

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Food waste is one of the most significant sustainability challenges we face today. In 2019, Gooch et al. estimated that 35.5 million metric tonnes of food were lost or wasted annually in Canada. This accounts for 58% of all food produced in Canada—or an estimated 50 billion dollars. Food isn't the only challenge; waste from food packaging also represents a significant issue. In Canada, food packaging makes up about one-third of a household's waste—3.4 million tonnes of waste each year. At best, about 20% of packaging products are reused or recycled; the remaining 80% ends up as litter or in landfills.<sup>2,3</sup>

Are consumers able to reduce food waste? Do they feel pressured to reduce food waste? Are they able to reduce the waste associated with food consumption, i.e., food-related waste? This report describes food and food-related waste in Canada, discusses consumer behaviours that lead to food and food-related waste, and reviews some consumer-targeted opportunities and recommendations for reducing the amount of waste we produce. We explore these challenges by evaluating the role and relationships between knowledge, attitudes, social norms, and perceived control over behaviour.

Research on consumer behaviour has shown that attitudes towards waste tend to be one of the biggest factors influencing consumers.<sup>4,5</sup> In many cases, consumers are ambivalent about waste; they don't want to waste food but typically view the impact as minor, or don't understand its full impact. Household food norms and consumer relationships with food are also changing; in an "on the go" society, consumers expect convenience. Consumers may misunderstand the meaning of open date labels such as use-by and best-by, which can lead to additional food waste. Lastly, control over food waste and food-related waste is complicated—it depends on socio-demographic factors as much as on willingness to prevent waste, and multifaceted, nuanced factors drive consumer decisions.

Given the complex nature of this problem, there is no 'silver bullet' solution. Education and awareness campaigns at the municipal, provincial, and federal level led by governmental organizations or industry will need to emphasize the true impact of waste and offer practical solutions for minimizing it. Most importantly, these strategies must change consumer mindsets towards food. Governments and the private sector must look at current regulations and policies to facilitate and incentivize innovative approaches towards minimizing waste and

enforce penalties and disincentives for those who do not adapt. More research is also needed to better understand the factors influencing consumers and potential solutions to this global issue. In a world challenged to sustainably feed approximately 9.7 billion people by 2050, tackling food waste is a problem we cannot afford to ignore.