

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS August 21, 2008, 11:41AM ET

Water experts urge major cuts in food waste

By MALIN RISING

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Leading international water experts warned Thursday that food waste must be halved by 2025 to meet the challenge of feeding the world's growing population and to preserve global water supplies.

Organizations at a water conference in Sweden said policy makers and businesses have to drastically improve harvesting methods on farms and minimize waste in food processing.

Consumers also must be made aware of the implications of food waste, which consumes large amounts of water that could otherwise be beneficially used in a world that faces water shortages, a report said.

"As much as half of the water used to grow food globally may be lost or wasted," said David Molden, director of research at the International Water Management Institute.

The report was unveiled at World Water Week, a meeting of 2,500 scientists, politicians and officials from 140 countries who met to discuss global water issues. The United Nations has named 2008 the International Year of Sanitation.

The Stockholm Water Institute said that each year 1.4 million children die from diarrhea-related diseases and poor hygiene. It described the lack of water and poor sanitation as "the world's largest environmental problem."

Researchers said that 30 percent of all food in the United States, worth some \$48 billion, is thrown away every year.

"That's like leaving the tap running and pouring 40 trillion liters (10.6 trillion gallons) of water into the garbage can -- enough water to meet the household needs of 500 million people," the report said.

The report said that policy makers, industry, universities and society should work together to reduce waste. It was released by the Stockholm institute, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and the international water management agency.

"Improving water productivity and reducing the quantity of food that is wasted can enable us to provide a better diet for the poor and enough food for growing populations," said Jan Lundqvist, a professor at the Stockholm institute. "Reaching the target we propose, a 50 percent reduction of losses and wastage in the production and consumption chain, is a necessary and achievable goal."

The report highlights problems faced by millions of hungry and poor people with spiraling global food prices. The United Nations estimates that 950 million people are at risk.

Later Thursday, Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria was to present this year's winner of the 2008 Stockholm Water Prize -- British Prof. John Anthony Allan -- with the \$150,000 cash award.

Allan, from King's College at the University of London, won the prize for studies on how food production consumes vast volumes of water, including his concept of "virtual water" that measures water used in the production of food and industrial products.

Copyright 2000-2008 by The McGraw-Hill Companies Inc. All rights reserved.

The McGraw-Hill Companies