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The fight against Food waste: Where are we now?

Questions & Answers

What is the size of the food waste issue in the EU?
The most recent estimate (FUSIONS, 2016) found that 88 million tonnes of food waste are generated in the EU each year with associated costs estimated at 143 billion €.

While around 20% of food produced in the EU is lost or wasted, some 43 million people cannot afford a quality meal (including meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent) every 2nd day.

Food waste has a huge environmental impact, accounts for about 6% of total EU Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHG) and puts unnecessary burden on limited natural resources, such as land and water use.

Why is it important to fight food waste?
Reducing food waste has enormous potential for reducing the resources we use to produce the food we eat. Fighting food waste is a triple win: it saves food for human consumption; helps farmers, companies and consumers to save money; and lowers the environmental impact of food production and consumption. In doing so, the safety of the food supply chain should never be compromised.

Where does food waste occur?
There is not one single cause of food waste with one solution because the food chain is a complex and dynamic system. Food waste occurs at all levels of the food supply chain, from farm to fork.

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According to the EU research project FUSIONS (2016), **over 50% of food waste generated in the EU occurs at the level of households** – a key area of focus for food waste prevention programmes in the Member States. Other sectors contributing to food waste in the EU are food processing (19%), food services (12%), production (11%), wholesale and retail (5%).

**What is the EU’s commitment?**

The EU is committed to being a driving force in the global fight against food loss and waste and to support actors in taking concrete measures to prevent and reduce food waste in their operations and daily lives.

Food waste prevention was singled out as a priority area in the EU’s [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) given its important environmental and economic impacts, and the need to adopt a more sustainable production and consumption model, driving food loss and waste out of our food systems.

**What is the EU’s target?**

The EU’s action plan aims to help achieve the global Sustainable Development Goal Target 12.3 **to halve per capita food waste at the retail and consumer level by 2030**, and reduce food losses along the food production and supply chains.

Combating food waste also contributes to related SDGs such as zero hunger (SDG 2), economic growth (SDG 8) and climate action (SDG 13) and supports EU policies in these areas.

**What have we achieved so far at EU level?**

The EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy called on the Commission to establish a multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to food waste prevention.

With the support of the [EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste](#), established in 2016, the Commission has adopted EU guidelines to facilitate **food donation** and the **feed use of food no longer intended for human consumption**, developed food waste measurement methodology and is undertaking work to improve date marking practices.
What is the role of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste?

The EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste is a unique forum that brings together all key actors representing both public and private interests - from farm to fork - in order to catalyse the EU’s progress towards the SDG 12.3 Target.

Members include international organisations (Food and Agriculture Organisation, UN Environment, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), EU institutions, Member States’ experts and stakeholders from the food supply chain including food banks and other NGOs.

The Platform aims to support all actors in defining measures needed to prevent food waste (including possible recommendations for EU-level action); sharing best practices and evaluating progress made over time.

Why is food waste measurement important?

Measurement is critical to food waste prevention, as it ensures a clear evidence base on which to build effective strategies.

Thanks to the revised EU waste legislation, adopted in May 2018, specific measures on food waste prevention have been introduced which will provide the EU with new and consistent data on food waste levels.

The new waste legislation requires Member States to implement national food waste prevention programmes and, importantly, to reduce food waste at each stage of the supply chain in line with SDG Target 12.3, monitor and report on food waste levels.

Is there a common EU food waste measurement methodology?

The Commission adopted on 3 May a Delegated Act laying down a common food waste measurement methodology to support Member States in quantifying food waste at each stage of the food supply chain. Based on a common definition for food waste, the methodology will ensure coherent monitoring of food waste levels across the EU.

The Delegated Act is subject to scrutiny by the European Parliament – to which it will be transmitted after the May elections - as well as by Council. Entry into force is foreseen in the second half of 2019.
Can food donation help reduce food waste?

Facilitation of **food donation is a priority area of work** in the EU’s action plan to prevent food waste. When food surplus is generated that is safe and fit for human consumption, the preferred destination is to make it available to people in need.

In 2017, the Commission adopted EU guidelines that clarify relevant measures laid down in EU rules (e.g. food safety, labelling, VAT etc.) in order to help lift any existing barriers to food redistribution within the current EU regulatory framework.

**Can food that is no longer suited for human consumption be used as animal feed?**

Yes. Where safe to do so, this practice can also help prevent food waste. In 2018, the Commission adopted EU guidelines to help valorise, as animal feed, food no longer marketable for human consumption (e.g. unsold bread, broken biscuits).

The guidelines clarify how relevant EU rules related to food, feed and waste apply in order to facilitate the use of such food resources whilst ensuring safety of the feed chain, animal and human health.

**Isn’t date marking a key issue as well?**

A [Commission study](https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/fw_eu_actions_date_marking_infographic_en.pdf) published in 2018 estimated that **10% of food waste in the EU supply chain is linked to date marking** (i.e. “use by” and “best before” dates indicated on food labelling). Findings revealed a wide variation in date marking practices in the EU.

Greater coherence in the use of date marking can help optimise supply chain management and facilitate consumer understanding of the meaning of these dates.

An immediate priority for the EU Platform’s work on date marking is the elaboration of scientific and technical guidance clarifying EU legal requirements in order to promote more consistent date marking practices by food business operators and control authorities.

For more information on the meaning of “use by” and “best before” dates, see infographic: [https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/fw_eu_actions_date_marking_infographic_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/fw_eu_actions_date_marking_infographic_en.pdf)
What measures do Member States take against food waste?

Member States are committed to achieving the global SDG 12.3 target, putting in place national strategies and measures to fight food waste.

Strengthening collaboration between all actors of the food value chain is crucial and governments can facilitate such synergies through, for instance, the establishment of voluntary agreements (e.g. the Dutch Taskforce Circular Economy in Food). The Horizon 2020 project REFRESH has established a 5-step model to deliver a successful food waste voluntary agreement (https://eu-refresh.org/building-partnerships-driving-change-voluntary-approach-cutting-food-waste).

A growing number of countries are putting in place national strategies and action plans to fight food waste (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom). Some countries have also established legislative frameworks focussed on food waste prevention (e.g. France, Italy).

As an EU citizen, what can I do to act against food waste?

Everyone can play a role in reducing food waste. Often with minimal effort, food waste can be reduced, saving money and helping to protect the environment.

The Commission has prepared some quick tips for citizens who wish to limit food waste in their daily lives: https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/fw_lib_tips_stop_food_waste_en.pdf

What are the next steps in EU action to fight food waste?

The Reflection Paper, “Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030,” highlights the importance of pursuing the EU action plan to fight food waste in order to strengthen sustainability of our food systems. Tackling food waste requires rethinking how we produce, market, distribute and consume food. The forthcoming “Recommendations for action in food waste prevention”, to be adopted by the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste by the end 2019, can make an important contribution to this redesign of our food systems.

For more information:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_waste_en