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FOOD PRODUCTION VERSUS FOOD PRESERVATION: CHOICE OF A STRATEGY

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The world today produces enough grain alone to provide every human being on the planet with 3,500 kilocalories a day (FAO-recommended norm is around 3000) However, about 800 million people are registered as undernourished. So there are two aspects of the problem: food availability and food accessibility. Nowadays logistical and operational issues are becoming equally, if not more important than just food production. FAO claims that roughly one-third of edible parts of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which is about 1.3 billion ton per year. Food loss takes place at all stages of production-consumption cycle: plant growing, postharvest handling and storage, processing, distribution and finally, consumption. Figures vary from region to region, in more developed countries major losses occur at final stages of that cycle while in developing countries at earlier stages. Research done by FAO shows that industrialized and developing countries dissipate roughly the same quantities of food - 670 and 630 million tons respectively. Fruits and vegetables, plus roots and tubers have the highest wastage rates of any food. Global quantitative food losses and waste per year are roughly 30% for cereals, 40-50% for root crops, fruits and vegetables, 20% for oil seeds, meat and dairy plus 35% for fish.

There is one more aspect to global food availability, namely dietary preferences. Switch to vegetarian diet or at least stopping feeding cattle with grains edible by humans offers another major resource for increasing of food supply.

Under these circumstances the question is whether we should increase productivity of cropland with the help of new plant varieties, more sophisticated pesticides and fertilizers, new irrigation schemes, risking inevitable pollution, soil erosion, salinization, etc., or concentrate on proper handling of what we already get from existing agro- ecosystems.

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