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World Water Week—an annual conference in Stockholm dedicated to discussing the management of global water resources—opened Monday with a message about cleaning your plate.

Food waste, according to experts at the conference, accounts for significant water waste.

A third to a half of all food grown globally either sits untouched on our plates or rots before it even gets there. A new report from the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) states that 40 percent of food purchased in the U.S. is thrown away. (And a new documentary called Taste the Waste highlights the problem—see the trailer below).

Source: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2012/08/29/waste-food-waste-water-a-message-from-world-water-week/>

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An Italian food market. Photograph by Michael Moore.

This is a horrible habit when you consider that nearly one billion people in the world already suffer from hunger and malnourishment.

The number of human mouths to feed is expected to grown by 2 billion before 2050 and the same amount of water we use today—often already found in scarce amounts in many places—will have to be stretched to support all of the food and energy needs that come with an expanding population.

This is why food security is inextricably linked to water security.

We currently use about 70 percent of available global freshwater to irrigate crops and produce food. A single

burger takes 660 gallons (2,500 liters) of water to produce, with much of that used to irrigate livestock feed. (Check on the water footprints of other foods in our interactive: [The Hidden Water We Use](#).)

Water losses through food waste occur at home, but they also happen through inefficient food harvesting, transport, distribution, processing, and storage methods. (Related: [365 Trillion Gallons of Water Thrown Away With Our Food Every Year](#).)

“Feeding everyone well is a primary challenge for this century. Overeating, undernourishment and waste are all on the rise and increased food production may face future constraints from water scarcity,” said SIWI director of knowledge services Anders Jägerskog. “We will need a new recipe to feed the world in the future.” Anders is the co-author of the new SIWI report: “Feeding a thirsty world: Challenges and opportunities for a water and food secure world.”

Colin Chartres, Director-General of the [International Water Management Institute \(IWMI\)](#) and the winner of the 2012 Stockholm Water Prize said during World Water Week’s opening ceremony: “Feeding over nine billion people by 2050 is possible, but we have to reflect on the cost to the environment in terms of water withdrawals and land resources. ... Saving water by reducing food waste, increasing productivity, plant breeding and waste water recycling are critical to all of us.”

Not to mention improved irrigation. Sandra Postel, who leads National Geographic’s Freshwater Initiative recently wrote a blog post for [Water Currents](#) about the promise of efficient drip irrigation systems. “As the world population climbs and water stress spreads around the globe, finding ways of getting more crop per drop to meet our food needs is among the most urgent of challenges,” she wrote.

Launching today at the conference is a movie about the costs of food waste by German filmmaker Valentin Thurn. Watch the trailer for [Taste the Waste](#).

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