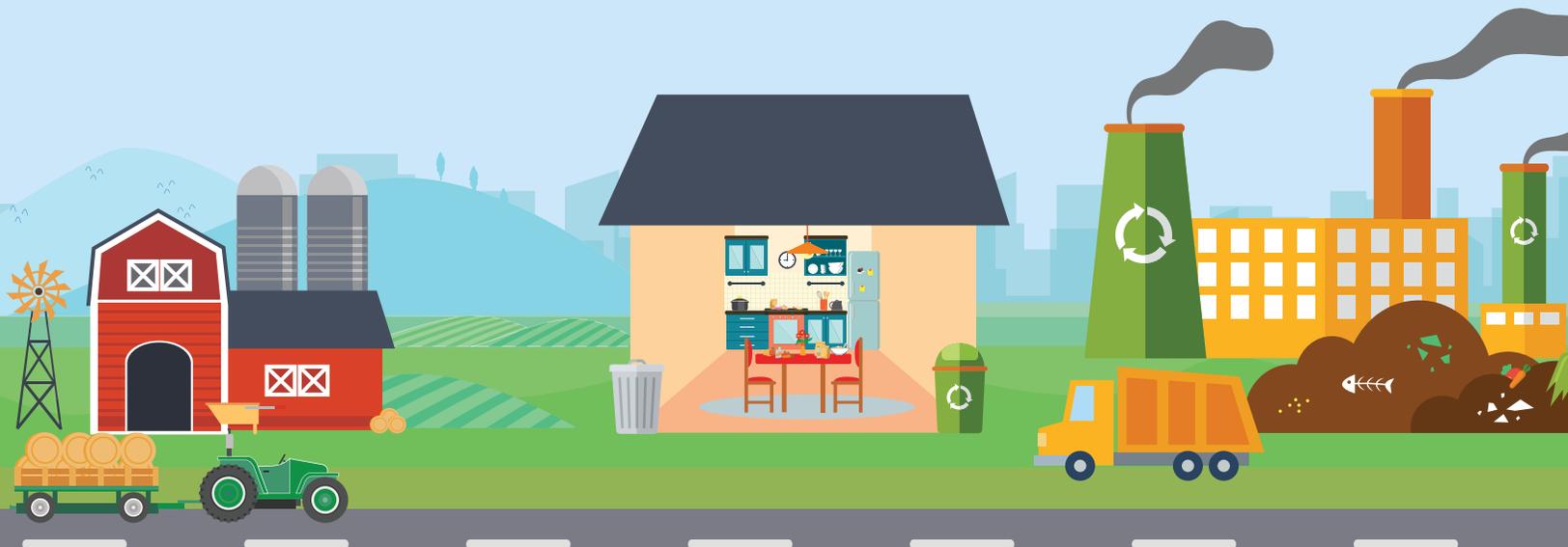


# From Farm to Fork to Landfill: Food Waste in Toronto

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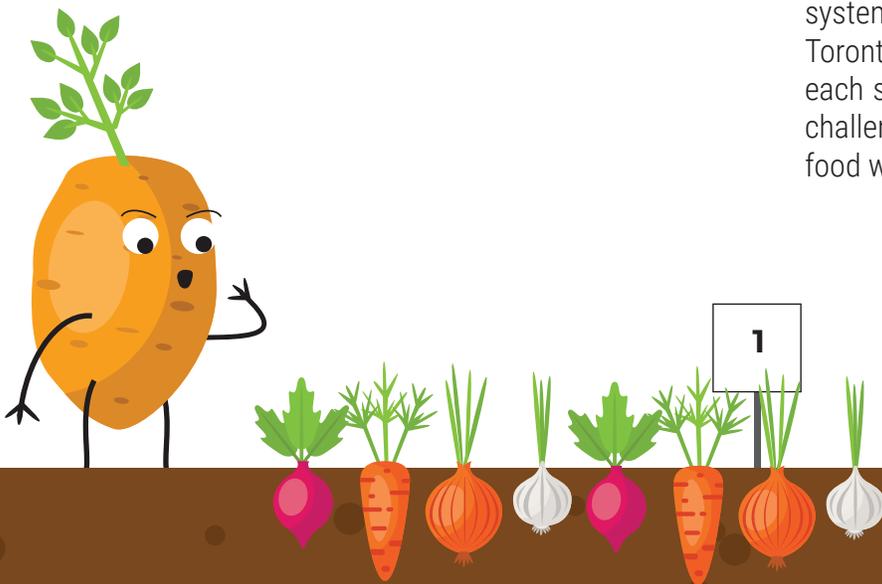
# OVERVIEW

**Currently in Canada, the annual per-capita food loss and waste (FLW) is 396 kilograms per person. Of that number, 122 kilograms or 31%, is fruit and vegetable waste. The journey of this segment of food from farm to fork to landfill has six major stakeholders: farmers, processing and packaging factories, distributors, grocery retailers, food service suppliers, residents, and the municipal waste management division. At every stage fruit and vegetable waste is generated, ranging from 4% to 47%.**

To date, efforts to reduce fruit and vegetable waste in Toronto have focused on food waste produced in households and disposal. From 2002 to 2004 the municipal government launched the Green Bin program across the city; an investment that used \$15 million of taxpayers' money. This program equipped households with a container specifically to dispose of organic waste, which includes food, garden and lawn clippings, animal and plant based materials, and cardboard. In 2017 the provincial government released a strategy for building a circular economy in Ontario where waste is considered a resource that can be recovered, reused and reintegrated.

Ontario residents generate a staggering 3.7 million tonnes of organic waste per year. When this waste is sent to the landfill, it's compressed with other waste, which produces methane, a greenhouse gas (GHG) that is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. GHG emissions from organic waste in the landfill accounts for 6% of the province's total emissions. The provincial government has reported that if improvements to this system aren't made, the province's landfills will run out of capacity within the next 20 years.

As the Canadian system of food waste is immensely widespread and complex, this report will solely focus on the journey of fruit and vegetable waste in Toronto. With a growing community of business owners and residents invested in environmental sustainability, systematic change in food waste is possible in Toronto. Beginning with identifying the root causes at each stage of this system, this report will discuss the challenges, gaps, and opportunities for stakeholders in food waste management.



# MAPPING THE PROBLEM BY STAGE

## 1. FARMS

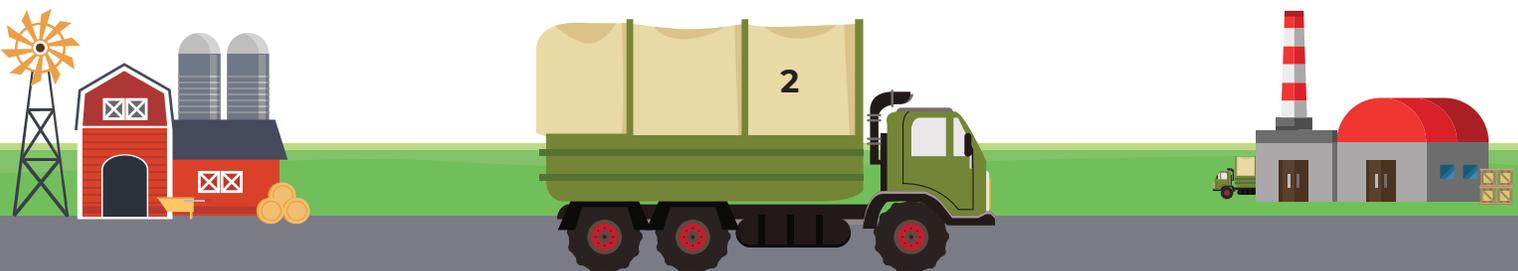
As fruits and vegetables are grown and harvested, 10% of FLW is produced at this stage through the following challenges.

- Farmers plant and harvest their produce depending on orders from their retailers. If a retailer revises or cancels an order, farmers may be left with excessive produce.
- When market prices are low, farmers leave fields unharvested. This is because the return on their investment does not justify the cost of harvesting and transporting the product to market.
- Farmers leave fruits and vegetables to spoil in the fields based on their cosmetic appearance. In North America, 30% of produce grown never makes it to retailers because of aesthetic imperfections. In Ontario alone, 25 million pounds of fresh produce are left to waste in fields annually.

## 2. PROCESSING & PACKAGING FACTORIES

After farmers have sent their produce to be processed and packaged, 20% of FLW is generated at this stage.

- Based on the retailer's order, both the edible and inedible parts of the food are trimmed then packaged. In this process, technical malfunctions can lead to defects in the product. If the food is not cut correctly or if the packaging is mislabelled, the entire product will be discarded because of brand restrictions.
- It's estimated that these factories lose about 16% of their raw materials during manufacturing, as reported by the Waste Resources and Action Programme (WRAP). Further comprehensive data is lacking in this stage as there is little clarity by manufacturers over the definition of food waste distinct from by-products.



### 3. DISTRIBUTORS

Once packaged, the product is picked up to be transported. At this stage, the smallest amount of FLW is made at 4%.

- As the product is being transported, food waste is a result of improper handling or poor management of storage conditions. For example, the temperature and relative humidity of the truck can lead to the deterioration or contamination of stored products. In this case, truckers dump rejected perishable shipments in the nearest landfill if another buyer cannot be found, or if the product's shelf life is too short to be considered for donation.

### 4. GROCERY RETAILERS

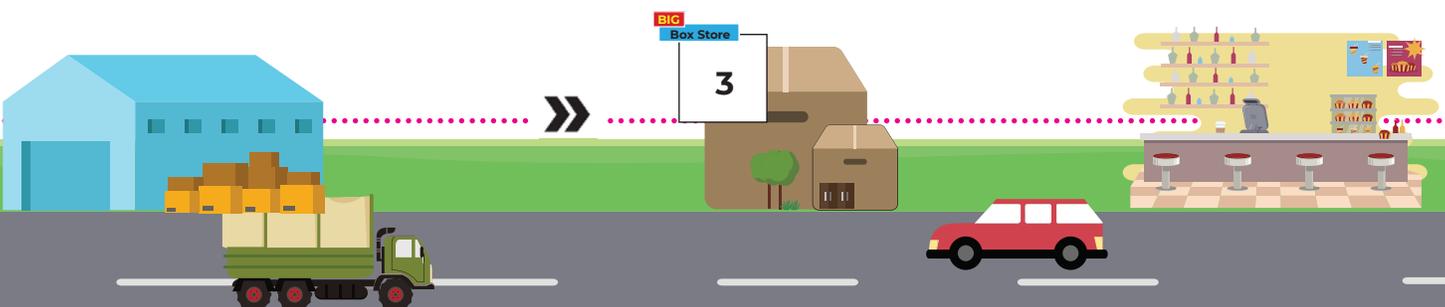
At this stage, 10% of FLW is made as retailers prepare the products for sale.

- It's estimated that retailers waste \$175 million of fresh produce annually, based on fluctuating consumer demand.
- As retailers stack their shelves, improper stacking and handling leads to damaged produce. Based on the cosmetic appearance of the food, suppliers and consumers reinforce their aesthetic standards, leaving produce to spoil.

### 5. FOOD SERVICE SUPPLIERS

In this industry, 9% of FLW is made.

- This includes waste made in the kitchens of restaurants during preparation and excessive produce left in storage that is not served before it spoils. As a result, restaurants serve large portion sizes, especially if they have non-seasonal and seasonal menu options.
- As well, 70% of FLW occurs after the food is served, specifically from the food that's left from customers who did not finish their meal.





## 6. RESIDENTS

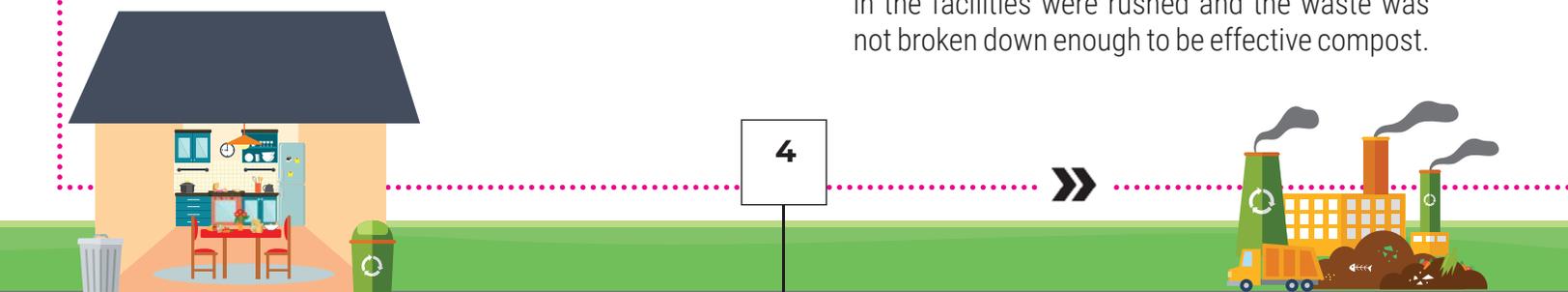
At 47%, the most amount of FLW is made at this stage.

- The average Canadian household wastes about \$31 per week, or \$1,600 per year, through food waste. As reported by residents, this is mostly a result of food spoilage from bulk purchasing of food.
- Another key driver of food waste is the misconception of date labels. In the U.S.A., confusion over the meaning of date labels is estimated to account for 20% of consumer waste of edible food. This equates to about \$29 billion USD of wasted consumer spending each year.

## 7. MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

In Toronto, the collected waste is transported to either an organics processing facility or, if unsorted, the landfill. The challenges with waste management at this stage focuses on infrastructure.

- In 2014, the provincial government reported that organic waste made up one third of Ontario's total waste, and nearly 2.4 million tonnes was sent to the landfill.
- In the organics processing facility, waste is pre-processed to remove plastic bags and contaminant materials, and then sent to a hydropulper. The hydropulper is similar to a large blender that spins the organics to a liquid pulp. After this, the pulp undergoes a decomposition process for at least 15 days to be converted into two products: compost and biogas. As reported by A&L Canada, a leading agricultural laboratory, there have been serious problems found with the compost produced, such as unfinished compost and high sodium counts. Essentially, the process in the facilities were rushed and the waste was not broken down enough to be effective compost.



# MAPPING THE SOLUTIONS LANDSCAPE BY MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS

## GOVERNMENT

Globally, interventions at various stages in this system have been made through all levels of government. Examples of successful interventions includes the following.



In 1950, Germany had 50,000 landfill sites. Today, they have 300 sites which are mandated to only accept sorted waste. This was made possible through the combined efforts of policy and innovative technology.



Inspired by a campaign led by WRAP, which reduced food waste in households by 21%, the City of Vancouver launched Love Food Hate Waste. This campaign shared information on food storage, creative recipes and meal planning options.



The federal government in France legislated a ban on the disposal of unsold food, which drove donation to reduce food waste.



In 2016, the City of Toronto approved a *Long Term Waste Strategy* that will guide Toronto for the next 30 - 50 years, committing to 70% diversion of waste from the landfill. Similarly, in 2018 the provincial government approved their strategy for a waste-free Ontario through building the circular economy. This included enabling two acts: the *Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016*, and the *Waste Diversion Transition Act, 2016*. Under the new legislation, the province is establishing a producer responsibility regime.





## INDUSTRY



Social enterprises have been facilitating a channel for consumers to purchase food that did not meet a supplier's cosmetic standard. This includes Imperfect Produce, a venture based in San Francisco, and The Misfits, a cooperative based in Alberta. In Provin, France, the retail chain The Ugly Revolution sold 1.2 tonnes of produce in the first two days of its campaign.



In striving for a strong corporate social responsibility plan, companies have set targets for environmental sustainability during their processing. For example, Morrisons, a supermarket chain in the United Kingdom, has donated unsold food that is still safe to local community organisations.



To address one of the challenges with the distribution stage, Food Cowboy is a mobile application that routes surplus food from wholesalers and restaurants to food banks instead of landfills.



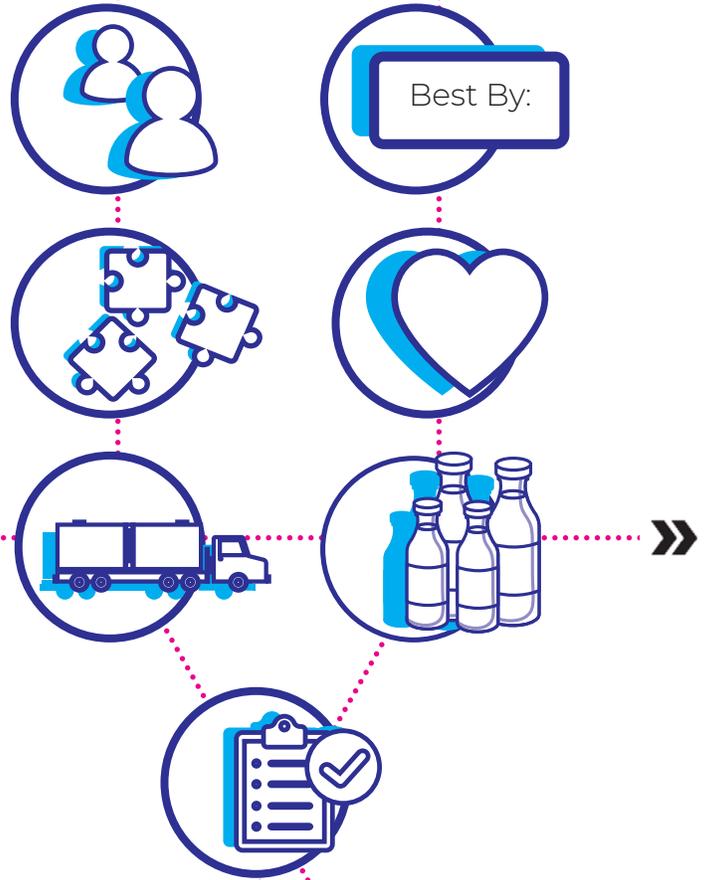
Across Canada, Loblaw Companies Ltd. has set a target to reduce their carbon footprint by 30% by 2030. This includes improving their diversion rates from 61% to 80% in corporate stores and reducing the intensity of transportation emissions.



# MAPPING GAPS AND OBSTACLES

Any approach for systemic change must consider all intersections of this challenge. This includes developing a collaborative plan with stakeholders that works towards food waste reduction and diversion from landfills.

The following table (page 8) highlights these gaps and includes opportunities for local solutions.



| Gaps and Levers of Change   | Opportunity  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>No existing collaborative method for food waste measurement</p> <p><b>Lever of Change:</b><br/>Mandate an evaluative framework for major stakeholders</p>   | <p>An opportunity for the federal government and academic institutions is to develop measurement methodologies and provide technical support across the food supply chain to employ comparable methods in measuring, tracking and reporting FLW.</p> <p>This includes a full life-cycle analysis of the supply chain for FLW that considers impact on GHG emissions.</p>                       |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Consumer misconceptions on date labels</p> <p><b>Lever of Change:</b><br/>Regulate the information on produce date labels</p>   | <p>If mandated by the government, industry stakeholders in supply chains would need to standardize date labels to reduce confusion. An opportunity for businesses as well is to use differentiated pricing for products which are near or past the date label.</p>   |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Cosmetic standards of produce</p> <p><b>Lever of change:</b><br/>Reform food grading for cosmetic standards</p>   | <p>Broadening cosmetic standards to incorporate a wider range of physical characteristics will dramatically reduce food waste. As demonstrated by enterprises mentioned earlier, consumers are willing to purchase produce that does not meet a supplier's cosmetic standards.</p>   |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Food spoilage during distribution</p> <p><b>Lever of change:</b><br/>Reform food inspection policies and support innovative storage technology during shipment</p>  | <p>At the government level, developing streamlined procedures for border and customs inspectors would facilitate faster movement of food shipments. This would minimize the opportunity for food spoilage due to unnecessary delays. Similarly, distributors can invest in research and development of innovative storage solutions in their trucks to accommodate delays.</p>                 |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Excessive shelf stacking and organization that damages produce</p> <p><b>Lever of Change:</b><br/>Expand training for inventory and display management</p>  | <p>An opportunity for retailers to reduce food waste is to include inventory and display management training during their staff onboarding. Retailers often stack displays high, which puts too much weight on produce that leads to bruising.</p>   |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Lack of incentive or regulation for household and retailer waste management</p> <p><b>Lever of Change:</b><br/>Collaborative efforts for enforcing waste management guidelines coupled with educational campaigns and incentives for behavioural change</p> | <p>Similar to the U.K. and Vancouver, the City of Toronto can improve on their existing campaigns and initiatives for encouraging residents to reduce waste. This would include adding information on food storage, seasonal recipes, and proper waste segregation. As well, the municipal government can set strict guidelines for waste pick-up to ensure that waste is sorted properly.</p> |
| <p><b>Gap Identified:</b><br/>Liability barriers for food services to donate unsold food</p> <p><b>Lever of Change:</b><br/>Amended legislation to allow for food donations</p>   | <p>In a collaboration with policy makers, stakeholders in the food service industry can share their concerns with donating unsold food. Bringing awareness to the <i>Donation of Food Act, 1994</i> can bring reassurance to stakeholders and allow for insight into possibly amending the legislation.</p>  |

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Abdul. Owner at Freshly Squeezed. Interviewed by Singla, A. 6 March 2018.

Anush. Assistant Manager at Adonis Restaurant. Interviewed by Al Harz, H. 5 March 2018.

Danuta. Co-owner and Organic Farmer at Wanigan Farm. Interviewed by Singh, G. 1 February 2018.

Glen. Collection Staff at Waste Management, Inc. Interviewed by Singla, A. 28 February 2018.

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Jason. Waste Collector Staff at Atrium on Bay. Interviewed by Singla, A. 1 March 2018.

Jessica. Manager at Mr. Greek. Interviewed by Al Harz, H. 1 February 2018.

Jose. Baker at Cosmic Treats. Interviewed by Singh, G. 4 April, 2018.

Matt. Manager at Panera Bread. Interviewed by Singla, A. 25 February 2018.

Paul. Manager at Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen. Interviewed by Singla, A. 25 February 2018.

Riyaz. Manager at The Kitchen Table. Interviewed by Al Harz, H. 1 March 2018.

Vitoldus. Co-owner and Organic Farmer at Wanigan Farm. Interviewed by Singh, G. 1 February 2018.

*\*Some interviewees requested that only their first names were recorded.*