

Making Retail and Wholesale part of the solution to fight food waste

Key messages

- Retailers and Wholesalers have been extremely successful in tackling food waste both within their own operations and by working with suppliers and consumers. Retail and Wholesale account for 5% of total food waste.
- Success will be anchored to the involvement of all the actors of the supply at their level of responsibility: Retail and consumers cannot bear the responsibility alone for reducing food waste.
- Only a collaborative approach and smart mix of measures can ensure that we reach the SDGs targets.
- The EU is bound to the UN SDGs commitment and its policy should be aligned with this commitment, including when considering the baseline.

Baseline

Different starting years

Retailers and Wholesalers have since a long time committed to contribute to reduce food waste. Some examples can be the signature of the 2012 Waste Agreement¹ under DG Environment, collective agreement to meet the Sustainable Development Goals to halve food waste by 2030 via the Consumer Goods Forum², individual measurable targets set up by companies³. In the meantime, Member States have set up voluntary or mandatory measures to reduce food waste.

Success stories

Measures to reduce food waste are a success all over Europe. In 2019, a study into household food waste in the Netherlands, commissioned once every three years by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and conducted under the supervision of the Netherlands Nutrition Centre, Milieu Centraal, Wageningen University & Research and the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management, showed a reduction of 29% since 2010⁴. Research shows that on average 98.3% of the food offered in supermarkets in the Netherlands is sold⁵.

In France or in Belgium, our members associations have estimated the volume of meal equivalent saved thanks to donation campaigns, which still occurred even during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Between 2015 and 2018, the five largest Belgian supermarket chains increased from 3,852 tonnes to 11,700 tonnes of food offered to the most needy. In 2018, 188 million meal equivalent were distributed in France. In April 2020, 130 000 meal equivalents were distributed in 12 days alone in France. In Italy, retailers donated 65000 tonnes in 2015 alone.

¹ https://www.eurocommerce.eu/media/120522/12_wastereport2014.pdf

² <https://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/environmental-sustainability/food-waste/>

³ <https://www.sustainable-commerce.com/>

⁴ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/10/02/syntheserapport-voedselverspilling-bij-huishoudens-in-nederland-in-2019>

⁵ <https://www.wur.nl/en/Research-Results/Research-Institutes/food-biobased-research/show-fbr/Dutch-supermarkets-provide-insights-into-food-waste.htm>

The Efficient Consumer Response⁶ (Retail Loss Group) is another example of successful cooperation to better manage the problems of on-shelf, availability and food waste.

Individual companies have committed to reduce food waste within their own operations and have engaged in a series of campaigns. One of the most recent examples is the commitments made under the Code of conduct for responsible business and marketing practices⁷. Other relevant activities to combat food waste listed under our dedicated website [#sustainablecommerce](#)

Most of these actions can be grouped in three areas:

- **Coordinating food waste prevention.** It is a joint business plan among supply chains to develop volume demand forecasting, which will contribute to linking primary food production to other markets (process) to avoid waste in case of surplus
- **Managing waste in the shop:** Organise food repurposing and suggest promotion for close to expiry date product. Some examples are the partnerships with start ups to sell fresh food as discounted prices, providing alternatives for fresh food that may not meet the marketing requirements (soups etc.)
- **Working with consumers:** As households represent the major contributors to food waste (reaching 53%⁸) it is essential to work with consumers and help prevent food waste. Retailers and wholesalers do not have all the answers but have proposed some actions to help prevent waste at home. Examples are providing recipes with leftovers, raising awareness on date marking, removing some date marking for some perishable goods where this is allowed by legislation.

In addition, the retail and wholesale sector has faced and responded to numerous challenges due to the lockdowns imposed by the health situations and we do not believe it could be representative of the work and efforts led by our sector.

The definition of a baseline scenario should consider the different starting years to recognize the efforts made by all actors so far. A baseline set in 2020 as the roadmap infers would hinder the efforts and progress made by the sector for more than a decade.

Scope

While retailers and wholesalers are aware of their role in supporting campaigns and actions against food waste, the sector cannot bare the sole responsibility to further reduce it. Every study concludes on the small share of the sector in the overall food waste, accounting for 5 % of the total⁹.

The causes of food waste are varied, such as changes in seasonal supply or knowledge of the precise level of consumer demand, inappropriate sizes or packaging compared to the type of households, esthetical considerations for fresh produce or lack of consumer understanding concerning the difference between ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ date markings.

As member of the EU platform on food loss and food waste, we greatly value the cross-sector approach taken by the European Commission. Similar approach should be considered to extend the scope of the actors mandated to reduce food waste.

⁶ <https://www.ecrloss.com/research>

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct/individual-pledges_en

⁸ <http://www.eu-fusions.org/phocadownload/Publications/Estimates%20of%20European%20food%20waste%20levels.pdf>

⁹ *ibid*

EuroCommerce calls upon EU institutions to favour S1 option and ensure that the whole supply chain is considered.

This would present several advantages:

- Ethically: Billions of humans have no or little access to food. While this problem cannot be handled only through reducing food waste, it seems imperative to ensure that as much food as possible actually gets eaten and can nourish people.
- Economics: Food loss and waste have an economic impact. We estimate that for the retail and wholesale sector only, the total cost of food waste and price discounts amount of close to 2% of total sales.
- Environment and climate: Food waste account for 6 % of total Greenhouse Gas emissions. If it were a country, it would be the 3rd biggest emitter in the world. Tackling food waste is hence as essential as any other sustainable initiatives led by regulators and industry. Some EuroCommerce members have besides committed to reduce food waste as part of their decarbonization commitments

Measurement and data collection

We welcomed the Commission decision on Food Waste measurements released in 2019¹⁰. **However, the proposed options for measurement in the current roadmap do not seem satisfactory as both are based on the measurement of volume.**

Monitoring food waste is a complex task. For example, how does one deal with a yoghurt pot that cannot be sold anymore? What about banana peels? Do we separate edible from non-edible parts? Over time, to deal with these issues pragmatically, retailers have developed different measurement methods that work and are realistic for their specific business contexts and allow them to identify hotspots and undertake improvement action. Today, most of our members measure food waste and have reporting schemes in place.

Some use schemes developed by third parties such as the Food Loss and Waste Accounting and Reporting Standard (or FLW Standard), the Fusions methodology or ad-hoc schemes developed in cooperation with public authorities. One example of the latter is the Flemish regional plan¹¹ to reduce food waste that is based on the Fusions methodology combined with a Flemish food waste definition). In general retailers collect detailed data based on shrinkage figures and balances on goods sold – unsold (economic value). This method consists of collecting data per store, per product group (fruit & vegetable, grocery, Ultra Fresh etc.) thanks to an internal data warehouse system. This method allows for concrete reduction measures per product group and provides accurate results. We therefore ask to consider pragmatic and already existing approaches which have proven to be effective.

We recommend relying on international protocol and guidance such as the WRI Food Loss and Waste protocol¹². Any data collection should however allow some flexibility.

¹⁰<https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/2122-Reducing-food-waste-method-for-measuring-waste-quantities>

¹¹

http://www.voedselverlies.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ketenroadmap_ondertekend_keten_en_ministers_kleur.pdf

¹²<https://flwprotocol.org/flw-standard/>.

Targets

EuroCommerce favours a **harmonized approach**, while keeping the flexibility to adapt to local needs.

We would need further information on the differences between option T2 and T3.

Policy Enablers

Based on our experience, we would like to use the opportunity of this roadmap to suggest some additional measures that would enable and support the greater development of food donation, hence reducing food waste

Amend legislation according to new purchasing behavior

Purchasing behavior has evolved. Nowadays online purchasing and reliance on omnichannels are widespread. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this digitalization of our sector, and this was accompanied by an increased interest in sustainability¹³. In terms of tackling food waste, this implies that certain legislation should be amended:

- In addition to the Commission's guidelines on food donation, **frozen food legislation** should be amended to adapt to the new realities of online purchasing these products online..
- **Food to feed legislation**: We support the prioritization laid down in the waste hierarchy but transforming food that is no longer suitable to animal feed can appear relevant as long as it fits in the limits of food and feed safety regulations. Even if in several Member States it is possible to donate or sell food for feed, however it is often not encouraged either because of heavy administrative burden or lack of tax incentives.
- **Date marking regulation**: Some of the household waste arises out of confusion about 'Best before' and 'Use by' date marking and how long food may still be safe and palatable. Appropriate date marking can help in this, and retailers and wholesalers will be working further with others in the supply chain and EU and national authorities on designing marking and consumer advice which differentiates clearly between quality and safety.
- Limit the **administrative** requirement to allow adaptability and efficiency, especially when it comes to food donation

Supporting incentives

We support the implementation of policy and fiscal incentives to promote further food donations, such as VAT reduction.

Support awareness raising campaigns

Most of food waste occurs in our home. Retailers and wholesalers participate to some awareness raising campaigns, such as, but not limited to, the International Day on Food Waste Awareness Campaign. Success lies in the partnerships with several stakeholders, suggesting more resource efficient behaviour, looking at better understanding of date marking, suggestions to use leftover through recipes or the advantages to reduce food consumption.

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