

SECTION 3

Stressing on Sustainability

"Man was not born a carnivorous animal, but born to live on fruits and herbs that the earth grows"

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi





Chapter 16

Putting the Planet First

What we eat can have an impact on the future of our planet. It can save it, or push it further down the pit.

We all try to eat right for the sake of our health, but we tend to ignore the fact that our environment dramatically impacts our health too. Today we live in toxic, climate challenged times, and just careful eating alone cannot save us. It is imperative to take conscious steps towards our environment via right food choices to avoid messing up our health big time.

Besides this 'save our health' reason, we also need to think about the need to feed the world, and our responsibility towards it. How we eat, and the choices we make directly affect our ability / capability to grow the food, and unfortunately, we have been steadfastly only depleting this asset by our every waking (and eating) moment. Every irresponsible food choice (of ours) contributes big time towards an increasingly hungry world... How's that for your conscience?

About time we wake up to the fact that eating right does not mean focusing on just nutrition, it also means encouraging and consciously practicing dietary sustainability, and ensuring that there's good food available not just for those living now, but also for the generations to come. So, the focus needs to move from just our needs (and health) to eating in a way that is good for the future of our planet and our people.

The 2019 EAT-Lancet Commission report recommends healthy diets that can feed 10 billion people by 2050 from environmentally sustainable food systems. These are essentially plant based with modest amounts of meat, fish and dairy foods. When Indian diets are compared with the recommended diet in the EAT Lancet report it was observed that Indian diets, across states and income groups, are unhealthy. Indians also consume excess amounts of cereals and not enough milk and milk products, fruits, and vegetables. Importantly, unlike many countries, excess consumption of animal protein is not a problem in India. Indian policymakers need to accelerate food-system-wise efforts to make healthier and sustainable diets more affordable, accessible and acceptable.

The Good Work!

FSSAI takes responsibility towards the environmental consequences of our food choices seriously. And that is why the emphasis on sustainability through the Eat Right India movement has increased manifold in the last few years. Amazing initiatives are being launched and implemented; creating awareness on food sustainability across India. The key components of the sustainability pillar of the Eat Right India movement includes production and consumption

of local and seasonal foods which not only help in reducing greenhouse gas effect but also encourages environmental friendly regional trade practices. Further, many steps have been taken to encourage reduction of use of chemicals in food production and preservation, reducing plastic in packaging material, reduce use of water in food processing and also reduce food waste.

The movement has created numerous organically growing platforms to engage with diverse stakeholders and benefit from their technical expertise—a network of professionals in food and nutrition (NetProFaN) to leverage the expertise of professionals in reaching out to consumers with scientifically sound messages and a network of scientific organizations (NetScOFaN) to participate in standard-setting processes. The network is formed to support and expand the outreach of various flagship programmes of the Government on food safety and nutrition, such as the Eat Right India Movement by FSSAI.

One of its kind centre 'The centre for food planet and health' has been set up by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India in partnership with Centre for Public Systems Management (CPSM)- LBSNAA with the objective to inculcate in officers (the young officers entering the civil services as well as other mid-level and senior officers) the competency to think and act in a holistic manner and promote policies and actions on food that are healthy, for both, people and planet.

FSSAI has also Constituted a Scientific Panel on Packaging to deal with the challenges of increasing plastic waste. FSSAI is committed to achieve a plastic waste free food and beverage (F&B) sector and move towards safer and sustainable food packaging by promoting food that is good for both the people and the planet.





Do Your bit

It's time to begin thinking about the environmental consequences of our food choices, and to tailor our choices based on this very important factor. We need to bring about this attitude change, before it gets too late, both for us as well as the only planet we have. Some of the simple steps that help in a BIG way are:

1

Eat less of the packaged, highly processed foods. They are proven bad for health (saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, salt, preservatives, myriad chemicals), but besides this red flag, the second reason is that the disposable plastic packaging they come in never degrades, and so is obviously bad for the planet. At least look for products with biodegradable or reusable or recyclable packaging, like paper, cardboard, wood, metal, etc. While travelling avoid bottled water too for the same reason. How difficult can it be to carry water from home!

2

Moderate your meat intake, to cut your diet-driven carbon footprint massively. So, try to get your protein more from protein-packed legumes and beans. No one is asking you to go meat free, but just toning down portions and frequency is good enough. Also, fruit is the way to go, as fruit crops yield the highest pound yield per acre, and therefore environment friendly.

3

Go organic. Now this decision may not prove practical or wallet friendly for everyone. But they do offer big pay offs to the environment... so may be one can begin by making small switches. Find out which foods are most worth buying organic, and buy just those. Every bit counts. Increase in demand of organic foods increases the chance of that food to be grown with minimum pesticide usage and ends up being grown organically.

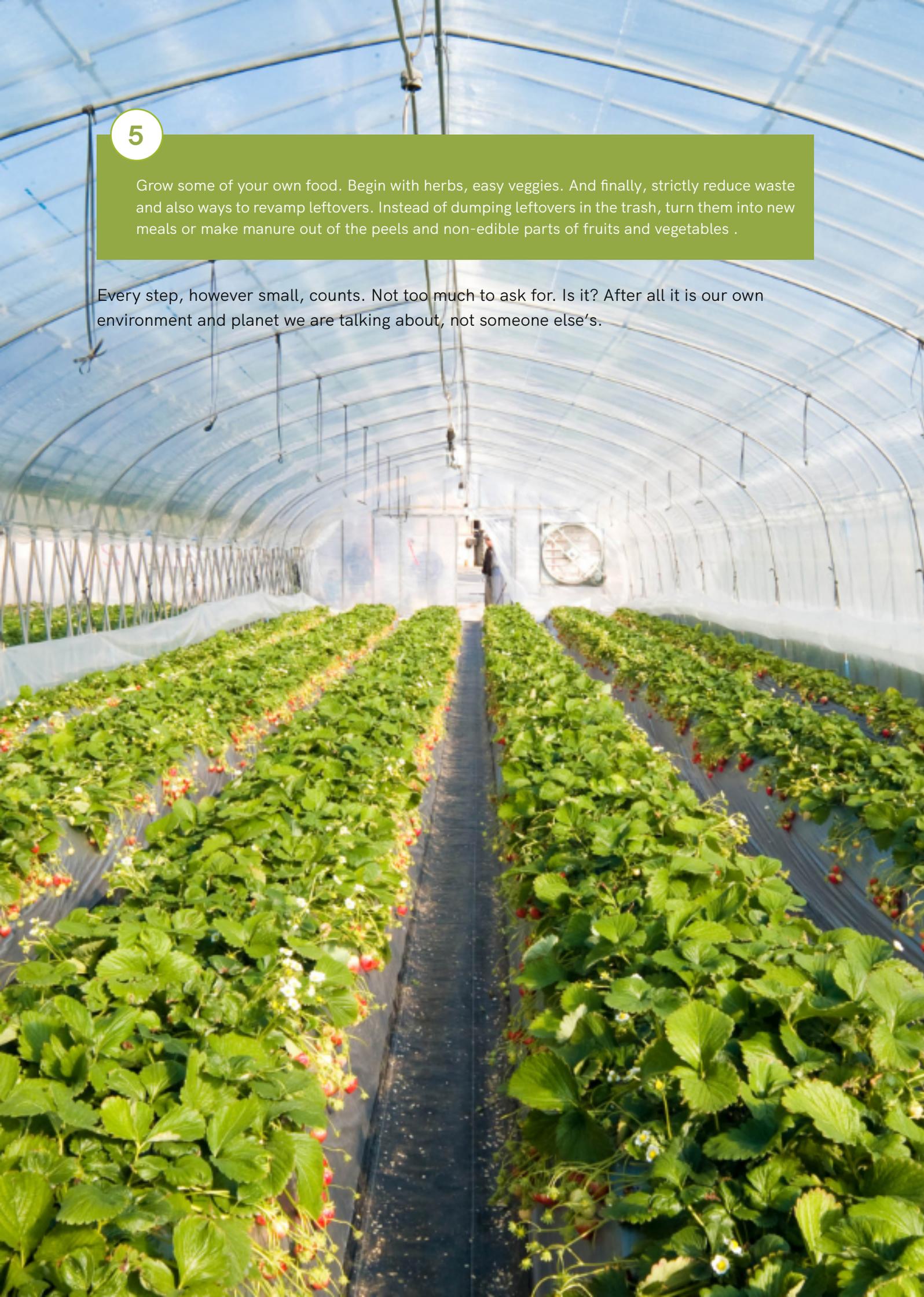
4

As far as possible go local and eat seasonal. This is possibly the best way to lower your carbon footprint when it comes to what you eat. This way fewer trucks and vehicles would need to travel long distances to deliver exotic, foreign foods to grocery stores in your area. Sabja instead of chia seeds... get the drift. There's enough incentive otherwise too: local food is fresher — and therefore tastes better and retains more nutrients too. Check out what's growing nearby right now and try to plate that more. It costs less too. Also support restaurants that purchase their products from locally-owned markets.

5

Grow some of your own food. Begin with herbs, easy veggies. And finally, strictly reduce waste and also ways to revamp leftovers. Instead of dumping leftovers in the trash, turn them into new meals or make manure out of the peels and non-edible parts of fruits and vegetables .

Every step, however small, counts. Not too much to ask for. Is it? After all it is our own environment and planet we are talking about, not someone else's.





Chapter 17

The Organic Decision

Should you go organic? That's a very valid question in everyone's mind today. And to take a decision it is important to have all the right information available to separate fact from fiction, and find out if this dietary choice is right for you.

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that investing in health via the food we eat is and should be non-negotiable. After all, both our life's - longevity and quality are at stake. And so, going organic makes sense. But are organic foods truly superior? A blanket statement that going completely organic is the way to go, wouldn't be the right thing to do as there are still multiple challenges. First, we still know so little about the actual difference between organic and conventional foods. Second, most of us don't know how to pick the truly organic foods. Third, the availability is always sketchy and not dependable. Fourth, the cost tends to be prohibitive in most cases.

So even though going the organic way is truly the way to go, the choice is a personal one to make. Demystifying what is organic actually can go a long way in being able to make an informed choice

What?

Organic food is food grown ecologically, without the use of chemical fertilizers, growth regulators, pesticides, weedicides and prepared without chemicals in processing. It is the product of farming systems such as recycling of farm waste, using natural, plant or animal waste, products for soil fertility, pest control and disease, without harming natural resources. Therefore, organic foods are good for both, our health and the health of the environment.

Why?

We need to eat organic for the simple sensible reasons. Organic is healthier for you as well as for the environment; because it has all the benefits that nature intended the crop or the fruit or the vegetable to have in terms of vitamins, minerals, fibre, antioxidants and so on. Plus, the added benefit is being free of harmful chemicals through pesticide and synthetic fertilizer residues, which tend to be destructive when unleashed in our bodies. Further, since organically grown foods are grown by rebuilding healthy soils, they have more trace elements and micronutrients, the deficiency of which leads to many health problems; e.g. iron deficiency leads to anaemia.



The Taste Tests

Of course, there is a question of taste - organic foods definitely tastes better and fresh. Anything grown organically is better in taste, as compared to its inorganic counterpart. Experience the aroma and taste of whole wheat chapattis being made or bread or baingan bharta, chhola, rajma... or bite into raw tomatoes or an organic apple - and decide for yourself!

Cost Factor

Money is of course a concern. Yes, generally speaking, on an average, organic food items cost about 25% to 30% more than inorganic foods. But today, most people eat out about once a week. If they were to just cut down one outing, they would be able to afford buying organic. So, it is comes down to a question of priorities, nothing else.

The Good Work!

The organic foods market is growing at a fast pace in India with more and more people getting interested in it and more land being allocated to it. Good regulatory environment in the country will help speed up the process. Plus, it is important to make things more transparent, as only when the ambiguity is rectified, the organic food movement will gather more steam.

FSSAI has regulated that organic food needs to comply with the requirements of labelling under Food Safety and Standards Regulations (FSSR) in addition to that of National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) or Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)-India. In addition, all the organic foods need to showcase FSSAI's Organic Logo (Jaivik Bharat)

All the certified organic food operators in India are listed at the Indian Organic Integrity Database Portal developed by FSSAI. The Portal (<https://jaivikbharat.fssai.gov.in/>) serves as a good reference point and here consumers can check and access the information about certified operators.

An Expert Committee on Organic Foods has been set up to look after the issues emerging from the implementation of the regulations.



Why Go Organic?

When you eat organic you eat natural, clean food which is nutritious and delicious. Organic milk tastes sweeter. organically grown fruit and vegetables tastes richer and fresh as are naturally ripened. Organic eggs are a result of birds that aren't continually fed antibiotics in their regular feed and are fed organic feed. According to research in-organic whole wheat is one of the most heavily pesticide foods, so is best avoided. Organic atta is usually stone-ground, has all the bran intact - therefore the family of B vitamins - and has enough roughage to keep your digestion humming along.

Organic dals are usually not polished, just milled. That is why organic moong dhuli and arhar dal are pale in colour. The fewer chemicals you put into your body the better. Plus, the taste and aroma are very different - more flavorful! Organic sugar is minus all chemicals like Sulphur free which is used as a bleaching agent in most white sugars.

Organic salts don't have any bleaching agents, and anti-caking agents. Switch to cold-pressed organic oils; there is a range available - Groundnut, Safflower/Kardi, Sunflower, Sesame, Mustard, Olive oil.

The benefit here is that the nutrients are intact as the processing method does not use a high temperature that causes nutrient loss. Also, these are high in flavour and fragrance. Spices give us micro-nutrients, and help digestion and metabolism. They are not just flavoring to food, so it is important to choose pesticide free spices. These are best consumed organic.





Chapter 18

The Organic Decision

Plastic sticks are there in the environment since decades, threatening wildlife and spreading toxins. There's a lot of microplastic dumped in our oceans. No one even really knows how long it's going to take to decompose - estimates range from at least hundreds of years to possibly a lot longer.

It also contributes to global warming (almost all plastics are made from chemicals that come from the production of planet-warming fuels like gas, oil and even coal). But we operate in a broken system that's clogged with plastic. Thankfully now there is a global movement gaining steam to reduce plastic pollution - more and more people are cutting down on the amount of plastic they use - to ensure that we can have cleaner streets, oceans, and beautiful communities. Plus, not only will these steps help save our planet but also improves our quality of life.

Moving away from plastic products can be a daunting task, but it is not impossible. All it takes is some thought and some serious will to want to make a difference. So, start small - soon all those small plastic-free changes will add up really big.

Simple steps you can take

- 1 Refuse to use all single use plastics.
- 2 Carry reusable shopping bags.
- 3 Give up bottled water.
- 4 Use glass, metal or bamboo drinking straws or say no to straw.
- 5 Cut out sodas, juices, and other plastic-bottled beverages.
- 6 Buy breads that comes in paper bags.
- 7 Choose milk in returnable glass bottles Or unpackaged but pasteurized loose /token milk.
- 8 Carry lunches in reusable stainless steel or glass containers.
- 9 Kitchens are a plastic magnet. The most environment friendly way to green your kitchen is to use the plastic items you have, and then when they reach the end of their life, replace them with plastic-free alternatives. Use ceramic, glass or metal bowls instead of plastic ones. Wooden or metal utensils instead of plastic ones.

10 Hotels can use paper-sealed glass bottles for captive use in place of plastic bottles.

11 Keep a zero-waste food kit in your car at all times - a container, a reusable straw, a coffee cup, a water bottle, a napkin, and similar stuff that can help you avoid using plastic wherever you are.

The Good Work!

The Food Authority has started a consumer awareness campaign **“Eat Right India for Sustainable Living”** as a call to action for plastic waste management and reduction of plastic footprint in the F&B industry. Accordingly, FSSAI has a Scientific Panel on Packaging to deal with the challenges in the area and to address them accordingly in the regulations.

As mentioned earlier FSSAI has also constituted a Network for Scientific Co-operation for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (NetSCoFAN), which is the network of research and academic institutions working in the area of food and nutrition to work for safer and sustainable packaging options.

FSSAI is further asking State/UT Food Safety departments to create awareness and to educate the public on use of alternatives to plastics, proper plastic disposal and litter management. It has started work on the process of allowing the use of other food grade packaging materials for packaging of drinking water and has allowed serving drinking water in paper sealed reusable glass bottles for captive use within the hotel premises subject to certain conditions.

FSSAI has also issued guidelines for use of bamboo as food contact material. The guidelines also permit use of liquid nitrogen dosing in PET bottles during the packaging of drinking water. This would help in strengthening the bottle thereby facilitating the manufacture and use of bottles with lower wall thickness.

The process of removing the restriction on the use of returnable bottles for packaging of artificially sweetened beverages has been initiated. The key features of FSSAI’s plastic free program include: preparation for collection and disposal of plastic waste in F&B sector, awareness campaign and mobilization of employees massive plastic waste collection drives by all, across rural and urban areas and recycling of collected plastic waste.

In addition, corporations and food companies using plastic for packaging have been nudged FSSAI to find newer ways to get their products to us in a plastic free manner.

NO MORE
PLASTIC



It is time to learn to believe in a world where the land, sky, oceans, and water are home to an abundance of life, not an abundance of plastic and make an effort to reduce our own plastic footprint and recycle as much as possible.





Chapter 19

Save Food Share Food

Answer a simple question: When is the food best? Only answer to this is, it is best when it's on our plate, ready to be eaten. Of course it's good in your pantry too, ready to be used. And it is at its worst when it is thrown in the bin, or in other words WASTED.

Let's not kid ourselves. Food is being wasted at an alarming rate. Along with the grocery stores and restaurants, we - consumers - are the largest source contributing to the wastage. By wastage we mean the last few bites from your plate that you couldn't / or didn't want to finish, or your bread crusts, all the stuff that could have been transformed into food.

On a personal level food wastage costs labor, resources, time and at the end of day a lot of money too, besides impacting the planet in a negative way. Yes, saving food does just save you money, but affects the bigger picture, too. How? Well, reducing food waste is good for the planet, as it helps slow down global warming. That is because organic materials, like food scraps are broken down by bacteria to produce methane.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and it has a warming potential of 21 times that of carbon dioxide. That is why it will be a huge help if we can reduce methane emissions - and saving food (and not wasting it) will play an important part in helping reduce methane emissions and combating global climate change.

Wasted food equates with wasted resources. All the water, energy, seeds etc. used to grow, and ensure that the food reaches us are wasted when we waste food.

Save and Share Food

Live by the mantra - my food's not rubbish. There are endless ways you can reduce, reuse and recycle your food waste - just follow this simple rule of JUST not waste even a scrap of food. Some simple ways:

Shop Smart:

Only buy as much as you need. Chuck the greed. Make a point to use up all the food you purchased during the last trip to the market before buying more groceries.

Store Right:

Wrong storage leads to a massive amount of food waste. When you store food correctly, it lasts longer.

Learn to Preserve:

Pickling, drying, canning, fermenting, freezing and curing are all methods you can use to make food last longer, thus reducing waste.

Use Leftovers:

Store leftovers in a clear glass container, rather than in an opaque container, to make sure you don't forget the food and use it soon enough. Also learn new recipes to use all the ingredients smartly.

Check your Serving Sizes:

By keeping your portion sizes within a healthy range will not just help keep your weight down, but also help reduce food waste.

Read about

Expiry dates; use food within the expiry date to avoid wastage.

Learn about composting:

Composting leftover food is a beneficial way to reuse food scraps, turning food waste into energy for plants.

Grow Some Food:

If possible, grow some of your own fruits, vegetables and herbs.

Pack your Lunch:

A helpful way to save money while reducing your carbon footprint is to bring your lunch to work with you.

Eat out right:

when you eat at a restaurant get the leftovers packed and eat at home the next day or give them to a needy person.

Recycle:

use up food scraps and unused food by setting up a compost bin or worm farm, feed the food scraps to your pets and donate unopened non-perishable food you don't need to a local charity before they spoil.

Spread the Word:

word of mouth is a powerful tool. Spreading the word is something everyone can do. Share your top tips, handy hints and favourite leftover recipes with friends and family and social media.



ZERO
WASTE



The Good Work!

FSSAI is working diligently for preventing surplus food waste. Excess food production, changing trends, minor imperfections in quality (shape, size, colour and freshness) and labelling errors leads to wastage of food in industry. Such food could be salvaged by timely withdrawing it from the distribution network, collecting it and then redirecting it to the people in need. That is why FSSAI is running campaigns to end waste at every level of the food system by catalysing reduction of food wastage movements around the country.

Food Safety and Standards (Recovery and Distribution of Surplus Food) Regulations, 2018 specifies that it is the responsibility of the food donor and surplus food distribution organisations to ensure food safety and hygiene while distribution of surplus food. Through the 'Save Food Share Food' initiative, FSSAI is promoting donation of surplus food via a PAN India network of food recovery agencies called IFSA (Indian Food Sharing Alliance). This initiative is also working at bridging the gap between food business operators, surplus food distribution organisation and in ensuring that such food reaches timely to those in need. Simultaneously, the initiative also lays focus on reducing and curbing food waste. For this:

- ★ A PAN India network of 82 Surplus Food Distribution Organisations has been identified.
- ★ A dedicated website to sensitize people on the importance of reducing surplus food waste and hunger in the country has been put in place. The website acts as a repository of information on this initiative. (www.sharefood.fssai.gov.in)
- ★ A 24-hour helpline to help food donors connect with Surplus Food Distribution Organisations is available. Common helpline number and a mobile application for easy Pan India food donation (is in pipeline)
- ★ Guidelines for prevention of food waste at home, school, restaurants and retail have been issued.
- ★ Regulation and trainings for safe recovery of surplus food distribution agencies to ensure safe food handling during collection, transport, storage and distribution of surplus food.
- ★ Campaigns to encourage food businesses and citizens to donate food.



Moving Forward

A strategy to mobilize Food Businesses to donate their surplus food products (processed & prepackaged) is under process and identification and streamlining of the network of Surplus Food Distribution Organizations under the Indian Food Sharing Alliance (IFSA) is being planned.

FSSAI is also working with State FDAs to conduct workshops in the states to create awareness among citizens, sensitize food businesses and retailers to reduce food wastage and donate excess food. A mobile-based application to help donors for easy and quick donations and to connect with Surplus Food Distribution organizations is also being developed.

Using up every edible bit of your food, and saving food is one of the best step that we can all take to save our planet, look after the environment, and save it for the next generation. And it is not that tough to do.

