

Zero Waste of Food

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Each year people in Taiwan throw away 1.8 million metric tones of food – enough to feed 5.5 million starving people in Haiti for one year or provide a nutritious lunch for 230,000 children of low-income families for 20 years? This astonishing figure was revealed at a meeting attended by more than 200 people at the Jing Si Hall, Hualien, on February 18; it was organized by the Tzu Chi Foundation to discuss a global problem that reflects the yawning gap between rich and poor countries. Its aim was to realize ‘zero waste of food’.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, of the world’s seven billion people, nearly one billion are living on the verge of starvation. Among the worst hit are tens of thousands living in Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Southern Sudan as well as in Haiti; they do not have enough to eat. The problem is not lack of food in the world but unequal distribution and the shocking waste in the developed world.

In Taiwan, many people throw into the kitchen waste bin food that they have not eaten. According to widely used data, for every five meals consumed, two are thrown away. Also discarded is food that has not reached its expiration date. Such practices lead to the figure of 1.8 million metric tones wasted a year – enough to feed 230,000 poor children from kindergarten to university.



Before the discussion, the audience saw a film “The Secret of Wasted Food”, which presented the issue. It showed starving children in Africa with bones as thin as matchsticks, people shouting and rioting on the streets of Haiti and residents of Indonesia scrounging for food in mountains of garbage; it contrasted this with images of many people throwing food away, to make viewers reflect on their own waste. 10-year-old girl Lin Yu-shuan saw in the film that people throw away much of the week’s supply of food. She was surprised and what a waste it was. Ku Lung-sheng said that nowadays people need to experience the pain of hunger to understand how precious food is.



Jin Shio-li, the master of the program, introduced the five scholars who have taken a long-term interest in the issue of food resources. One of them was Cheng Shu-li, who called herself ‘the ambassador of spoils’ for making a documentary film about a garbage mountain in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. She described the lives of those who lived next to the mountain and how three generations of the same family could not escape from this way of living. As a person who had seen the food crisis on the front line, she realized the relationship between peace and the environment and how to turn excess food into love, to give to those who need it. This sharing

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will create a global village that is sustainable for ever.

Hsieh Ching-kui, director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Tzu Chi Foundation, has seen the inequality of food distribution during his years of relief work. From his experience, he knows that buying food with money is not enough to solve the problem. "I hope that everyone can pay attention to the waste of food," he said. He also explained the viewpoint of being a consumer and farmer. He shared the process of how he grew rice.

The waste occurs not only during the production process but also during the transport and storage. Hong Yin-long, a famous vegetarian chef in Taiwan, said that careful use of the materials used in the kitchen could avoid waste. He invited eight members of the audience to the stage to sample a delicious dish made from skin cut and head of a radish; it was an example of how to achieve 'zero food waste'.



Chen Da-de, the founder of the Taiwan Food Bank, shared his ideal of "No waste of resources, no ending of love". For him, the Food Bank promotes the "Bank of Love Resources". As someone who provides love on the front line, he explained how to distribute food. At the end, he expounded his idea of how to inspire those who live on the street and turn them from aid recipients into producers. Chio Yi-ru, a professor at the Center for General Education of Tzu Chi University, shared the idea of how communities should support agriculture to prevent the waste of food. Bringing together the point of view of producer and consumer will make us respect and love the earth and help man make a form of life that is sustainable for ever. He also explained the education of food and agriculture in Japan -- what the earth teaches us and how it enables us to nurture and support life.

For many years, Master Cheng Yen has promoted the idea of "be 80 per cent full and giving 20 per cent to help others". In other words, not only do not waste nutritious food but use it to help people. "There are so many people suffering in this world that it is hard to maintain life. People with love can give a little and bring happiness to so many," she said.

Finally, Jin Shio-li invited everyone to be concerned for the world and take care to conserve things they use, conserve energy and use money they save to help others. In this way, we can not only reduce the waste of food but also make our bodies more healthy and have a graceful posture and more energy. She said that schools, restaurants, companies and households should work together to turn excess food into love and give to those in need and not create a problem of waste food.