regarding the potential success of food reduction campaigns in the first world. Furthermore, Mr Gjerris wisely tries to rein in their

over eagerness, as it can vary from culture to culture. A possible criticism of the book may then be that it presents a predominantly Western perspective on food waste and reflects Western values when defining what makes a good human life. Despite this, however, it is encouraging to see that the religious perspective is being considered at all, and that such concerns may be voiced so that an echo chamber might be avoided.

NOTE

* JOACHIM VON BRAUN – MARCELO SÁNCHEZ SORONDO – ROY STEINER, *Reduction of Food Loss and Waste*, LEV, Vatican City 2020, <https://www.pas.va/content/dam/casinapioiv/pas/pdf-volumi/scripta-varia/sv147pas.pdf>

