

Regional pressures

- The region suffers from excessive abstraction of water from deep aquifers which has substantially sunk water tables leading to increased scarcity and further environmental damage;
- The Arab region's rapid population growth is resulting in urban sprawl and most urban expansions were not planned with sustainability in mind. This is leading to further environmental damage as cities encroach on nearby farmlands. The expansive urban areas generate excessive waste, which leads to the contamination of nearby land and water resources;⁶
- Conflict, wars and occupation have forced millions to become refugees or internally displaced, assembling in makeshift camps usually on farming lands in the affected countries and thereby leading to lost production;⁷
- A nutritional transition away from traditional diets is ongoing in affluent countries and urban areas and is characterized by a higher consumption of animal products. The new dietary pattern is more demanding in terms of land and water resources;
- Food loss and waste (FLW) is a concern in the Arab region, with food loss more prevalent in low-income countries and food waste in high-income countries and urban centres. At a per capita of 210 kg per year with some countries reaching up to 427 kg per year, total food loss and waste is estimated at approximately \$60 billion per year in value and about one third of the region's food;^{8,9}
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how prevailing production and consumption patterns generate food loss and waste with insufficient processing and storage capabilities at the post-harvest level and overstocking and buying at the consumer level.

The above pressures, alone or in combination, are proving detrimental to the region's environment and the sustainability of the fragile and scarce natural resources, particularly land and water. To preserve these resources with the aim of improving livelihoods and the quality of life, there will be a need to revisit how land-degrading and water-depleting production systems, including cotton, grains, foraging, khat or animal husbandry, are conducted.

