

Food Waste

EUROSAI WGEA

From Waste Management to Circular Economy

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Introduction

- Each year one third of all food produced for human consumption, approximately 1.3 billion tonnes, is lost worldwide. Food loss refers to all food produced for human consumption but not consumed by humans
- This represents USD 1 trillion in economic costs, around USD 700 billion in environmental costs and around USD 900 billion in social costs. The world is thus losing USD 2,6 trillion
- Global food loss and waste generate annually 4,4 GtCO₂ equivalent, or about 8% of total anthropogenic GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions

Definition: Food Loss - Food Waste

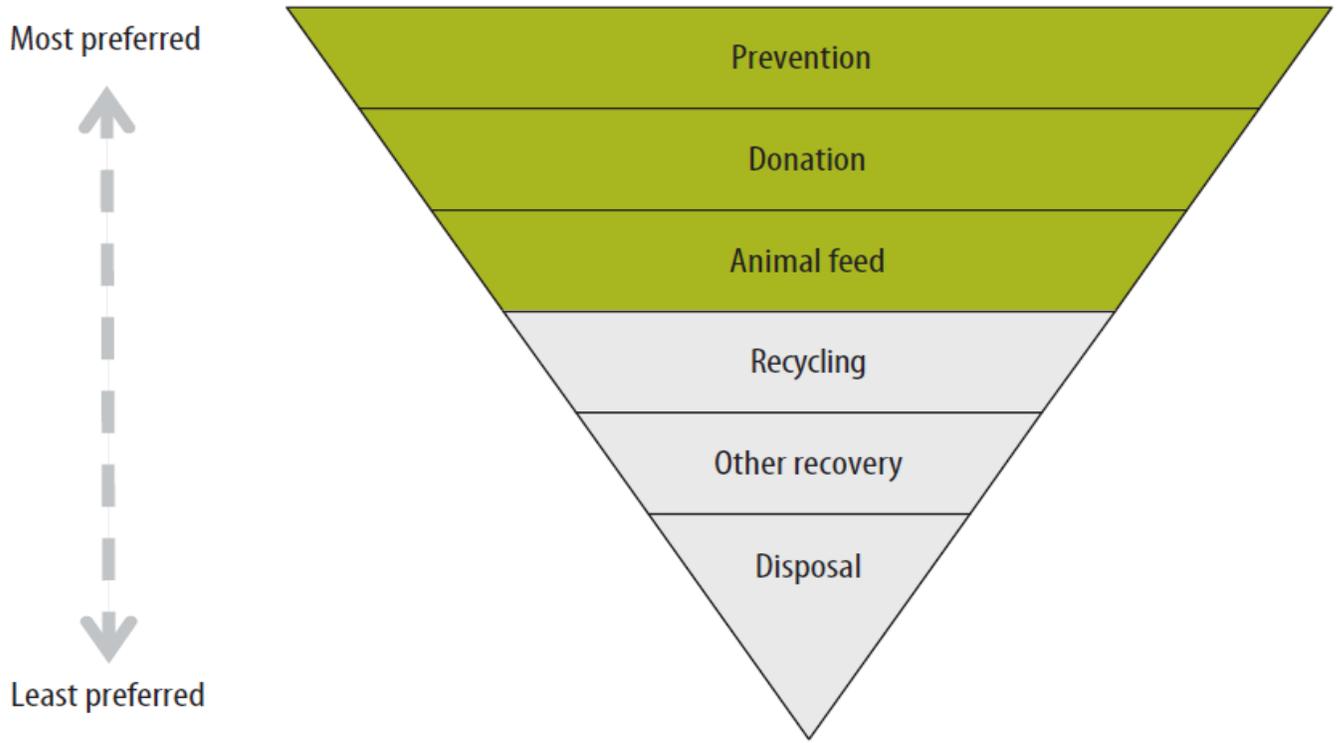
- FAO: same definition: “the decrease in quantity or quality of food”. Nevertheless they often distinguish between food loss and food waste
- Food loss refers to all food produced for human consumption but not consumed by humans
- Food waste is part of food loss and refers to discarding or alternative (non-food) use of food that is safe and nutritious for human consumption along the entire food supply chain
- Food loss actually occurs in the first stages of the food chain due to inefficiencies in food production and processing
- Food waste occurs at the end of the food chain, consumers throwing out excess food, let it spoil, or develop other behaviors that waste food

Consequences of differences

- Food waste is recognized as a distinct part of food loss because the drivers that generate it and the solutions to it are different from those of food losses
- High-income countries have significantly greater levels of food waste
- Middle- and low-income countries struggle predominantly with food loss issues (less waste due to lower supply, lower purchasing power and less demanding food quality preferences)
- Cultural differences also matter, e.g. chicken feet: a delicacy in China, not eaten in western countries

Moerman's Ladder: scale of food waste

Food waste hierarchy



Food waste in Europe

- According to the FUSIONS project, an estimated 88 mega tonnes of food waste is produced each year in the EU-28
- WRAP (British NGO) estimates that the portion of food waste which can be avoided represents an average yearly economic cost of £480 (€595) per household

Awareness of the problem

- Raising collective awareness on all levels: UN (FAO); G-20; OECD; European Parliament
- In Belgium: also resolutions on all government levels (federal, Flemish, Walloon)

UN and EU objectives

- Reduce food waste by 50% by 2030
- UN: Sustainable Development Goals, n° 12.3
“By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses”
- EU: Directive (EU) 2018/851 of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, *Article 9. 1. (g)*. :
“reduce the generation of food waste in primary production, in processing and manufacturing, in retail and other distribution of food, in restaurants and food services as well as in households **as a contribution** to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to reduce by 50 % the per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and to reduce food losses along production and supply chains by 2030”

No enforceable standards

- The Sustainable Development Goals are part of the 2030 Agenda, a Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the UNO
- Directive (EU) 2018/851 on waste: be aware of the text wording : the directive doesn't state the EU incorporates the goal to reduce per capita global food waste by 50 %. It only states that Member States must reduce the generation of food waste (...) *as a contribution to the (...) goal to reduce by 50 % food waste*
- Recital (31) of the directive states: "In order to contribute and ensure to be on track towards the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goal, Member States should aim to achieve *an indicative Union-wide food waste reduction target of 30 % by 2025 and 50 % by 2030.*"
- Nevertheless reduction of food waste by 50% by 2030 will be a policy objective and can be considered an audit standard

Some structural problems

- Market withdrawals
- Cosmetic quality standards
- Food safety policy
- Dates on labels

Market withdrawals

- Although we see less images of tomatoes, cucumbers and cauliflowers being destroyed by bulldozers nowadays, as compared to the seventies and eighties, market interventions, including market withdrawals, still exist
- Market withdrawals are based on Commission delegated Regulation No 2017/891, Chapter III: Crisis prevention and management measures; Market withdrawals
- The EU support scheme is exclusive for producer organizations and their members
- Free distribution to charitable organizations have priority
- However, 66 % of the products withdrawn were wasted in the period 2007-2015 (ECA, based on Commission's figures)

Cosmetic quality standards

- Most visual quality standards are abolished by Commission Regulation No 1221/2008 (for instance how a cucumber or an onion should look like)
- Some survived: for bananas a minimum length of 14 cm and a minimum grade permitted of 27 mm still exist ; with exceptions for European bananas (Implementing Regulation No 1333/2011, Annex I, III. Sizing)
- Nowadays cosmetic quality standards are replaced by less rigid “marketing standards” : products have to be sound, not affected by rotting or deterioration
- Commercial standards set by retail pose actual problems : a Flemish study found that two thirds of all farmers are not able to sell part of their products in the intended sales channel as they couldn't meet with the required cosmetic quality standards, with a sales loss of about 10% (= food waste)
- Not only cosmetic standards, but also packaging size (too big) and discount bundling in supermarkets cause food waste

Food safety policy

- Most Member States have guides to good hygiene practice
- There is always a delicate balance between requirements of food safety and the prevention of food waste
- ECA says exchanging good practices amongst Member States and food business operators is highly important
- To limit recalls and withdrawals, traceability is crucial and volumes should be limited

Dates on labels

- 'Best before' and 'use by' dates are used in different ways by producers, processors and retailers
- The best before date states the date up to which the food retains its specific properties when properly stored
- The use by date indicates the last day on which the product is safe to eat
- Less than half of the consumers know what these dates mean
- Milk and yoghurts, fresh juices, chilled meat and fish offer the greatest opportunities for prevention
- 10 percent of food waste generated by the EU annually is linked to date marking (Market study on date marking, Commission, 2018)

Flemish policy: the roadmap

- In 2015 the Flemish Government negotiated a roadmap to achieve a 15 % reduction of food waste by 2020 with the most relevant partners (obligation to use best endeavours)
- Long-term objective: 30 % reduction by 2025
- Participants: agricultural organisations, the retail federation, the association of food processing industries, catering, consumers' associations
- 57 actions to reduce food waste respecting the food waste hierarchy (by cooperation, training of employees, raising businesses and consumers awareness, promoting and facilitating donations)
- Similar actions in Wallonia (Régal = RÉduction Gaspillage ALimentaire) and Brussels (Good Food)

Our ongoing audit

- We have already made up a review of all relevant information, but the audit itself is only starting up
- Audit questions will probably be:
 1. Does the Flemish Government ensure sufficient follow-up of the chain roadmap and are the measures implemented?
 2. Is the chain roadmap effective enough to reach the target of -15% by 2020 and do (provisional) figures or indicators support this?
 3. Has the Flemish Government reached an appropriate level of ambition and is it adequately prepared to comply with the international and European commitments to reduce food waste by 50 % by 2030?

Recommendations

- It is too early for our audit recommendations
- On the European level the ECA made three recommendations:
 1. The EU efforts to combat food waste should be strengthened and better coordinated; in doing this the EU could take a greater role in the appropriate forums at a global level; the Commission should now develop an action plan for the years ahead covering various policy areas
 2. The Commission should consider food waste in future impact assessments and better align the different policies (CAP, common fisheries policy, food safety) and consider ways in which they could be developed to target the problem
 3. the Commission should promote the option of donating food that is safe for consumption and that would otherwise be wasted.

Most important references

- FAO. 2011. Global food losses and food waste – Extent, causes and prevention. Rome
- European Court of Auditors, Combating Food Waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain, Special Report No 34/2016. Luxembourg.

Thank you for your attention!

Further information:

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