

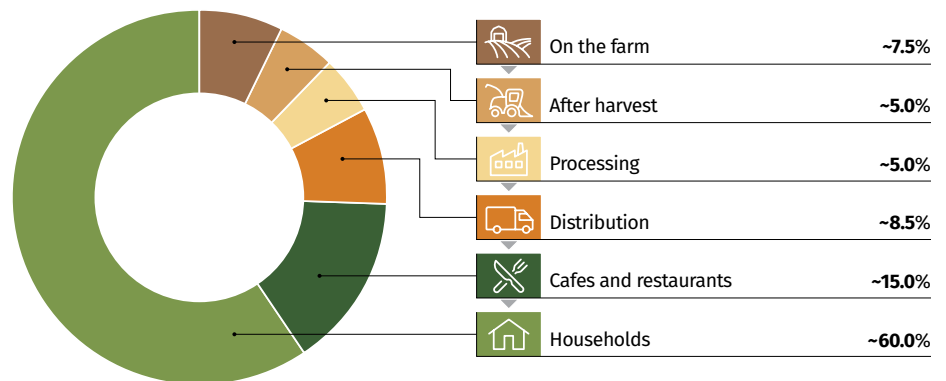
## Background brief

# Food Waste Challenge

An enormous amount of food that is grown or processed never makes it into our mouths. This is truly a global problem, with one third of the world's food going to waste, but in Australia specifically we waste 7.3 million tonnes of food each year. This is the equivalent of 300 kg per person per year or 1 in every 5 bags of groceries.



Food waste is not just the squishy banana in your fruit bowl that you threw away, although more than half of total food waste happens once you bring it home from the supermarket. Sadly, some food never even leaves the farm, while some is deemed not the right size, shape or quality for sale. Some food is lost during processing and packaging and some is damaged during transport. Too much food gets thrown out by favourite restaurants and cafes as well.



Adapted from figures quoted by the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre ([fightfoodwastecrc.com.au](http://fightfoodwastecrc.com.au))

Australia produces more than enough food for our population, so why can't we afford to waste it? Well, food waste is very expensive, costing Australia **\$20 billion every year**. And while Australia is a relatively wealthy country, about **5 million of us** last year experienced food insecurity, having run out of food and been unable to buy more. Food waste is also a huge environmental problem - growing and making our food uses a lot of **water, land and energy**:



A single almond needs about 12 litres of water to grow, while throwing out a burger wastes the same amount of water as a 90-minute shower.



An area of forest and bushland the size of the MCG is cleared every 2 minutes in Australia, much of this for agriculture.

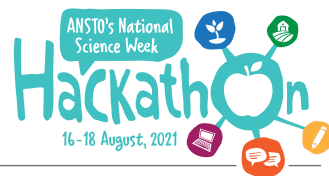


Energy used to grow wasted food accounts for more than 5% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Also, rotting food in landfill produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas.



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Why are we wasting all this food? Some reasons include:

- Market pressure for perfect-looking fruit and vegetables at the supermarkets mean that bruised or deformed items are usually discarded before they make it to the shelf.
- “Use by” and “best before” date stamps on foods are confusing for consumers, meaning that food is often thrown away by households while it is still good to eat.
- Fearing legal action, businesses will throw away perfectly edible food that has past it’s use by date.
- Many households, perhaps time-poor or not necessarily food-waste conscious, buy far more food than they can eat or only use part when in fact the whole item is good to eat.
- Many of us have become less aware of where their food comes from, how it is grown and the resources and time taken to grow it.

There are already some fantastic initiatives to reduce food waste. Several charitable organisations, like Food Bank, Oz Harvest and Second Bite redirect perfectly good food from large businesses to those in need, improving food security for many people who go hungry.

There are also programs that divert food waste from the commercial sector for composting on a large scale, reducing landfill fees for businesses and providing important fertiliser for agriculture.

Technology and apps are increasingly connecting savvy consumers with businesses that make and sell sustainable food. Even with these programs in place, there is still a lot more we could do to reduce the amount of food that we throw out.

### Resources for students

[www.foodbank.org.au/](http://www.foodbank.org.au/)

[fightfoodwastecrc.com.au/](http://fightfoodwastecrc.com.au/)

[www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste/food-waste](http://www.environment.gov.au/protection/waste/food-waste)

[www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumer/food-labelling/stay-safe/date-marking-storage-labelling](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumer/food-labelling/stay-safe/date-marking-storage-labelling)

[www.theguardian.com/food/2019/apr/17/the-truth-about-expired-food-how-best-before-dates-create-a-waste-mountain](http://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/apr/17/the-truth-about-expired-food-how-best-before-dates-create-a-waste-mountain)

[foodwastemovie.com/](http://foodwastemovie.com/)

[www.leftoverlovers.org/](http://www.leftoverlovers.org/)

[www.fairfoodforager.com.au/](http://www.fairfoodforager.com.au/)



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