

THE REASONS OF WASTE IN FIELDS

The reasons behind food waste and losses in farming are many. Some of them are strictly linked to the organic side of farming, some to market factors, others to risks taken by farmers trying to speculate on high prices during harvest.

As mentioned, farming is greatly influenced by the weather, as well as by other risks: parasites, adverse weather, unfavourable crops. So it is very difficult for farmers to predict with certainty the right quantity of produces to farm that will satisfy the market's demands. For this reason, as a trend, there are larger quantities of produces being farmed and produced. If they end up being excessive, they will be left in the fields to rot.

In other cases, produces cannot be harvested because of damages caused by parasites, diseases and unfavourable weather (hail, too much heat, too much rain, etc.). Or sometimes, financial reasons play an important role in deciding whether to pick a crop or not. If the market prices are too low when it's time to harvest, farmers can decide to leave a part of their crop on the fields because the earnings would not even cover harvesting and transportation costs.

The combination of both these phenomenon, those caused by nature and the market factors, is called "walk-by's", and cause the produces in fields not to be harvested and then buried. The produces go back to the fields as organic material but there are, without a doubt, losses in terms of human nutrition, and resources such as water, energy, work, chemicals, etc. used for farming and producing those goods.

In recent years some fields have not been harvested because the workforce was not available.

The respect of Quality Standard (calibre, colour, regular dimensions, shelf life, etc.) imposed by the great distribution and wholesalers, often causes a selective harvest, so that "non standard" produces (too big or too small, irregular, almost ripe) can be left in the field to rot.

Another cause is linked to possible health emergencies. For instance, in 2008, in the USA the Food and Drug Administration launched an alarm about possible salmonella contamination in tomatoes. At the end it was a false alarm but in the meantime the demand for tomatoes dropped. As a result, about 32% of the total fields grown as tomatoes was not harvested in the USA. (Something similar happened in Europe in 2011 with Escherichia Coli contamination on soy sprouts).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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