



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Q&A

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Frequently asked questions: Reducing food waste in the EU

Why is it important to reduce food waste?

According to the most [recent estimate](#), 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, every second day some 33 million people cannot afford a quality meal (including meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent).

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

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.

What is the EU doing to reduce food waste?

As part of the new ["Farm to Fork" strategy](#), a key element of the European Green Deal, the EU will step up its action to prevent food loss and waste along the whole food value chain.

Given its important environmental and economic impacts, food waste prevention and the need to adopt a more sustainable production and consumption model was put forward as a priority area in the EU's first [Circular Economy Action Plan](#), adopted in 2015.

The Action Plan called on the Commission to establish a multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to food waste prevention. Established in 2016, the [EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste](#) has supported the Commission in its work to adopt EU guidelines to facilitate [food donation](#) and the [feed use of food](#) no longer intended for consumption, and develop a food waste measurement [methodology](#), and is supporting work to improve [date marking](#) practices.

Tackling food waste requires rethinking how we produce, market, distribute and consume food. The [Recommendations for action in food waste prevention](#), adopted by the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste in December 2019, can make an important contribution to this redesign of our food systems.

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How does the Farm to Fork Strategy ensure action is being taken against food waste?

As part of the Farm to Fork Strategy's action plan, the Commission will propose **legally binding targets for food waste reduction** by 2023. These targets will be set against a baseline established following the first EU-wide monitoring of food waste levels according to a common measurement methodology. The Commission will **revise EU rules on date marking** ('use by' and 'best before' dates) in order to avoid unnecessary discarding of food linked to misunderstanding of the meaning of these dates, in particular the "best before" date. **Food losses at the production stage** will also be investigated.

The Commission will seek to scale-up action across the EU, mobilising Member States, food businesses and civil society notably through the work of the **EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste** and encouraging implementation of its [recommendations for action](#) by all players.

The Commission will consider further opportunities to integrate food loss and waste prevention as part of all relevant EU policies and take action to strengthen the evidence base for food waste prevention interventions.

What is the EU's target?

The EU is committed to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 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. To accelerate the EU's progress, the Commission will propose legally binding targets for food waste reduction by 2023, as called for by the Farm to Fork Strategy.

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.

Where does food waste occur?

Food waste occurs at all levels of the food supply chain, from farm to fork. However, the largest share is generated at consumption, which represents a key area of focus for food waste prevention programmes.

According to the [Food Waste Index](#) report of the United Nations Environment Programme, (presenting a new estimate of food waste at retail and consumption for SDG Target 12.3), previous estimates of consumer food waste (household and food service) significantly underestimated its scale. Globally, total food waste generated at the level of retail and consumption is now estimated at 121 kg/capita, with 61% coming from households, 26% from food services and 13% from retail. In the EU, the situation is very similar: the EU research project [FUSIONS](#) (2016) estimated the level of food waste for these stages of the

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food supply chain at 122 kg/capita, although the contribution of households is even higher – 76% (with 17% coming from food services and 7% from retail).

Considering food waste generated throughout the EU food supply chain, FUSIONS estimated that **53% occurs at the level of households** (92kg/capita). 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 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 recommendations for EU-level action); sharing best practices and evaluating progress made over time. The Platform's [monthly newsletter](#) offers an overview of food loss and waste prevention initiatives taken by the members, and is open for subscription to all interested stakeholders. Its [first edition](#), issued in March 2020, focussed on initiatives undertaken by members to prevent food waste in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At its 7th meeting on **12 December 2019**, the EU Platform launched recommendations for action to help accelerate the EU's progress towards global food loss and waste reduction targets. In line with the integrated, holistic approach needed to tackle food loss and waste, the recommendations address action required by public and private stakeholders at each stage of the food supply chain (including food redistribution) as well as cross-cutting actions requiring action from multiple players. The recommendations contribute to the future development of EU policy to prevent food loss and waste, mobilising action by all players and promoting inter-sectoral cooperation.

The EU Platform will continue to play a key role in mobilising action to reduce food loss and waste across the EU as part of the Farm to Fork Strategy. In order to re-establish the Platform and ensure continuity of work as of 2022, the Commission will **launch, in 2021, a new public call** for expression of interest for private sector organisations and invite public entities to join its work for another term.

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

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consistent data on food waste levels. Based on these data, the Commission will define a baseline for EU food waste levels against which legally binding targets for food waste reduction will be proposed by 2023.

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 2019 a common [EU methodology](#) to measure food waste in order 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.

After scrutiny by the European Parliament and the European Council, it entered into force in October 2019. The [format for reporting of these data](#) as well as the content of a quality check report for data submitted by Member States, was adopted on 28 November 2019. Member States shall start collecting data on food waste as of 2020 and report on national food waste levels by mid-2022.

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.

In the context of an EU pilot project on food redistribution, the Commission has mapped and analysed policy and regulatory frameworks relevant for food redistribution in the Member States. Findings from the project provide information as to where barriers still exist and how these could be lifted to further optimise food donation. The project has also contributed to the dissemination of the EU guidelines on food donation through stakeholder dialogues.

The EU Platform adopted in May 2019 a [document](#) which collects examples of food redistribution practices in Member States. This document complements the EU guidelines and illustrates how Member States implement EU rules to facilitate food donation in practice.

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

Yes. Where it is 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.

Is date marking a key issue as well?

A [Commission study](#) 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 also revealed a wide variation in date marking practices in the EU.

The Commission will propose, by 2022, to revise EU rules on date marking in order to avoid food waste linked to the misunderstanding of the meaning of these dates. The legislative proposal will be informed by an [impact assessment](#), which will include public consultations. The proposal will also be informed by findings from consumer research that will assess how consumers understand and use date marking and identify possible new ways of expressing date marking (e.g. changes in terminology, visual presentation and/or format).

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

In order to support the consistency of date marking practices in market, the Commission has asked the European Food Safety Authority to provide scientific advice and develop a risk-based approach to support food business operators' in their decision-making regarding date marking and related food information. The [first opinion](#), adopted in October 2020, relates to factors that should guide food business operators in deciding between 'use by' or 'best before' dates and setting of shelf-life. The second opinion (to be adopted by March 2021) will focus on other food information aspects, such as storage conditions, time limits for consumption after opening and thawing practices.

What measures do Member States take against food waste?

In 2020, the German Presidency to the Council of the European Union assessed progress made by Member States and the EU in their work to prevent and reduce food losses and food waste, as compared to the Council conclusions on food loss and waste (adopted in 2016). The Council's assessment highlighted milestones achieved at EU level, as well as measures taken by Member States, such as the development of national strategies, adoption of legislative and non-legislative initiatives and consumer awareness campaigns. The assessment also addressed activities undertaken to mitigate risks of food waste linked to COVID-19. Further information can be found on the Council's [dedicated page](#).

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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/VABlueprint>).

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/system/files/2020-06/fw_lib_poster_reduce-food-waste-daily_en.pdf

The leaflet **How to reduce food waste in your daily life** has been translated into all official EU languages (except Irish) and is available [here](#).

For more information:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food-waste_en

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