Our food system and climate change are strongly linked to each other

(by Carina Renkl, 6CG)

Climate change is a global crisis, making millions of people flee their homes due to natural catastrophes every year. Since those numbers keep increasing to an enormous extent, we have no choice but to face the fact that we are destroying our planet. But how can we change for the better, when to achieve a drop in temperature means giving up luxuries concerning one of our basic needs?

The food system is one of the most influential contributors to global warming, producing 30 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Such a tremendous percentage emerges through a consecutive line of processes, starting with production. Farmers need various machinery to fulfil the demand and withstand the rising competition, which leads to a focus on efficient rather than sustainable ways of harvesting and breeding. Following this up, the food is packaged, often with plastic wrap, which takes over a thousand years to decompose and therefore lands mostly on trash islands in the ocean, killing millions of animals every year.

However, this is not the only thing happening at the packaging stage of the food system. Food that doesn´t meet the strict requirements of appearance is thrown out, often having just small cosmetic flaws. There is nothing wrong with a carrot being somewhat twisted or crooked, it tastes exactly the same as well shaped carrots. Still it is dumped and as a result becomes part of enormous food waste.

One of the most significant factors leading to climate change, though, is food miles. Products like bananas from Africa, strawberries from Spain and meat from Asia are all found in our local supermarket, and people buy them without even considering the giant carbon footprint involved. Additionally, produce is harvested before it has reached its peak ripeness point to prevent decay before arriving in its designated country. In contrast, local food is allowed to ripen naturally and therefore does not lose nearly as much nutritional value while being transported as products travelling such long distances.

Lastly, around 1.3 billion tonnes of food are thrown away each year, which is one third of all food produced for human consumption, although large quantities of it are still edible. This happens because the fluctuating demand of costumers needs to be fulfilled by supermarkets and due to this, they tend to overstock. Furthermore, grocery stores are required by law to throw away all food after the best-before date has passed, even if the products are still perfectly fine to consume.

So, what can be done to reduce the negative impact of the food system on climate change? People have to change their lifestyle drastically in order to create an environmentally friendly food system. Buying regional and seasonal food, composting, purchasing "flawed" food and stopping discards of food just because of the "best-before" date is what every person can do individually, without much effort. This may seem like a small step towards saving our planet, but our actions have an immense impact on global warming. It´s time to stop acting

irresponsibly and take action, because with the climate changing, people have to start changing themselves.