European Business & Management
2025, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 67-74
https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ebm.20251104.11

Research Article

Assessment of Food Products Lost Among Households in Rwanda: A Case Study of Rural and Urban Areas

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Abstract

This study investigates food loss in rural and urban households in Rwanda, focusing on areas in the Eastern and Western Provinces for rural settings and Kigali for urban ones. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 320 households, with 160 from rural and 160 from urban areas. Data was collected through surveys and interviews, exploring household characteristics, food consumption patterns, food loss stages along the value chain, and socio-economic impacts. The analysis revealed that food loss is more prevalent in rural areas at the production, handling, and storage stages, while urban areas experience greater loss at the consumption stage. Poor storage, spoilage, and over-purchasing were identified as significant contributors to food loss. The study suggests that rural and urban households face economic challenges due to food loss, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions, including improved storage infrastructure, consumer education, and better food management practices.

Keywords

Assessment, Food Loss, Food Products, Households, Rural Areas, Urban Areas

1. Introduction

Food loss and waste are critical issues globally, with far-reaching effects on food security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. In Rwanda, the challenge of food loss is exacerbated by factors such as poor post-harvest handling, inadequate storage facilities, and limited access to markets. This is especially significant in both rural and urban households where food insecurity is prevalent due to high food prices and poor infrastructure [2].

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Received: 4 March 2025; **Accepted:** 17 March 2025; **Published:** 8 September 2025

Food loss along the value chain poses significant challenges to food security, economic stability, and environmental sustainability, particularly in developing countries like Rwanda. The food value chain includes stages such as production, post-harvest handling, storage, processing, transportation, and consumption, where food products are lost due to factors like poor infrastructure, inadequate technologies, limited resources, and ineffective management practices [2]. In Rwanda, food loss is particularly severe among rural households, where poor storage techniques and a lack of preservation technologies exacerbate the problem [5]. Studies show that while urban households may waste food due to over-purchasing or improper food management, rural households are more likely to experience loss through spoilage during storage [12].

In Rwanda, food loss is an ongoing issue, with varying factors contributing to waste at different stages of the value chain in rural and urban households. In rural areas, food loss is primarily linked to challenges in post-harvest handling, storage, and transportation, with inadequate access to modern technologies for preservation [12]. This issue is further compounded by limited storage facilities and poor road infrastructure that impede the efficient transportation of food products to markets. In contrast, urban households tend to experience food loss at the consumption stage, driven by factors such as over-purchasing, improper food management, and consumer behavior [4].

The economic impact of food loss is substantial, affecting not only food security but also livelihoods and income, particularly in rural areas where households depend on agriculture for their sustenance and income [5]. In urban households, food loss also leads to economic strain, as families purchase more food than they consume, ultimately wasting significant amounts. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted, contributing significantly to food insecurity and economic losses [2].

In developing countries like Rwanda, food loss predominantly occurs during harvesting, handling, and storage due to inadequate infrastructure and technology [6]. Food loss has far-reaching socio-economic consequences. For rural households, it directly affects food security, resulting in higher dependency on market purchases and increased vulnerability to food price fluctuations. Urban households, on the other hand, face financial losses due to buying excess food that is ultimately wasted (Rwanda Food Security Working Group [8].

Several studies have outlined strategies to reduce food loss, including improving storage facilities, enhancing market access, and educating households about better food preservation techniques [4]. Successful interventions in similar contexts have demonstrated that combining technological, economic, and educational strategies leads to significant reductions in food loss [3].

Despite the importance of understanding food loss along the value chain, there is a gap in research focusing on household-level losses in Rwanda, particularly in rural and urban settings. Most studies have focused on agricultural production or waste at the commercial level, while limited attention has been paid to the losses that occur after food reaches households. This research aims to assess the extent of food loss in both rural and urban households in Rwanda, examining the causes, impacts, and differences between these areas.

The study aims to assess the extent and causes of food loss in households across rural and urban areas in Rwanda. It also examines the socio-economic implications of food loss, aiming to contribute to policy recommendations for reducing waste and improving food security. The objectives of this study are to assess the extent of food products lost along the value chain in rural and urban areas, to identify the food products loss by category in rural and urban households, to determine the factors influencing food product loss in rural and urban households; to compare the economic value of food product loss in rural and urban households by quantity and stages; to analyze the socioeconomic impacts of food loss on households in both rural and urban areas.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of the Study Area

This study focuses on both rural and urban households in Rwanda. The selected rural areas include Gicumbi-Rukomo, Kirehe-Nasho, Huye-Tumba, and Nyabihu-Mukamira, while the urban areas include Musanze-Muhoza, Gasabo-Kimironko, Kicukiro-Kagarama, and Nyarugenge-Nyamirambo.

2.2. Sampling and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to select 320 households (160 from rural areas and 160 from urban areas). Each area will be sampled based on socio-economic characteristics, with equal representation from low, medium, and high-income households.

Table 1. *Sampling and sample size.*

Location/District	Sector	Rural and urban sample size
Gicumbi	Rukomo	40
Kirehe	Nasho	40
Nyabihu	Mukamira	40
Huye	Tumba	40
Musanze	Muhoza	40
Nyarugenge	Nyamirambo	40

Location/District	Sector	Rural and urban sample size
Gasabo	Kimironko	40
Kicukiro	Kagarama	40
Total		320

2.3. Data Collection

Data will be collected using a combination of surveys and interviews. The survey will be structured to collect data on household characteristics (size, income, food consumption patterns), stages of food loss along the value chain (production, handling, storage, consumption), causes of food loss (e.g., poor storage, spoilage, over-purchasing), and socio-economic impact (food insecurity, economic strain). Interviews with key informants (local leaders, food producers, and market traders) will complement the survey data.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means and percentages) will quantify the extent of food loss at each stage of the value chain. A chi-square test will compare the differences in food loss between rural and urban households.

The study will be conducted in Rwanda's rural and urban areas, specifically targeting households in the Eastern and Western Provinces for rural areas and the city of Kigali for urban households.

3. Results and Discussions

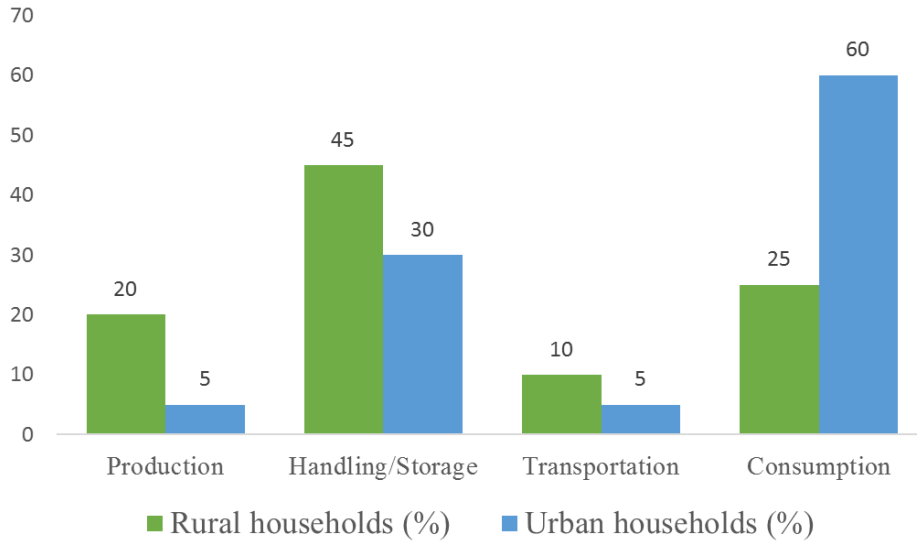

Figure 1. *Extent of food loss by value chain stage in rural and urban areas.*

The results in Figure 1 revealed that rural households experience a higher percentage of food loss (20%) at the production stage compared to urban households (5%). This could be attributed to factors such as poor farming practices, inadequate harvesting techniques, and lack of access to modern agricultural equipment or technologies in rural areas. The finding in the same figure 1 indicated that the highest percentage of food loss in both rural and urban areas occurs during the handling/storage stage. However, the loss is more pronounced in rural areas (45%) compared to urban areas (30%). This suggests that rural households might lack proper storage facilities, such as refrigeration, or face challenges like high humidity and temperature fluctuations that contribute to spoilage.

The results also indicated that transportation issues contribute to food loss in both rural (10%) and urban (5%) households, but the loss is more significant in rural areas. Poor infrastructure, lack of transport options, and long distances to markets likely exacerbate transportation losses in rural areas. The finding revealed that urban households experience a higher percentage of food loss (60%) at the consumption stage compared to rural households (25%). This could be due to over-purchasing, improper storage at home, and a lack of awareness about managing food effectively. In urban settings, food waste during preparation or failure to consume food before it spoils is a common cause of this loss.

Table 2. *Food products lost by category and economic value (USD) in rural and urban households.*

Category	Rural households (%)	Urban households (%)	Economic value of loss (USD)/year in rural	Economic value of loss (USD)/year in urban
Fruits and vegetables	35	25	64.5	45.0
Grains and cereals	20	15	37.4	32.2
Dairy products	10	20	12.5	58.0
Meat and fish	5	10	9.5	47.7
Other (including legumes, processed foods, etc.)	10	30	18.0	53.3

The results in Table 2 showed a higher percentage of food loss in fruits and vegetables (35%) compared to urban households (25%). This can be attributed to poor storage conditions, lack of refrigeration, and reliance on seasonal harvesting, which leads to higher spoilage. In terms of economic value, rural households experience a higher loss in absolute terms (USD 64.5) compared to urban households (USD 45.0), reflecting the larger quantities of fruits and vegetables produced and consumed in rural areas.

The findings indicated that rural households also report food loss in grains and cereals at 20%, which is higher than urban households (15%). This could be due to inefficient post-harvest handling, lack of proper storage, and pests. However, the economic value of grain and cereal loss is (USD 37.4) in rural areas and (USD 32.2) in urban areas. The higher loss in rural areas again reflects both the greater quantity produced and the challenges in preserving grains and cereals properly.

The results also revealed that urban households report a higher percentage of food loss in dairy products (20%) compared to rural households (10%). This is likely due to inadequate refrigeration or improper handling, leading to spoilage in urban areas where dairy products are often consumed in large quantities. Urban households lose more economically in dairy products (USD 58.0) than rural households (USD 12.5), possibly due to greater reliance on dairy products in urban diets and higher retail prices for dairy in urban markets.

Findings also showed that urban households have a higher food loss for meat and fish (10%) compared to rural households (5%). This could be due to issues such as improper storage (lack of refrigeration) and transportation problems, which contribute to spoilage and wastage. This is because in rural areas meat or fish is consumed very little, especially on special days (e.g. Christmas or other celebrated days or events). Therefore, the economic loss in meat and fish is (USD 47.7 in urban areas, compared to (USD 9.5) in rural areas. Urban areas may experience greater monetary loss in this category due to higher prices and greater demand for animal-based products.

Other (legumes, processed foods, etc.) findings also showed that urban households have a higher food loss (30%) compared to rural households (10%). The similar loss percentages reflect common issues across both settings, such as inadequate storage, pests, and over-purchasing leading to spoilage. The economic value of losses in this category is USD 53.3 and USD 18.0 for rural and urban households, respectively, showing that while the type of foods may vary, the overall economic burden is comparable across both types of households.

Rural households experience higher overall food loss in certain categories, such as fruits and vegetables, grains and cereals, and meat and fish. This is likely due to challenges in storage, transportation, and handling. Urban households, while having slightly lower food loss in categories like grains and vegetables, experience higher losses in dairy and meat products, which could be linked to the reliance on refrigeration and consumer handling behaviors.

Rural households face larger monetary losses for fruits, vegetables, and grains, reflecting the higher production of these items. However, urban households report higher monetary losses in dairy and meat products, likely due to the higher value of these products and more frequent consumption. The overall economic burden of food loss is still significant in both rural and urban households, and it indicates the need for targeted interventions such as improving storage infrastructure, transportation, and consumer education on food preservation and waste reduction.

Below is an example of regression analysis results in a table format, along with interpretations of factors influencing food product loss based on variables such as poor storage conditions, over-purchasing, spoilage, handling, transport issues, irresponsibility, distance to market, age, education level, occupation, and off-farm income.

Table 3. Regression analysis results of the factors influencing food product loss.

Variable	Coef	SE	t-Statistic	p-value
Poor storage conditions	0.32	0.08	4.00	0.000
Price of related goods	-0.43	0.09	-4.78	0.000
Spoilage	0.20	0.05	4.00	0.000
Over-purchasing	0.25	0.07	3.57	0.001
Handling issues	0.18	0.06	3.00	0.003
Transport issues	0.15	0.05	3.00	0.004
Age	-0.03	0.02	-1.50	0.134
Education level	-0.10	0.05	-2.00	0.046
Distance to market	0.05	0.02	2.50	0.014
Irresponsibility	0.10	0.04	2.50	0.012
Occupation (Agriculture)	0.12	0.07	1.71	0.088
Off-farm income	-0.15	0.07	-2.14	0.034

Poor storage conditions significantly increase food loss, with a positive effect at the 1% significance level. This implies that with a 1% increase in Poor storage conditions, the food product losses should increase by 0.32%. Therefore, poor storage conditions have a significant positive effect on food loss. As storage conditions worsen (e.g., lack of refrigeration or proper storage facilities), food loss increases substantially. This factor is the most significant, highlighting the need for improved storage infrastructure and practices. This finding aligns with previous research that suggests improving storage infrastructure can significantly reduce food losses [3]. Therefore, investing in modern storage techniques, such as refrigeration systems or controlled atmosphere storage, is crucial in reducing food waste.

The results in Table 3 revealed that spoilage due to inadequate preservation techniques contributes significantly to food loss at a 1% level of significance. This also implies that with a 1% increase in spoilage, the food product losses should increase by 0.20%. This highlights the importance of using proper preservation techniques like refrigeration and drying. According to a study by [1], improper food preservation practices are responsible for considerable losses, particularly in tropical regions where high temperatures accelerate spoilage. This finding supports the need for better education and access to effective preservation technologies to minimize waste.

The results in Table 3 show that the price of related goods has a significant impact on food loss, with a 1% reduction in price leading to a 0.43% increase in food product losses. For example, if the price of alcohol decreases, more people, especially males, might spend time in bars, leading to neglect of harvested or purchased food, which then spoils and contributes to higher food losses. Economic theories suggest that lower prices can alter consumer behavior in unintended ways, leading to wastage [10]. This highlights the need for integrated policies that address both economic and behavioral factors in food consumption.

The results in Table 3 also showed that over-purchasing is a significant factor contributing to food loss, with a positive impact at the 1% significance level. This also implies that with a 1 kg increase in quantity purchased, the food product losses should increase by 0.25 kg. Over-purchasing increases food loss due to excess food being bought and not consumed in time, leading to spoilage. This variable is significant at the 1% level, emphasizing that consumer behavior plays a critical role in food wastage. Over-purchasing is often driven by consumer habits, bulk purchasing strategies, and perceived savings on large quantities, despite the risk of food going to waste [7]. Encouraging consumers to buy only what they can realistically consume and educating them about portion sizes and expiry dates can reduce this source of food loss.

Handling issues also significantly affect food loss, with a positive relationship at the 1% level. This means that poor handling during harvest, transport, and processing stages leads to significant food loss. Training on proper handling techniques can mitigate this issue. Transport-related issues, such as poor infrastructure and high transportation costs, are also significant factors in food loss. Transportation issues, such as poor infrastructure and lack of proper vehicles, contribute to food loss by making it difficult for food to reach markets or processing centers in good condition. This is especially relevant in rural areas. Inadequate training for workers involved in harvesting, packing, and transporting food can lead to damage, bruising, or contamination, which

accelerates spoilage [9]. Addressing these issues through better training and equipment is crucial for reducing losses. Research by [13] has shown that enhancing post-harvest handling practices can reduce food losses by improving the quality of food as it moves through the supply chain.

The findings of this study stipulated that irresponsibility, which can include negligence, lack of awareness, or failure to manage food properly, is another contributing factor to food loss. It suggests that awareness campaigns could help address this issue effectively. Studies show that raising awareness and improving consumer knowledge can lead to more responsible consumption and waste reduction [11]. The distance to the market is positively associated with food loss. Longer distances can result in food spoilage during transport due to a lack of proper facilities or delays. Improving road infrastructure and transportation networks is crucial. According to a report by [13], investing in rural infrastructure can facilitate more efficient food distribution and reduce wastage.

The result of the study also revealed that age has a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with food loss, implying older individuals may experience slightly less loss, though the effect is weak.

The results in Table 3 indicated that higher education levels are associated with a decrease in food loss, with a significant negative impact at the 5% level. This also implies that a 1-year increase in the level of education should reduce the food product losses by 0.1%. Higher education levels are associated with a decrease in food loss, as more educated individuals may have better knowledge of food preservation methods, consumption patterns, and waste reduction strategies. This finding is supported by research indicating that higher educational attainment leads to more sustainable consumer behavior (Meybeck *et al.*, 2012).

The finding also revealed that agricultural occupation is positively related to food loss, though the relationship is marginally significant. Farmers may experience higher food loss due to inefficiencies in post-harvest handling or lack of access to better storage techniques. However, off-farm income has a significant negative effect on food loss. Households with additional sources of income can invest in better food storage, purchasing habits, or preservation technologies, reducing overall food loss. This is consistent with findings by [1], which suggest that additional financial resources enable better management of food loss.

Table 4. *Comparison of economic value of food product loss in rural and urban households by quantity and stages.*

Value chain stage	Rural households (kg lost per month)	Urban households (kg lost per month)	Economic value of loss (USD) in rural	Economic value of loss (USD) in urban
Production	10	2	114.4	29.7
Handling/Storage	25	18	883.0	635.8
Transportation	5	2	579.2	423.8
Consumption	7	20	74.2	222.5

The result in Table 4 indicated that the rural Household lost 10 kg of food per month during production, which contributes significantly to food loss, particularly because of challenges such as poor farming practices, pests, and inadequate tools. The economic value of this loss is (USD 29.7). However, urban households experience less loss in the production stage (2 kg per month), reflecting the fact that most urban dwellers do not engage in food production themselves. The economic value of this loss is (USD 114.4).

The results revealed that the highest amount of food loss occurs during handling and storage in rural areas, with 25 kg lost per month. This is mainly due to inadequate storage facilities, lack of refrigeration, and poor handling practices. The economic value of this loss is (USD 883.0). However, urban households also experience significant food loss in handling and storage (18 kg per month), though less than rural households. This is attributed to improper home storage practices and insufficient awareness about food preservation. The economic value in urban households is (USD 635.8).

The findings of this study revealed that rural Households lost 5 kg of food per month during transportation in rural areas due to poor infrastructure, long distances, and lack of appropriate transport. The economic value of this loss is (USD 579.2). Urban households report smaller losses during transportation (2 kg per month), as transportation infrastructure is generally better in cities. The economic value is (USD 423.8).

The results showed that rural households lose 7 kg of food per month during consumption, typically due to over-consumption, improper food handling, or spoilage in poorly stored food. The economic value is (USD 74.2). However, urban households have a significantly higher consumption loss (20 kg per month), primarily due to over-purchasing, improper meal planning, and food waste at the consumer level. The economic value of this loss is (USD 222.5).

Generally, rural households face challenges in food pro-

duction, storage, and transportation that contribute to high food loss, especially in raw agricultural products like fruits and vegetables, grains, and cereals. Nevertheless, urban households, on the other hand, face greater food loss during consumption, highlighting the need for better consumer education and awareness of food management and waste reduction strategies.

The study in Figure 2 examines the socio-economic impacts of food loss in both rural and urban households. It found that food loss increases food insecurity by 60% in rural areas and 30% in urban areas. In rural areas, food loss leads to economic setbacks since many households depend on farming as their primary income source, and wasted food reduces their income. Urban households face financial strain due to higher food expenditures caused by over-purchasing and food waste.

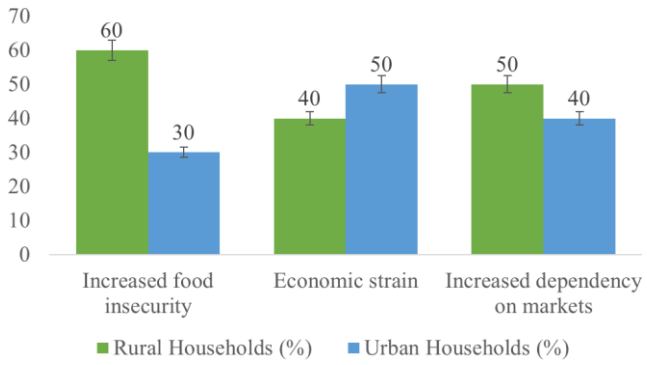

Figure 2. *Socioeconomic impact of food loss in rural and urban areas.*

Rural households experience greater food security challenges, as food loss worsens hunger and increases reliance on aid. In contrast, urban households struggle with the high cost of food and wastefulness, limiting their access to affordable nutrition. Food loss in rural areas also causes family stress, especially where food security is already fragile. In urban areas, heightened awareness of food loss issues, coupled with social norms, may lead to behavior changes that focus on reducing waste.

Both rural and urban households contribute to environmental degradation but in different ways. Rural households impact land and water resources, while urban households contribute to waste generation and environmental problems like packaging waste and carbon emissions.

The study highlights the significant role food loss plays in exacerbating food insecurity. For rural households, the impact is more severe, with food loss directly reducing their income and making it harder to ensure food security. Urban households face a different challenge, where the over-purchasing of food and subsequent waste limit their ability to access affordable nutrition, contributing to food insecurity despite the abundance of food options.

In rural areas, food loss directly affects household income. This is especially true in communities where farming is a primary source of income, as food waste means fewer products to sell. In urban areas, while food loss doesn't necessarily reduce income, it places a financial burden on households due to the high cost of food and waste. Both situations indicate that food loss has broader economic implications, from affecting individual households to contributing to larger-scale economic inefficiencies.

The findings suggest that food loss in rural areas can lead to additional stress for families already facing food insecurity. This situation may worsen in areas where access to aid or alternative resources is limited. In urban areas, there is a stronger awareness of food loss, and social norms may induce guilt, leading people to make more conscious efforts to reduce waste. This contrast indicates that awareness and education about food loss could be an important tool in promoting more sustainable consumption.

Both rural and urban households contribute to environmental degradation but in different ways. Rural households tend to impact natural resources like land and water due to inefficient food management, while urban households contribute more to waste and pollution, such as packaging waste and higher carbon footprints. This highlights the different ecological consequences of food loss in different settings and emphasizes the need for tailored strategies to address environmental degradation.

The study suggests that addressing food loss could have significant benefits for both food security and the environment. For rural households, policies that reduce food waste and improve farming practices could help alleviate economic losses and improve food security. For urban areas, promoting better purchasing habits and reducing food waste through public awareness campaigns could lessen financial pressure on households. Environmentally, targeted policies addressing the specific contributions of both rural and urban households to environmental degradation could lead to a more sustainable food system.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated food loss in rural and urban households, analyzing the extent, causes, and economic impacts of food loss across various stages of the food value chain. The study highlights the significant food loss in both rural and urban households in Rwanda, with distinct patterns observed between the two. Rural households face higher food loss during production, handling, and storage, primarily due to poor infrastructure, inadequate storage facilities, and inefficient farming practices. On the other hand, urban households experience greater food loss at the consumption stage, driven by over-purchasing, improper meal planning, and food waste. The economic and social consequences of food loss are substantial in both settings, exacerbating food insecurity and economic strain. However, the impact is more severe in rural areas, where food loss directly affects income, while urban households are burdened by higher food expenses due to

waste. The study calls for tailored interventions to address these issues, such as improved storage and handling in rural areas and consumer education and waste reduction efforts in urban areas. Recommendations:

For rural households, investment in better storage facilities, such as refrigeration, and appropriate handling practices can significantly reduce food loss. Training programs for farmers on post-harvest handling and food preservation techniques should be prioritized.

Improving transportation infrastructure, especially in rural areas, would help reduce food losses during the transport stage. This can be achieved through better roads, more efficient transport vehicles, and local storage facilities closer to markets.

In urban areas, addressing the consumption stage of food loss requires focused educational campaigns on responsible purchasing, responsible food management, meal planning, and proper food storage. Promoting awareness about the environmental and economic impacts of food waste could lead to behavior changes.

Governments should implement policies that address the specific challenges faced by rural and urban households. For example, subsidies or incentives for purchasing modern farming equipment in rural areas could help reduce losses at the production stage, while policies encouraging better food management practices in urban households could minimize waste at the consumption stage.

Encouraging more sustainable consumption behaviors, including purchasing only what is necessary, properly storing food, and reducing reliance on perishable products, can help mitigate food waste. In urban areas, this could involve promoting portion control and better use of leftovers.

Targeted environmental policies, such as reducing packaging waste in urban areas and improving resource management in rural areas, could reduce the ecological consequences of food loss. Sustainability efforts should be integrated into both rural and urban food systems to lessen their impact on land, water, and waste.

Encouraging households to use food scraps, such as leftover fruits, vegetables, and grains, as feed for small livestock like chickens, ducks, and pigs can help reduce food waste. By breeding these animals, families can recycle organic waste, reducing food product loss while ensuring a steady supply of food sources like eggs, meat, and manure. This practice is cost-effective and beneficial for managing food loss at both the consumption and production stages, especially in urban areas.

Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
USD	United States Dollar
Kg	Kilogram
SE	Standard Errors
%	Percentage
JKUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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