

Curbing Food Loss through Awareness and Engagement



Parents and children enjoying their experiences at a "salpa" or salvage party.

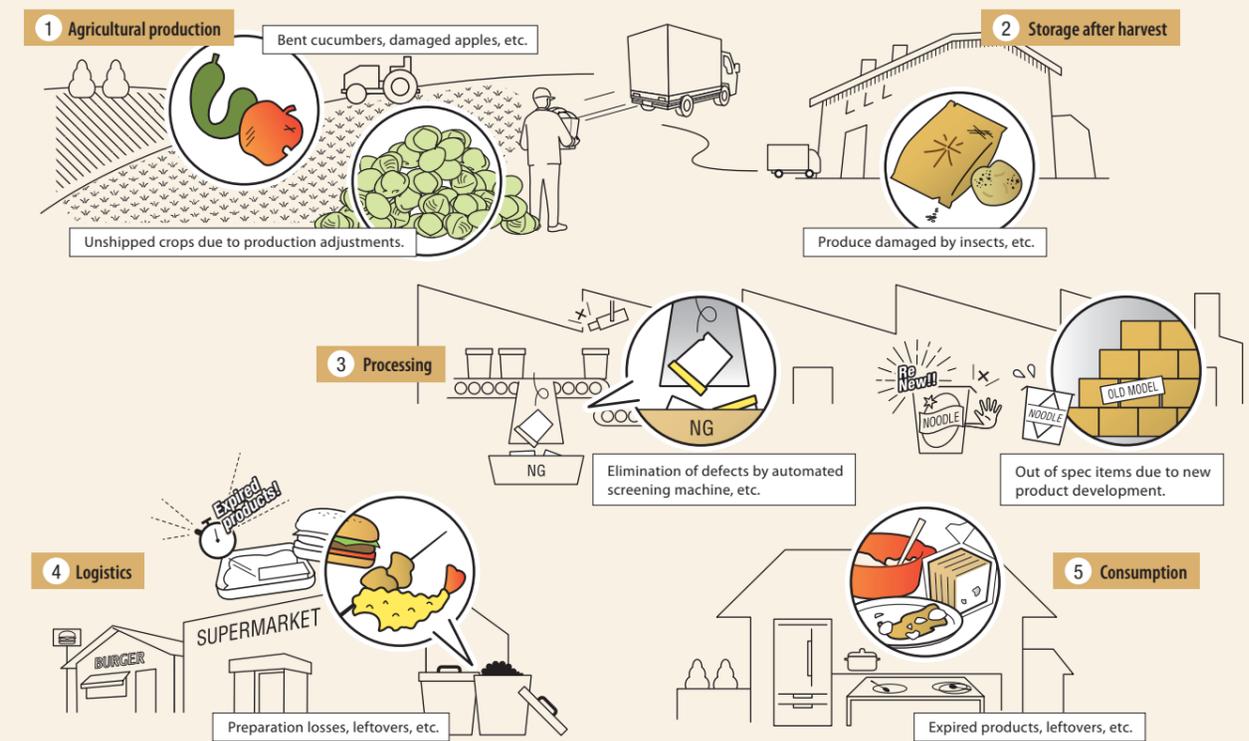
With an alarming amount of food loss and waste being seen on every continent, raising awareness and engaging all of society around the issue have become an urgent necessity.

While approximately 124 million people across 51 countries and regions are experiencing a food security crisis or worse, in 2017 the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported a worldwide average of 1.3 billion tons of food loss and waste—enough to feed as many as 2 billion people a year! Although the patterns and figures for this phenomenon are significantly affected by the specific socioeconomic and cultural context of each country, it is an unfortunate situation that directly affects all parts of the globe, and Tokyo is no exception to the rule. In 2012, Tokyo saw 1.97 million tons of food loss and waste. Around half of this was discarded by the food industry with the remainder being discarded by households. This alarming situation is now drawing significant attention and heightening the urgency of debates about sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and social awareness.

What is the difference between food loss and food waste? Actually, food loss arises throughout the successive stages of the food supply chain, from the production of crops to the refrigerators of consumers and restaurants. However, the term food loss is often considered to refer to losses in the first stages of the supply chain (harvesting and post-harvesting operations, industrial processing

and distribution) and to be the responsibility of farmers, producers, industries, and retailers. Food waste, on the other hand, refers to the waste produced in the final links in the food chain, namely from restaurants and consumers.

More than half of Japan's food loss and waste is currently being recycled. Ways to even further improve this situation include raising greater awareness by doing more to create environmentally-friendly mindsets and a deeper promoting of new lifestyles from the perspective of ethical consumerism. The Bureau of Environment of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is dedicating a great deal of attention to these points. The bureau is collaborating with other public agencies and the private sector in its attempt to gain a holistic understanding of the structure of the problem so that it might create more solutions. Many Tokyo-based startups are also taking on this challenge, bringing innovative ideas and concepts to the table in order to open and maintain dialogue and to take action. Some of the many initiatives gradually developing around Tokyo include food banks distributing surplus food, effective and timely utilization of emergency stockpiles of food, and seminars to raise awareness for the general public. In the long term it will probably be better to solve this issue



by making all of the members of society aware of their responsibilities in a fun, meaningful, educational, and engaging way, rather than blaming and pointing fingers at potential culprits.

Salvage parties, or "salpas," are among those initiatives in favor of promoting engagement instead of pursuing accusations. These events are held by Food Salvage, an organization officially launched in 2013 by Satoshi Hirai, and they promote a very simple lifestyle among individuals as a way to a long-term solution to reduce food waste. "Let's not waste what's still edible! Let's make the most of what's in the kitchen!" Initially thought up as a fun, participative, and engaging way of raising awareness among consumers, salvage parties gather participants together in community cooking sessions where the menus are exclusively based on the unused, but still edible, ingredients they bring in. Salvage parties are an interactive and entertaining (and tasty!) way of exploring alternatives to systematic food waste and they also cultivate ambassadors of good food management practices.

We went along to a salpa that was held recently. The first mission for the four mother-daughter duos on this day was to bring an ingredient from their own kitchen that for some reason they had yet to use and that they would probably

not use in the future. Participants gathered in a community kitchen, piled their ingredients on a table, and listened to a short explanation of the food loss and waste situation. The discussion was started with the question, "Why did you bring this ingredient?" The participants began to reveal their reasons, such as, "I bought it but I don't know how to cook it," "I can't read the label, it's imported," "It's past the 'use by' date," and so on.

"No worries, let's make something delicious out of it!"

With the support of a professional chef, participants figured out a menu based on the available ingredients, cooked the ingredients, and in the end enjoyed together the meal they had collectively created: "Itadakimasu!" (Let's eat!)

The children were amazed by their achievement, with one stating, "I'm so glad I came and was able to cook something so tasty!"

As for their mothers, the experience was the first step towards a new lifestyle: "I used to think that being conscious of food waste at home wouldn't make such a big difference, but now I see how individual action is important!"

These parties are a simple process for achieving three goals: raising awareness, sharing new cooking methods to reduce food waste, and having a good time!