

A close-up photograph of a child's hands holding a small pile of fresh raspberries. The child is wearing a red and white checkered shirt. The background is dark and out of focus. A large, white, stylized geometric pattern, resembling a series of interlocking chevrons or a modern logo, is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Maximizing Food

A Messaging Toolkit for Motivating Business
and Policy Leaders to Address Food Waste



WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

Produced on behalf of Champions 12.3
September 2025



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The Case for Reframing Food Waste



More than 40% of all food produced globally is never eaten — enough to feed every food-insecure person three full meals a day for an entire year, with food to spare.

And yet, the issue remains low on the priority list of many business and policy leaders focused elsewhere. Why? Because the case isn't landing.

To mobilize change, we need messaging that resonates with what decision-makers care about — whether that's economics, efficiency, sustainability or something else.

This toolkit was created to help you shift the conversation. It introduces a new way to reframe the issue of food waste and provides a library of motivation-driven messages that can connect with business and policy priorities. You also will find practical guidance for using these messages effectively — plus creative ways to make the issue feel real, relevant, and actionable.

If you're working to minimize food waste in the world, this toolkit will help your message cut through, no matter where in the world you are.

What's Behind This Toolkit

Research

To uncover why current messaging falls short, we conducted:

- 20+ interviews with senior stakeholders across the private and public sectors
- A global survey with 100+ respondents from 28 countries. These were largely people working on food waste now
- A global analysis using Google Trends, Search Console, and SEMrush to gain insights from online conversations

Expert Input

To shape the next phase of messaging, we assembled an advisory group of communications experts from across the Champions 12.3 network. This group helped develop two new messaging frames to test in the real world.

Real-World Testing

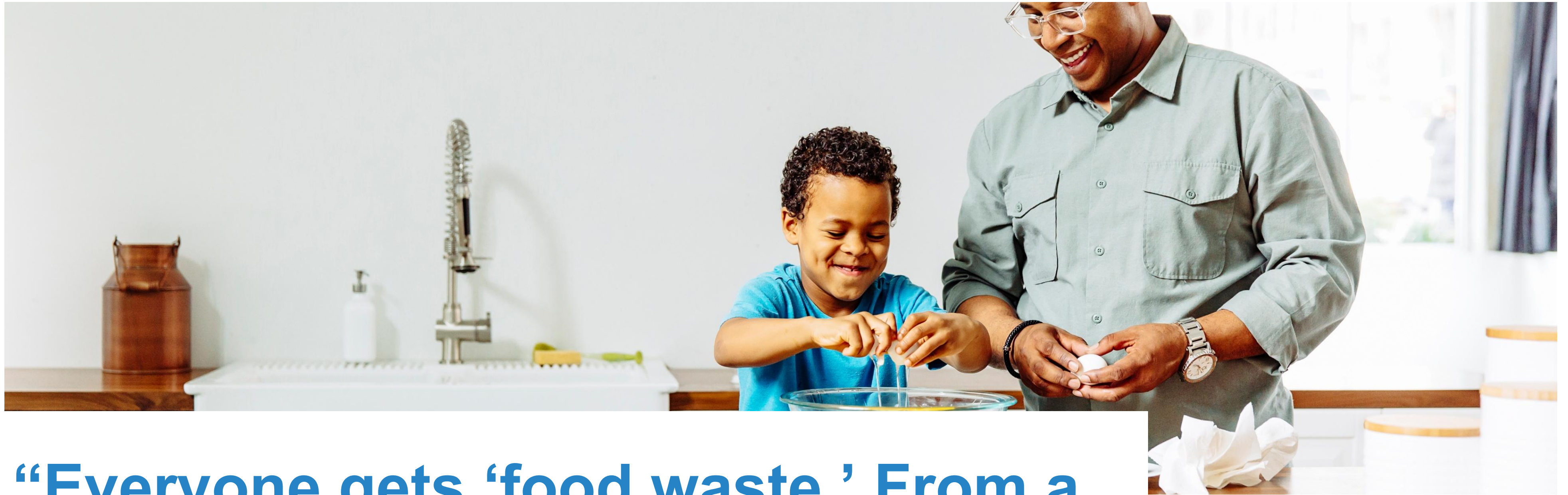
To identify which messaging resonates, seven organizations – including two major global companies – conducted real-world tests across email, social media, and speaking engagements over two months in summer 2025. This helped us gather both qualitative and quantitative insights.

WRI thanks the members of the Champions 12.3 narrative working group (who commissioned this project), the Global Action Drive, and the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this project's survey, interviews, expert input and testing. Select portions of this toolkit were developed with assistance from AI tools. All content has been reviewed and finalized by WRI staff.

What Our Research Shows:

5 Reasons Why Your Current Message May Not Be Landing ...

1. **“Food loss and waste” as a term is not well understood.** Three-quarters of survey respondents said the term “food loss and waste” is not well understood by business or policy leaders. Many told us it just adds confusion. Most interviewees said leaders default to “food waste,” no matter where in the supply chain waste happens.
2. **While nobody likes waste, framing the issue negatively isn’t enough to drive action.** One interviewee said: *“Let's talk about the positive of what we're engaging in: longer shelf life, increasing biodiversity etc. Let's be for something, not against it.”*
3. **We don’t link food waste to what’s front of mind for business and government leaders.** We often make broad arguments for tackling food waste, but are we connecting to the *specific* priorities our *specific* audience cares about? Framing food waste action around leaders’ priorities positions it as a practical solution to the challenges they care about most.
4. **We get stuck on the problem, and the bigger picture gets lost.** Ultimately, we don’t reduce food waste for its own sake – it’s the benefits for people and the planet that matter. Our messaging should frame it as a pathway to broader goals.
5. **Food waste communications aren’t always human enough.** Too often, we use statistics that are hard to picture and language that misses the real impact on people. One interviewee said: *“Let’s start talking in more personal terms - less about meals saved and more about number of people who can be fed.”*



“Everyone gets ‘food waste.’ From a CEO to a 7-year-old, you can have a meaningful conversation about food waste.” – *one interview participant*



Recommended Terminology

1. **Use "food waste" when discussing the issue, no matter where it occurs in the supply chain.** When possible, include the sector: Agricultural food waste, industry food waste, retailer food waste, household food waste etc. Use "food loss and waste" only with technical experts.

We recommend moving away from the broad term “food loss and waste” because our research shows it is poorly understood and fails to resonate with many business and policy leaders. By contrast, “food waste” is widely used, intuitively clear, and more understandable to non-expert audiences.

2. **Use “minimize” waste instead of “reduce”.** It’s more exact, aspirational, and easier to intuit.

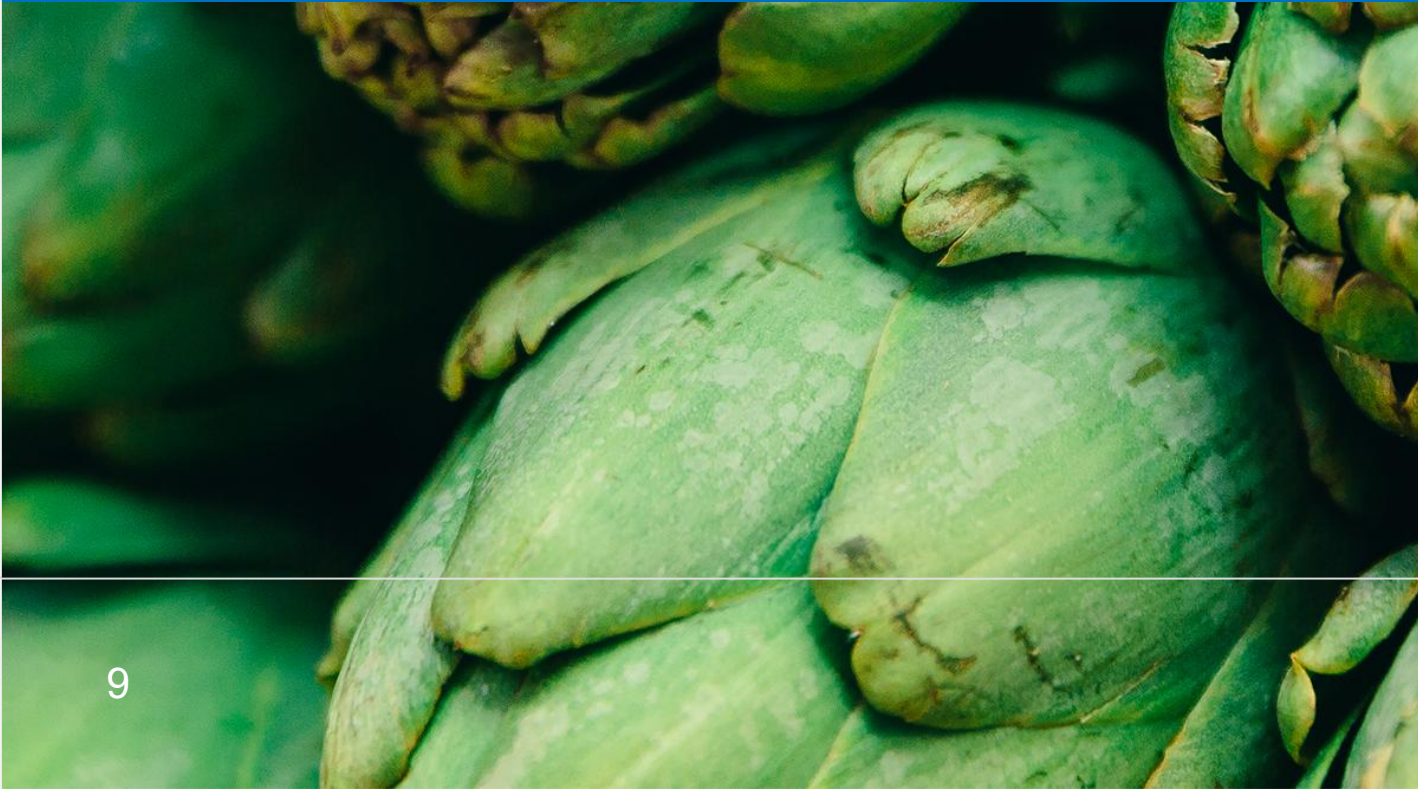


Maximizing Food: A Fresh Way to Talk About Food (Waste)

You can inspire action by framing food waste action as an opportunity — one that highlights efficiency, shared gains, and respect for the effort behind every bite. It's a more positive, practical way to show what's possible when we make the most of food.



What's a Messaging Frame Anyway?



A messaging frame is a way of presenting information that shapes how people interpret and emotionally respond to a topic. It emphasizes certain values, ideas, or outcomes while de-emphasizing others — influencing what *feels* most important, relevant, or motivating to the audience.

Put simply: A messaging frame is the lens through which a message is told.

Example:

- Food waste frame – Focuses on problems, losses, and environmental harm.
- “Maximizing food” frame – Focuses on solutions, opportunity, and shared benefit.

Both can talk about the same facts — *but they shape perception and motivation differently.*



Maximizing Food

An approachable concept that encourages doing more with the food we have. It implies getting the most value, enjoyment, and impact out of every bite.

What It Means

Maximizing food means optimizing the food system to its fullest potential. It's about maximizing efficiency, enjoyment and nutrition by ensuring that every resource within the food system is fully utilized.

This concept can apply to different stages of food production (food losses) and consumption (food waste). The core idea is what matters — not the exact phrase. Focus on conveying the value of food and the effort, care, and resources behind it.

Why It Works

Typical food waste messaging can fall flat because it:

- Sounds moralizing
- Feels abstract or intangible
- Requires perceived sacrifice or cost

The "maximizing food" frame shifts the conversation from what we need to stop doing to how we can get more out of what we already have. It:

- Centers around opportunity over obligation
- Embeds systemic solutions in a relatable way
- Highlights shared value for farmers, institutions, consumers, and the planet



The Do's for Effectively Using “Maximizing Food”



- ✓ **Lead with gains** — income, affordability, efficiency, health, resilience, etc. — not losses and avoided outcomes. For example: “Dairy farmers make more money when they use cold chain technologies to deliver their entire stock to market.”
- ✓ **Make it personal, tangible and specific.** For example: “Getting more from our school system’s food purchases can help 50,000 more children have healthy meals next year.” This use focuses on the school children who can be fed, rather than the number of meals saved.
- ✓ **Use straight-forward language.** Avoid high-level language or lots of jargon and buzz words. Get to the point and quickly – and keep your message centered on what’s in it for the audience.
- ✓ **Ground it with real world results.** Show it working in a school, hospital, city, farm, or company. Case studies make it real. For example: “In X city, schools redesigned their menus to use every part of produce— reducing waste by 40% while serving more creative dishes and saving Y amount of money.”
- ✓ **Tailor it to your audience** — but keep the core idea of “doing more with what we have.” We found that in the Global North, terms such as “wasted food,” “food composting” and “zero waste kitchens” are more familiar. In the Global South, “spoiled food” and “post-harvest losses” are commonly used. Consider your audience and go with what they are familiar with.
- ✓ **Emphasize good stewardship of food and its inputs, not guilt.** Celebrate how we can be more resourceful; don’t shame over what is being done wrong.
- ✓ **Frame it as a win for multiple audiences.** Position maximizing food as a multi-benefit:
 - For farmers → more value from what they grow
 - For restaurants → lower costs, satisfied diners
 - For families → household budgets that go further
 - For food manufacturers → improved profit margins, reduced emissions

From This → To That

Standard Language

In 2024, we saved 4 million meals from being wasted.

What it does: Focuses only on what didn't happen (waste), which can feel insufficiently motivating. This message also lacks a clear sense of who benefited or where, which can feel distant or faceless.

Wasting food is a waste of resources, time and money.

What it does: Feels moralizing. This message also lacks a sense of opportunity — it's about loss, not potential.

Reducing food loss and waste is a triple win for people, planet and the economy.

What it does: Uses technical and vague language, which can feel generic and unmemorable.

“Maximizing food” frame + tips from our “Do” list

In 2024, we served 4 million extra plates of food – to people [in X city], not trash bins.

What it does: Focuses on the positive outcome — people being fed — not just the problem avoided. This message inspires the audience with impact rather than by avoiding negatives.

Using every bit of food maximizes the return of every resource, hour and dollar we put into it – from farm to plate.

What it does: Focuses on value and efficiency, rather than guilt.

Getting more out of our food system raises farmer incomes, lowers costs, saves families money, and protects the planet.

What it does: Emphasizes specifics (farmers, families) over generic (people).



“We can use language that’s accessible and fun – it doesn’t have to be fancy, serious or dramatic.” – *one interview participant*

Ways to Bring 'Maximizing Food' to Life

The below offer different ideas for how to convey the core concept of doing more with the food we have

Practical & Efficient Phrases

- Make the most of our food
- Use food to its fullest
- Do more with the food we have
- Put food to greater use
- Stretch our food resources
- Get more from what we grow
- Unlock food's full potential
- A better return on every harvest
- Efficiency on every plate
- Feed more with the same resources

Relatable Phrases

- Get more from every morsel
- Make every bite count
- Stretch every spoonful
- Full value from every forkful
- The most from every meal
- Turn bites into benefits
- Get the good out of every grain
- Make every meal matter
- Max every meal

Good Stewardship Phrases

- Value every harvest
- Celebrate the work behind every bite
- Food, fulfilling its purpose
- Use up food to honor the hands that grow, cook, and serve it



Reaching Decision-Maker Priorities

Business and policy leaders juggle many priorities and often must focus where they see clear, immediate returns. To elevate food waste on their agenda, we must link it to what already matters to them.

Our research identified 14 key motivators for business and policy leaders — generally falling into four categories: economics, health, environment, and resilience.

The following messages are designed as entry points, not scripts. They are practical tools to help you start thinking about how to frame food waste action as a solution to the challenges leaders care most about.



Economic Starter Messages

How to connect with business
and policy leaders most
motivated by economic
arguments

Audience Priority

Sample Message

Cost Savings Return on Investment Reinvestment Opps

- Fully using food allows you to sell more product, use labor and equipment more efficiently, and increase financial margins.
- You also cut waste expenses—from hauling fees to landfill costs, freeing up money for higher-impact investments.
- It's a perfect business opportunity.

Livelihoods

- Farmers prosper when every harvest counts.
- The more of their crops that reach market, the more stable their income, the stronger their business, and the better they can provide for their families.
- And when farmers can rely on selling what they grow, they face less pressure to overproduce, easing strain on both their land and livelihoods

Household Savings

- Getting more from every morsel keeps money in families' pockets.
- By planning portions, carefully storing food, and repurposing leftovers, families get the most out of their groceries—so they spend less overall and get more time around the dinner table from every trip to the grocery store.



Health & Wellbeing Starter Messages

How to connect with business and policy leaders most motivated by health arguments

Audience Priority

Sample Message

Food Security

- We can feed more people with the food we already grow.
- Getting the most possible out of the food system makes more food available for those in need.
- It helps stabilize prices so families can afford groceries.
- And it builds reliable access to the nutritious food that's essential for health.

Nutrition

- From seeds to stems, food offers countless ways to serve healthy meals.
- Some of the most nutritious foods – like fruits and veg – are also among the most wasted.
- We can boost family nutrition simply by selling all our produce, creatively using every part of food, and using what we grow to the max.



Environmental Starter Messages

How to connect with business
and policy leaders most
motivated by environmental
arguments

Audience Priority

Sample Message

Natural Resources

- Using all of what we grow ensures every invested resource is used responsibly.
- Food production consumes vast energy, water, and land; reducing waste honors those resources and strengthens our stewardship of water, climate, and ecosystems.
- Maximizing food helps us feed more people with the same resources used today.

Climate Mitigation & Adaptation

- Using more of what we grow keeps good food from going bad -- whether it's just leaving the field or heading to a landfill, where it emits greenhouse gases.
- It's an important step for reducing food's climate footprint and building a food system that's better equipped to handle climate shocks.

Landfills & Methane Emissions

- We prevent the harmful methane emissions that come from decomposing food in landfills when we make the most of every part of food—leftovers, scraps, and all.
- This also frees cities up to focus on community improvements – not building new landfills, which saves both the financial costs and environmental impacts associated with expanding waste infrastructure.

Land Use & Biodiversity

- We can protect biodiversity and keep natural habitats intact by doing more with the food we already produce – ensuring there's less need to clear forests or drain wetlands for agriculture.
- Fully using our food is a smarter way to nourish people while protecting our wonderful wildlife.

Recycling

- Maximizing food turns waste into resources, keeping food scraps out of landfills and in the loop.
- Leftovers and peels can be composted into nutrient-rich soil or converted into bioenergy, reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers and fossil fuels.
- By fully utilizing every part of food, we create a system where nothing is wasted and yesterday's scraps become tomorrow's solutions.



Resilience Starter Messages

How to connect with business
and policy leaders most
motivated by resilience
arguments

Audience Priority

Sample Message

Secure Supply Chains

- You can future proof your supply chain (and business) by using more of what you already produce.
- An efficient system that requires less energy, water, and land means more stable supply, lower costs, and consistent returns – even during climate events or economic disruptions.

Food Sovereignty

- Countries can strengthen national food systems by putting locally grown food to greater use.
- This approach maximizes homegrown resources; reduces reliance on imports; and ensures healthy, culturally relevant food reaches every community.

Stable Food Systems

- We get the most out of our food system when we make every bite count.
- This approach of wasting nothing creates a more efficient, resilient system that's able to withstand shocks like climate change, supply chain disruptions, and economic crises.
- It also helps us bounce back faster in tough times.

Strong Communities

- Making every meal go further helps feed families, stretch budgets, and strengthen local communities.
- We can create a ripple effect of well-being—for families, neighborhoods, and our planet – simply by better using the food we already have.

Facts You Can Feel

You can make food waste feel concrete and relatable by helping people understand its direct impact on their lives or the world around them.

Making the issue tangible puts it into a context that others can see or feel. This helps engage emotions and makes it easier for people to connect with the issue and want to do something about it.



Facts You Can Feel

Theme	Factoids
Amount Wasted	Each year, the world wastes approx. 2 billion tons of food. This could fill: • 67 million grocery stores 2 billion tons of food waste is: • More than 4x the combined weight of the entire global population
Health	With all the food we waste, we could instead: • Give every person on earth a large refrigerator's worth of food (approx. 250kg/550lbs) • Provide every food insecure person on the planet (29% of population) three meals a day for a year... and still have food leftover
Economics	With \$1 trillion, we could: • Feed the entire global population for 25 years • Spend 10% more on global healthcare
Environment	Food waste is responsible for 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions every year. This equals: • More than 3x the aviation sector's emissions • Taking 814 million cars off the road – more than all the cars in Europe and North America combined, or more than all the cars in Asia and South America combined!

FAQs

Q: Are you recommending I don't ever use "food loss and waste"?

Yes, when speaking to non-expert audiences or communicating broadly (e.g., LinkedIn posts, presentations, media interviews). Most people don't understand the term, even after years of use, which makes it ineffective. For technical or expert audiences who you know are familiar with the term, it's fine to use. Always match your language to what's most widely understood by your audience.

Q: What about pre-harvest losses or yield gaps? Are those included in "maximizing food"?

Yes! "Maximizing food" covers the *entire* food chain—from seeds to beyond. It's about making the most of every input that gets food onto our plates.

Q: Won't simplifying the term undermine the technical distinctions?

No. In fact, the lack of general understanding around "food loss and waste" often undermines those distinctions. Using the intuitive "food waste" paired with context (e.g., "retailer food waste," "farm-level food waste") provides clarity for audiences, while you can still differentiate for technical purposes when it matters.

Q: Can "maximizing food" be used beyond food waste?

Sure. It works for talking about food security, farmer incomes, and other benefits — reinforcing that maximizing food (and by nature, minimizing waste) delivers maximum gains.

Q: Do I need to change how I write reports, give presentations, or talk to partners?

We hope that you will integrate the concept of maximizing food in a way that feels authentic to you. Adapt the language to your style while keeping the core idea intact.

Q: Can I use "maximizing food" with more audiences than just business and policy leaders?

We haven't looked into its use with consumers specifically (and so recommendations may differ), but we do think "maximizing food" is a unifying concept that strengthens communications across audiences and formats.

What do you think?

Scan the QR code below to tell us about your experience using this toolkit ↓



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