

We have enough food to feed everyone, yet the food deficit is widening

By [Andy Du Plessis](#)

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South Africa produces enough food to feed all its people. Farmers, agri processing plants, food manufacturers, retailers, warehousing and logistics companies, food distributors, and thousands of other businesses that operate in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry all typically generate huge amounts of 'waste'. Since most of this food, if intercepted in time, is good for human consumption, we prefer to refer to this as surplus food. This food becomes surplus because of inherent weaknesses throughout the consumer goods value chain.



South Africa has a net surplus of food as a country – yet food poverty at the household level is widening, and now even more rapidly so because the pandemic is decimating our economy and jobs at an alarming rate. About one third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted. Approximately 50% of this food loss takes place during harvesting. Processing, packaging, distribution and retail account for a further 45% of wasted food. The remaining 5% of food waste is the responsibility of consumers (*WWF Surplus Food Report 2018*). Clearly, our efforts to divert food must be directed at the pre-consumer phases.

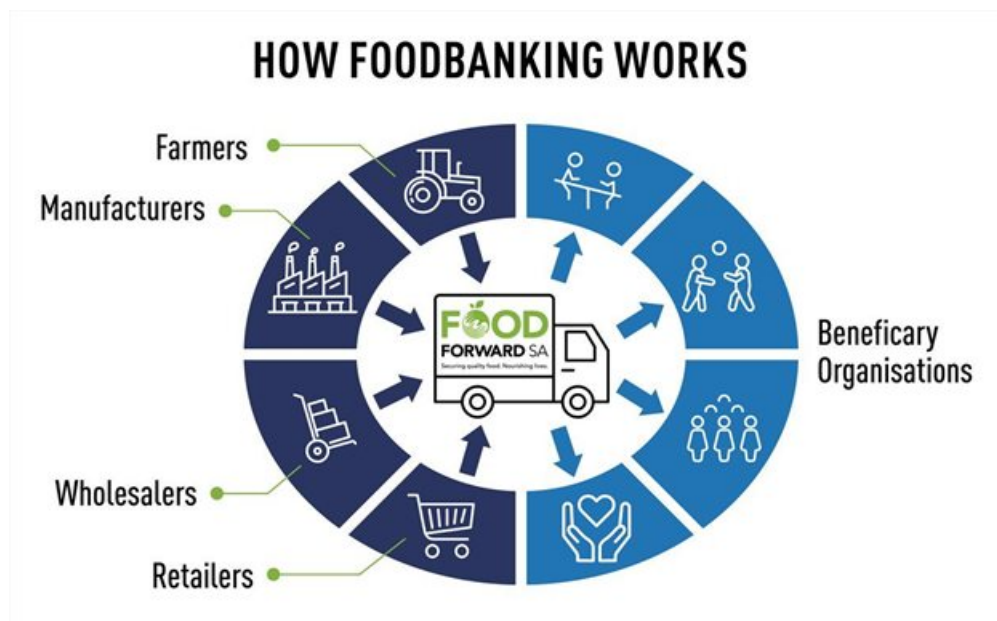
Defining 'surplus food'

Before we delve deeper into why we have so much surplus food and why it's not getting to those who need it, it's important to clarify what we mean by surplus food because there are huge misconceptions, misunderstandings and even misapprehension around this issue.

Surplus food is *not* expired food, lower grade food, or rotten food. It is perfectly good food. Because of unforeseen circumstances throughout the food value chain, more than 10 million tonnes of food is lost or wasted annually. Some examples of why food becomes surplus include:

- Overproduction
- Poor forecasting
- Specification requirements

- Incorrectly labelled products
- Damaged goods
- Errors in manufacturing, packaging or logistics phases
- Short-dated products and confusion around date labelling



Sadly, almost all of this good quality edible surplus food is dumped in landfill or incinerated. If timeously intercepted, surplus food can be diverted to address the growing problem of hunger and food poverty across South Africa - which is what FoodForward SA has been doing for more than 11 years now. We recover edible surplus food from our supply chain partners and redistribute it to registered charities that use the food to make meals for vulnerable people in under-served communities.

According to the Department of Environment, Forestry, and Fisheries' (DEFF) *2020 Waste Management Report*, in 2018, South Africa generated 55 million tonnes of general waste, with only 11% of this waste being diverted from landfills. More than 50% of this is organic waste, of which food waste is in all likelihood a major contributor. The wasted resources used to produce this food that ends up in landfills and the negative impact it has on our environment are serious warning signs that must be heeded and addressed with urgency. We have too many South African households experiencing acute food shortages not to tackle this problem. We're also experiencing severe constraints regarding the availability of landfill space.



Major SA food brands join PnP in food waste reduction commitment

15 Oct 2020



Innovation and creativity needed

We need to be more innovative and creative around how we manage surplus food and intercept it early enough for it to be usable. One way to manage this better is the introduction of laws that make dumping and incinerating edible usable food illegal. France, four years ago, was the first country in the world to ban supermarkets from throwing away or destroying unsold food, forcing them instead to donate this to charities and food banks (*The Guardian International Edition: 2016*). Campaigners now hope to persuade the European Union to adopt similar legislation among member states.

What is very encouraging and exciting is that, following France's bold move, countries like Norway, Australia, Italy, Denmark, Dubai, Japan and South Korea have all either set hard targets for the reduction of food waste by companies or created an environment that makes it easier for companies to donate surplus food. We need similar action in South Africa.



Commitment to reduce food waste, loss

Another important recent development in South Africa is that food manufacturers, suppliers and retailers have committed to a landmark [voluntary agreement to reduce food waste and loss](#). The agreement will mark the beginning of initiatives to ensure that surplus food which is still safe for human consumption can be donated to serve needy families in South Africa. The Consumer Goods Council of South Africa's (CGCSA) Food Safety Initiative (FSI) has already partnered with the Department of Trade and Industry to secure funding from the SA-EU Dialogue Facility to support the initiative. FoodForward SA has been part of these discussions for a while now and we are excited for the opportunities that this will bring to organisations like FoodForward SA. This initiative speaks directly to what FoodForward SA focuses on and which we believe is a more effective and cost-effective way to address food insecurity.

A third area where we can be more proactive is to have accurate data collection at the actual origin of the various waste streams and volumes. We can put proper measures in place for improved implementation of food waste management. Transparency in terms of disclosure, monitoring and reporting of 'waste'/surplus food is critical.



How McCain is working towards a sustainable food chain in SA

2 Oct 2020



Diverting waste from landfill

The DEFF is working towards reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate change, which is key to a more sustainable socio-economic development plan and ensures the stability of the country's natural resources, systems and environment. One of the targets set by DEFF is to prevent waste and where waste cannot be prevented, to ensure 40% of waste is diverted from landfill within five years, 55% within 10 years and at least 70% within 15 years. While this is a step in the right direction, these targets are not enough given the magnitude of the problem. More stringent targets are needed within the next five to seven years.

Food security and national development are mutually dependent. Nutrition is critical to educational outcomes and success in the job market. If we fail to ensure that all our people in South Africa have access to sufficient nutritious and safe food, it will have devastating consequences for our development as a nation.

We, therefore, call on all the actors within the consumer goods supply chain to work with organisations like FoodForward SA that have a national footprint and impact, along with the required infrastructure and logistics capacity, to donate surplus food timeously so that we can use this food to address food insecurity at a national level and realise the right to food for all our people.

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