

2022.01 Enact Federal Legislation to Reduce Food Loss and Waste

Resolved, that national council of The Catholic Women's League of Canada in 102nd annual national convention assembled urges the federal government to enact legislation to reduce food loss and waste in Canada's agri-food, industrial, commercial and institutional sectors.

BRIEF: Enact Federal Legislation to Reduce Food Loss and Waste

Food loss is edible food that is lost in food production, processing and manufacturing while food waste is when edible food is thrown away by grocery stores, hotels, restaurants and commercial institutions (HRI). In Canada, there is no legislation to prohibit food loss and waste (FLW) in the agri-food industry. Law can provide the fundamental principles and rights on which the Canadian agri-food system is built and the basis for delivering food security and nutrition to all Canadians (Rugarabamu par. 5). Legislation that specifically focuses on the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors could decrease FLW by an estimated 11 million tonnes or 32% annually (Gooch et al.; Nikkel et al.). This reduction would feed every Canadian for five months (Gooch et al.). Reducing FLW can benefit Canadians by reducing costs to consumers, driving change and efficiency and competitiveness within the agri-food industry, and protecting the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and climate effects (ECCC).

FLW occurs because there is a lack of: government legislation; business infrastructure to address FLW; and cooperation and collaboration between different sectors of the agri-food industry (Gooch and Felfel). Other causes of FLW are that it is not a priority for businesses, and there are safety and liability concerns with food donations (Gooch and Felfel). However, there is federal government FLW policy in development (ECCC). The safety and liability issues of donating edible food has been addressed by the government of British Columbia with the development of criteria for both industry and charitable organizations to ensure food safety and mitigate liability (BCCDC).

The approximate \$49.5 billion cost of FLW to the Canadian economy represents around three per cent of Canada's gross domestic product (Gooch et al.). The annual FLW from the commercial sector comprises 58% of Canada's FLW at a cost of approximately \$29 billion (Nikkel et al.). However, this does not represent the true cost of commercial FLW. For example, if food production costs are accounted for (e.g., the cost of the use of land, water and energy) the cost of FLW is estimated to be over \$100 billion (Gooch and Felfel). Of the 11 million tonnes of commercial FLW, an estimated 8.8 million tonnes is avoidable and could be rescued (Nikkel et al.). Avoidable FLW occurs along the food chain as unplanned/post-processing FLW and represents the greatest opportunity to reduce it. The area of HRI provides the greatest opportunity for food rescue with currently 98% of its FLW being avoidable (Gooch et al.). According to Nikkel, other areas of potential food rescue include production and manufacturing where there are no attempts made for food rescue. Food processing and distribution are two more areas of potential food rescue.

Presently, the reduction of FLW is the responsibility of the federal department of environment and natural resources (ECCC). This has resulted in leadership to address the historical marginalization of FLW for the allocation of government time, funds and political capital (Gooch et al.). As stated in a 2019 report of the federal government on FLW, "All orders of government – federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal – have authority over matters that can directly or indirectly influence the creation of food loss and waste. This represents an opportunity to identify particular policy and regulatory barriers and levers that could reduce food loss and waste" (ECCC). "Law can provide a guiding framework that coordinates and drives change across agri-food systems" (Rugarabamu par. 6). Enacting legislation will advance the reduction of food loss and waste in Canada.

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Action Plan: Enact Federal Legislation to Reduce Food Loss and Waste

1. Write letters to the prime minister, minister of environment and climate change, minister of health, minister of agriculture and agri-food, with copies to local members of parliament urging the federal government to enact legislation to reduce food loss and waste in Canada's industrial, commercial and institutional sectors.
2. Write letters to provincial, territorial and municipal governments urging them to collaborate with the federal government to reduce food loss and waste in Canada's industrial, commercial and institutional sectors.
3. Raise awareness that could include inviting speakers and providing information and resources to members and the public about reducing food loss and waste.
4. Monitor the federal government's response to the resolution.