



Tropentag, September 11-13, 2024, hybrid conference

“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Assessment of food loss among arable crop farmers in Nigeria

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Abstract

Food loss and waste have been globally recognised as problematic phenomena. Most studies on this topic have been conducted in the Global North. However, there is limited data on the causes and extent of crop loss in the Global South, where substantial losses occur during crop production and distribution. Less than 35% of annual global studies on food loss have focused on these stages. In this study, food loss is described as any food originally planned or cultivated for human consumption, but omitted (irrespective of the alternative purpose) between the production and distribution stages. This omission has partially contributed to the current food crisis in the developing countries. In Nigeria, food loss has intensified, exacerbating the problem of limited access to food. In terms of food security, the country is ranked 25th among the 28 African countries. Among the studies conducted globally on food loss between 2016 and 2022, Nigeria was classified among the top ten countries with the most case studies. Paradoxically, millions of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition in the same country in which food is lost. Given this context and global interest in finding a sustainable solution to the problem, understanding the underlying reasons for continuing food loss in this region is pertinent. Although a wealth of literature is available on this subject, most studies employ quantitative research methods. With this approach, the role of food valuation practices among key actors, such as arable crop farmers, has received little attention. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap by examining food loss through the lens of valuation, which suggests that individuals and groups have different values that impact their economic activities. Primary data were collected from arable crop farmers in Nigeria using qualitative research approaches such as observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant interviews. Ultimately, this study explores the outcomes of valuation practices, specifically actors' actions, practices, and perceptions, that influence food loss. The insights gained from this study are expected to foster the design of impact-driven food loss reduction policies and interventions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Arable crops, food insecurity, food loss, food systems, food waste