

European Citizens' Panel on Food Waste

Final recommendations



#FoodWasteEU



European
Commission

Summary of recommendations and voting results

No	Title	IN FAVOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	TOTAL
1	The closer the farmer, the happier the consumer: Less waste, more sustainability	120	15	5	140
2	Tastes of home: Public and private support for local farming to reduce food waste	119	9	12	140
3	Share don't waste!	93	31	16	140
4	Sharing of data and best practices across Europe	97	27	16	140
5	Gathering data across the food supply chain	101	28	11	140
6	Citizens' voices matter: Citizen participation in European food policy	91	37	12	140
7	Just picked: The value of seasonal food	103	26	11	140
8	EU-wide food exchange network	84	41	14	139
9	Planned purchases and redistribution	85	38	16	139
10	Restaurants stand for "enjoy without wasting"	113	17	9	139
11	All waste has a weight	73	48	18	139
12	A mandatory reporting system for transparency coupled with penalties and rewards	68	56	15	139
13	EU-wide legislation on the destruction of unsold food products - a peer learning approach across Member States	109	20	10	139
14	Transparency on food waste for visibility and action	102	22	15	139
15	Innovation in packaging and use of packaging when needed	116	18	5	139
16	Broadening the definition of food waste in order to save unharvested food	110	19	10	139
17	Encouraging adults to take action on food waste as a priority	113	20	6	139
18	Nutritional awareness and sustainable food in primary and secondary schools	123	9	7	139
19	Promote and support food sharing applications and platforms connecting consumers with each other	97	25	17	139
20	Save food, save money: A European campaign against food waste in cooperation with food retailers on four weekends a year	98	31	10	139
21	"Stop food waste": A week of food waste awareness at school	116	16	7	139
22	To provide consumers keys to be aware and independent on their impact on food waste and to understand how to process, preserve and reuse a product before and after the date of the product has Passed ("use by" date is a safety date after which a product should not be consumed; "best before" indicates the date until which a product keeps its optimal quality)	108	26	5	139
23	The implementation of standardized practices at the retail level when promotion to consumers products close to the expiration date.	109	18	12	139

Topic block I – Cooperation in the food value chain: From farm to fork

RECOMMENDATION 1

The closer the farmer, the happier the consumer: Less waste, more sustainability

We recommend that the EU continues its work with policies and initiatives to support small-scale producers in their trade with retailers and supermarkets. Large retailers/processors have a clear power advantage in this relationship, and often steer the trade in their favour, sometimes resulting in food waste.

Three aspects need specific attention:

- 1) The EU and its Member States should encourage retailers and supermarkets to always source from the closest producer possible. Furthermore, they should investigate and develop incentives that motivate retailers to follow these recommendations.
- 2) The EU needs to monitor and track the ban on last minute cancellations from 2019 and be ready to intervene if it is not followed.
- 3) The EU needs to continue working with policies on ugly/misshaped food and investigate further the consequences in relation to food waste when such products are rejected.

Rationale/justification

Supporting small-scale producers and their sales in close proximity have high potential to reduce food waste in several ways, both along the value chain and in households:

- When transportation of food is long and supermarkets try to be cost efficient by increasing volumes, food waste is likely.
- Local producers can be more adaptable and respond faster to changes in demand, which can reduce waste.
- Food from nearby producers is often of higher quality and longer lasting, which can result in less waste in households.
- Food currently disposed of due to its wrong shape can be avoided.
- Food waste due to last minute cancellations can be avoided if more comprehensive regulations and frameworks supporting small producers are in place.

Additional notes

Positive influence on food security and health.

Emphasizing the importance of combining this recommendation with other initiatives focusing on consumer behaviour, public awareness, and education to strengthen the cooperation between stakeholders and improve the general understanding of food waste and its relation to local food production.

Challenges:

- Trade-off with EU principle on free trade and free market, therefore it can be opposed by large corporations/retailers and lobbyist groups.
- It is important to consider and discuss what is “local” and what is a “short supply chain” when working further with this recommendation, since there is no common definition for this at EU level.
- Seasonality of products and demand of consumers can challenge a potentially limited supply due to focus on food from short food chain.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Tastes of home: Public and private support for local farming to reduce food waste

We recommend local & regional authorities to support local farmers with practical solutions and initiatives aimed at reducing food waste. The goal is to encourage stakeholders to cooperate more closely to drive these initiatives and thereby create a sustainable food system that benefits both farmers and consumers.

Several initiatives are suggested for local authorities to initiate:

- 1) Tax reliefs and subsidies for small scale farmers.
- 2) Support local farmers in finding new markets where they can be protected from unfair power relations with retailers, for example by allocating public spaces for sales.
- 3) Encourage inclusive processes and initiatives with value chain stakeholders for the work with food waste, for example by promoting the use of "food waste apps" in a city.
- 4) Support associations and other actors that are supporting local farmers in food waste issues, such as food banks.

Rationale/justification

Supporting small-scale producers and their sales in short proximity have high potential to reduce food waste in several ways, both along the value chain and in households:

- When transportation of food is long and supermarkets try to be cost efficient by increasing volumes, food waste is likely.
- Local producers can respond faster to changes in demand, and be more adaptable to changes, which can reduce waste.
- Food from local producers is often of a higher quality and lasts longer, which means that shortening the value chain would reduce waste both at the transport and household level.

Additional notes

- Emphasizing the importance of combining this recommendation with other initiatives focusing on consumer behaviour, public awareness, and education to strengthen the cooperation between stakeholders and improve the general understanding of food waste and its relation to local food production.

Main challenges

- Large scope and complexity of the recommendation. It will take time to analyse and implement many of the suggested initiatives, and it requires solid monitoring systems.
- Trade-off with EU principle on free trade and free market which can challenge the initiative and its acceptance by different stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION 3**Share don't waste!**

We recommend that food banks, and redistributors in general, should be financially supported at a basic level by governments through a structural scheme common across Europe, instead of primarily working by private donations (but not 100% funded, so it does not turn into a business). We also recommend a platform that connects the various existing apps that connect retailers to food banks. The platform should be user-friendly, efficient, and managed centrally. We also recommend that the food redistributed (donated or sold at a lower price) from retailers to food banks is given away in good time and good condition, preferably 3-5 days before it goes bad (rather than the current 48-hour guideline). The incentive to do this could be a tax deduction for retailers, that decreases the closer the redistribution is to the items' expiration date. They must donate a minimum amount of food to be eligible for this deduction.

Rationale/justification

Since food waste cannot be completely avoided in the current system, we should at least work to save the food that is wasted. In this context, we should utilise all the tools already available (food banks, applications, relevant associations, initiatives, etc.)

Additional notes

A challenge is how to strengthen the capacity of the food banks without making them into a business industry (as we rather want to handle food waste upstream).

RECOMMENDATION 4**Sharing of data and best practices across Europe**

We recommend that governments in each country share their data and best practices on actions to target all steps of the food waste chain, from producers to consumers, to the European Commission's platform for food waste (EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste). This information will then be managed and analysed by a special committee of EU researchers that work to promote the good practices and make them easily accessible. The data on good practices should be categorized by types of production and types of consumption. In addition, we want to promote a network of cities/regions which access the data and utilize the practices that work best for them, based on similar consumption and production patterns. The network is set up for these localities to learn from each other based on these similarities. The concept of "twin cities" could be applied for this purpose: cities with similar food waste issues work together to solve them.

Rationale/justification

Best practices could be shared more efficiently and consistently. Also, this would utilise both the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, the Eurocities and "twin cities" concept. We want to empower the collaboration of cities and regions across Europe.

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 5

Gathering data across the food supply chain

We recommend that data on how, where, who, why, and when food waste occurs across the food supply chain gets collected by an EU body or other agencies or research institutions. This could be through:

- 1) Individual consumer behaviour through app measurement.
- 2) Face-to-face collection of data, through the Eurobarometer survey.
- 3) Surveys sent to schools and other educational organizations. Could be before/after a school intervention targeting food waste.
- 4) The use of citizen panel citizens as a representative cohort for research purposes.
- 5) Journalling study of consumer behaviour could be an intervention study. Inspiration from consumer scan panels of BE/NE.
- 6) The use of scientifically validated measures from universities.
- 7) Observational studies – specifically studying actual waste amounts by drawing on existing waste management processes of towns and municipalities.
- 8) Collecting and comparing invoices from supermarket/farmer interactions.
- 9) Standardizing forms for reporting waste.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because if we know where, when, and why we are wasting food, we can launch more targeted awareness raising campaigns, and provide a detailed insight on where we could have the biggest impact on the reduction of food waste. Our group believes that by collecting more accurate data about where exactly in the food chain food is wasted, then we will be able to address our solutions to food waste more effectively. The current common methodology for collecting EU data on food waste (as defined by the Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597) focuses on measuring the amount of waste, whereas the aim of our proposal is to gather more detailed data on the who, when, and where of food waste. These additional data-gathering projects/initiatives could be used to supplement the quantitative data gathered in the new yearly reporting by Member States. They would provide more specific data on the “what, how, who, when and where” of food waste.

Additional notes

Notes on data we want collected: We should collect data on the “what, how, who, when, and where” of food waste. **What/When:** What food are we wasting and in what circumstances? What exactly are people throwing away - how many grams are left on the plate? Data on how much we buy vs. how much we throw away. **How:** How is it wasted - is it thrown away? Is it cooked too late/spoiled/out of date? Did we buy too much? Cultural differences could also be considered. **Who:** Who in the supply chain wastes food - distributors, consumers, etc? At consumer level, is there a breakdown of which consumers are wasting the most food - this could be linked to age or country? (Note: will people want to provide this data?).

Relating to point 5): The name of the company we're drawing inspiration from is Growth for Knowledge/GFK.

The group believes that respecting the privacy and personal data of European citizens is very important. Any studies conducted based in our recommendation should respect this.

RECOMMENDATION 6**Citizens' voices matter: Citizen participation in European food policy**

Building on the Conference on the Future of Europe and the current EU Citizens' Panel on Food Waste, we recommend the establishment of local and national citizen engagement fora. These fora would be tasked with following, monitoring and offering advice on national strategies to implement EU directives on reducing food waste from the perspective of citizens. We further recommend that the EU Platform on Food Waste should include citizens' representation and engagement that coordinates exchanges between the engagement fora. At both national and EU levels, the fora should offer a platform for information sharing and mutual learning between citizens/ consumers, stakeholders, and policy makers.

Rationale/justification

We offer this recommendation because it is important to give voice to citizens, ensure a fair and transparent process, and to allow citizens and decision makers to coordinate and learn from each other. Citizens are experts on their own lives, and their perspectives must be considered at local, national, and EU level.

Additional notes**RECOMMENDATION 7****Just picked: The value of seasonal food**

We recommend a change in consumer habits by informing consumers of the value of seasonal food. This should be done through clear signs in stores that allows consumers to clearly identify seasonal produce. Information about seasonality should also be communicated to a wide audience through public information campaigns. Informing consumers through signs on shelves and campaigns may incentivize producers to grow seasonal produce. We further recommend the production of better data on the most effective methods for incentivizing production of seasonal produce and limiting the import of non-seasonal low-quality foods.

Rationale/justification

We offer this recommendation because non-seasonal food is often imported and/or of worse quality than seasonal foods. Higher quality produce can impact consumer behaviour, as we tend to value higher quality food more, thus wasting less.

Additional notes

Topic block II - Food business initiatives

RECOMMENDATION 8

EU-wide food exchange network

We recommend major distributors to be directly connected through a register on an EU-wide website that allows the exchange of about-to-expire or surplus food. The webpage would prevent food waste by enabling communication within the levels (see below) and the next sectoral unit in the supply chain. Businesses can sign up and offer or buy surplus food at a lower price. There would be three levels:

1. Level one would consist of producers, farmers, and distributors.
2. Level two would incorporate supermarkets, food banks, and community kitchens.
3. Level three encompasses consumers and households.

Rationale/justification

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 9

Planned purchases and redistribution

We recommend developing a legal framework to harmonise Member States' legislation on practices for the entire supply chain regarding the redistribution of surplus and about-to-expire food, considering safety regulations and data forecasting. Purchases should be adjusted to what will be sold. Supermarkets and suppliers could be incentivised with benefits (for example, through tax breaks) for selling at a lower price or donating.

Rationale/justification

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 10**Restaurants stand for "enjoy without wasting"**

We recommend to the European institutions the following plan to reduce food waste in restaurants. Once certain quality criteria (like the ones outlined below and some others) are met, all types of restaurants should be allowed to show a logo (which is harmonised across the EU). The logo would advertise the possibility to take leftovers home and waiters should provide packages for food to take leftovers home. Those restaurants that implement the logo plan would write on their menus an additional text stating "you can take your leftovers home". If there are still leftovers of prepared food, they should be offered to employees. If there are leftovers of raw food from the kitchen, they should be offered to Food Banks/other charity institutions.

If food is inedible, it should be used to produce renewable energy. To encourage restaurants to meet these quality criteria (or further quality criteria), financial support should be given to restaurants to carry out this plan. A tax relief could serve as a financial incentive and additional aid could be granted. As leftovers from kitchens can be weighed or measured, they could be monitored and taken into consideration for the tax relief.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because it would reduce food waste coming from restaurants and significantly reduce the shaming effect which might occur when asking for leftovers. If restaurants act as role models, private households will be encouraged to reduce food waste as well.

Additional notes**RECOMMENDATION 11****All waste has a weight**

We recommend that organisations in charge of waste management be obliged to weigh, scale or measure organic waste. In the short term, the plan should focus on public institutions (e.g., schools and hospitals), entire neighbourhoods or districts, and in the long-term, it should also include private households. Representatives of these institutions/districts and, at a later stage, private households should regularly receive reports and comparisons to previous periods and comparisons to other entities. This leads to more awareness and is an incentive to reduce food waste. It does not have to be measured in the same way in all countries, it is sufficient if it is comparable in a respective country.

Rationale/justification

We recommend it because it would broaden awareness among consumers. It would also serve as an incentive to improve and reduce food waste. The results of the recommendation can be measured in the short and long term, providing some motivation to reduce food waste.

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 12**A mandatory reporting system for transparency coupled with penalties and rewards**

We recommend establishing a reporting system (especially similar to ISO certification) to set specific standards across the whole value chain including producers, manufacturers, retailers, supermarkets, restaurants, and hotels. It should distinguish between large and small/medium size enterprises (SMEs) based on existing categories to classify company sizes. There should be penalties if standards are violated and rewards if companies overperform. There should be a relative fine system proportional to the gravity of the offense and the size of the company. Rewards should primarily be based on a label system, for example, ABC grades, or potentially financial incentives, especially for SMEs. Independent and external auditors must be tasked with reporting, not the companies. Public authorities at the member-state level (e.g., ministries or regulatory bodies) are in charge to ensure implementation and monitoring. The data should be publicly accessible and enable peer learning. The Commission should have an oversight and coordination function.

Rationale/justification

It is important for transparency purposes to have the data of the labels available and accessible for people who wish for more information than just a label.

Additional notes**RECOMMENDATION 13****EU-wide legislation on the destruction of unsold food products - a peer learning approach across Member States**

It must be ensured that food products are used in different phases before being thrown away. The priority is on avoiding food waste, but if not possible, the following cycle applies: human consumption, animal consumption, biofuel, and composting. The Member States are responsible for the required infrastructure to be in place to enable implementation. The EU sets an overarching goal to reduce food waste by a certain percentage. Member States set national standards so that the EU goal is collectively achieved. Member States can implement either voluntary or mandatory measures for companies to comply with. The reduction needs to be quantifiable. After a pilot phase that focuses on supermarkets, and adjustments based on peer learning, the best practice should be a guideline for all Member States.

Rationale/justification

The French example does not work, so we need a better solution, for example a platform like in Finland, where companies can upload food that would go to waste. A law forbidding food waste needs to be kept general to account for diverging cultures of Member States.

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 14**Transparency on food waste for visibility and action**

We recommend that all participants in the food supply chain, except individual households, should have an obligation to measure and report transparently on dealing with food waste and its handling. Further emphasis should also be on the need for new options for data collection as well as including the food loss in the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, differentiated incentives to promote voluntary agreements should follow to support institutions in playing a pioneering role. Also, corrective measures contribute to the importance, geared towards including all participants in the food supply chain (except individual households).

The EU should do a best-practice evaluation of the different Member States about their existing reporting structures and incentives as well as corrective measures. This helps to establish a further embedded framework for the EU to make data more comparable.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because the awareness of existing food waste is the basis to apply further approaches, such as incentives, innovative voluntary agreements, and corrective mechanisms to avoid food waste.

Additional notes

As an example of incentives, an EU-wide labelling technique could be used to benefit from marketing strategies. Another example could be appropriate financial compensation for reducing food waste.

RECOMMENDATION 15**Innovation in packaging and use of packaging when needed**

We recommend investing further in scientific research on innovative and alternative sustainable ways of packaging. This helps to increase the life span, improve the package size to reduce food waste, and ensure better food safety for its transportation. The EU should support this financially and politically through appropriate programs, such as the funding of start-ups and smaller innovating forces. Furthermore, we recommend supporting retailers to sell food without packaging, where it is possible, without compromising food safety.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because we still rely heavily on the packaging, particularly concerning transportation and food safety. Therefore, we believe that supporting innovations (research/ start-ups) in environmentally sound packaging can contribute towards this. On the one hand, adjusting the sizes of packaging of perishable food would reduce food waste, whilst considering the risk of increased packaging waste (whereby research mentioned above, should aim at preventing this). On the other hand, the individual portions should be offered, where one can bring his/her own container (also to reduce food waste, as well as waste of other kinds). If we develop a structure of environmentally friendly packaging and its infrastructure is adapted, ultimately, consumer acceptance can be achieved.

Additional notes

Topic block III - Supporting consumer behavioral change

RECOMMENDATION 16

Broadening the definition of food waste in order to save unharvested food

We recommend that unharvested food should be integrated in the European definition of food waste. We also want farmers to have the possibility to commercialize less-than-perfect but still edible products. To avoid food loss, farmers should get signs which announce that unharvested food may be harvested by private households and NGO's.

This idea must be communicated to two groups:

- to citizens via the campaign that is developed in recommendation 20
- to farmers via the Member States' ministries for agriculture. The latter should implement this recommendation in coordination with local municipalities and producer unions.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because it is unreasonable to waste edible food. Direct harvesting helps recognize the work that farmers do and value the food they produce.

Additional notes

A challenge is that we don't want to blame farmers.

RECOMMENDATION 17**Encouraging adults to take action on food waste as a priority**

We recommend that each Member State should implement a program for adults to raise awareness and knowledge about the cost of food waste and the benefits of preventing it at national, regional, and local level.

This should be based on best available data (recommendation 5) to underline the urgency of the problem. It should include apps (recommendation 18), campaigns (recommendation 4 and 20), further education and training for people working in the food industry, in-house training programmes for professionals as well as documentaries and television programs on the topic. Some possibilities could be short ads showing the benefit of reusing food, promote Sunday as leftover day, and create game shows with cooking competitions for young adults to involve the broadcasters.

Informing people, through simple messaging or nudges, about the economic and environmental benefits of not wasting food is important.

A key contributor to the dissemination of information could be the media, especially public service radio stations and television, print media, social media, public institutions, museums, and retailers. Existing EU institutions could develop resources to support Member States (for example, the House of European History).

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because other recommendations deal with children's education, but we also need actions that have an immediate short-term effect on the current buying and cooking generation.

Additional notes

A benefit is that anti-food waste nudges used in supermarkets will balance the marketing that persuades people to buy too much.

RECOMMENDATION 18**Nutritional awareness and sustainable food in primary and secondary schools**

We recommend the inclusion of the topics of sustainable food and nutrition in primary and secondary schools' curricula, either through the creation of new mandatory standalone courses, as they already exist in some countries, and/or their inclusion in existing mandatory subjects. This recommendation aims to increase pupils' awareness of food waste through discussions on socio-economic values, sustainable production and consumption, shopping behaviours, household economics, and practical experiences bringing schools and farms closer together. To make this recommendation happen, there are two preconditions which we expect the EU to enact. Firstly, we need a multi-stakeholder awareness raising campaign to create and increase momentum around the topic (recommendation 20). Secondly, we need to support teachers through trainings, and pedagogical exchanges and materials, capitalising on existing networks and proven best practices. While we acknowledge that these changes can take time to be implemented, it is important to already organise action days or weeks on the topic of food waste in schools, with the mobilisation of different societal actors (recommendation 21).

Rationale/justification

Food waste is the symptom of broader systemic issues which relate to how we produce, buy, and consume food today in Europe, hence why any pedagogical action needs to go beyond food waste, but consider values and desirable futures for production and consumption in Europe. Education remains a national competence and each Member State has different curricula. We acknowledge these differences, while encouraging the EU to promote ambitious actions, with new and/or existing schools subjects such as geography or economics.

Additional notes**RECOMMENDATION 19****Promote and support food sharing applications and platforms connecting consumers with each other**

We recommend that the EU promotes and supports existing applications and platforms, such as Olio or FoodSharing.de. The tools to be promoted must meet some basic criteria and be assessed accordingly: user-friendliness, richness of the database, independence, adaptability to local contexts, and the real impact on curbing food waste. The EU, national and regional authorities need to be proactive in their promotion of most-promising existing tools and support, notably, but not only financially, their development and maintenance through their different research, action, and funding programmes. Public funding should encourage qualitative and neutral information, free of advertisements.

Rationale/justification

There are many applications that connect different actors, from businesses to consumers, or consumers to consumers. Some of these tools might have proven successful to connect consumers with each other, helping them to save food. However, they seem to have a limited geographical coverage or are not known enough by Europeans. We believe it is important for the EU and Member States to actively support technological innovations with high impact, leaving the door open to new ideas and innovations to emerge and to become sustainable in the long term.

Additional notes

RECOMMENDATION 20

Save food, save money: A European campaign against food waste in cooperation with food retailers on four weekends a year

We recommend that the EU coordinates a campaign focusing on shops selling food (food retailers, supermarkets, hypermarkets, smaller shops) to be deployed in the Member States. This campaign would take place over four weekends each year, and focus on the topic "save food, save money". It would be up to the different Member States to decide which weekends to pick. The choice of date should be based on the objective to raise awareness on food buying habits (for example around national or cultural celebrations) and seasonality (for example around harvest time). The campaign would be an initiative from the European Union, which would develop a uniform visual design (same logo, colour code, etc.) for all Member States. The campaign would then be implemented at the national level and adapted based on the specificities of each country, their annual calendar, food habits, etc.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because it is important to raise awareness among citizens on food waste. There is only the International Day of Awareness on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, which is unknown among citizens and lost among the large amount of other international days. The new event would be extended to four weekends per year. This would develop the visibility of the issue among European citizens, and the form of repeated weekends through the year would be more useful than a single day. That would also be a way to differentiate the European event from standard international days.

Additional notes

- One benefit of our recommendation is that it would raise awareness among European citizens on food buying, consumption, and seasonality as ways to avoid food waste. Having a campaign organized around four weekends a year would bring regularity in the messages passed on to citizens. Another benefit would be encouraging cooperation with food retailers as part of this campaign and including food retailers in the fight against food waste.
- Among the challenges, there is the issue of how to get food retailers/food outlets involved in the event. Because the objectives of food retailers are to sell as much as possible, some may be reluctant to encourage people to consume less food or adopt different consumption habits. On the other hand, the objective of any shops, including those selling food, is to generate profits, so they might consider the event as a strategy to develop a good image as actors in the fight against food waste. Another challenge concerns the specific characteristics and annual calendar in national Member States in the EU: some countries don't celebrate Christmas, or celebrate it on different dates, and holidays can be different from one country to another.
- Other details on how the recommendation would be implemented:
 - * Use diversified sources for the campaign against food waste in cooperation with food retailers: traditional media (television, newspapers), social media, use of local influencers, advertising. Take the opportunity of the four weekends to spread a strong Zero Food waste campaign.
 - * On these weekends, the EU should communicate about the food retailers who already have organized and developed initiatives against food waste. The EU should support these already existing initiatives and communicate on good practices, sharing a positive narrative. We should not highlight shocking messages and focus on positive experiences.
 - * Organize a follow-up and an evaluation of the 4 weekends to improve it and reach more and more people every year.

RECOMMENDATION 21

“Stop food waste”: A week of food waste awareness at school

We recommend organizing a theme week in schools on food waste to raise awareness on the topic among young children and teenagers. The week would adopt a form and content depending on the age of the pupils. In primary schools and for younger children, the week should focus on raising awareness through games. The European Commission would create and distribute a toolkit for schools and teachers in all the EU languages on how to raise awareness on food waste at schools and how to discuss and organize activities on this topic in relation with their own teaching subjects. The toolkit would include guidelines with proposed activities to not overburden teachers and should be easily accessible online. Younger pupils would be rewarded by receiving a certificate (with the EU logo). National states would implement the week depending on the functioning of their respective education systems and of their academic calendars. Schools would be free to decide what activities they want to organize during the week, with the help of the toolkit made available for teachers.

Rationale/justification

Children should learn how to value food, how food is produced, and how much time it takes to produce food. It is important to gain this awareness early on. This kind of event can also reach parents through children and teenagers, because pupils tell their parents about their experiences at school when they come home.

Additional notes

- A benefit is that children should learn how to value food, how food is produced, and how many times it takes to produce food. It is important to start early with awareness learning. Another benefit is that this kind of event enable to reach parents through children and teenagers, because scholars tell their parents about their experiences at school when they come home.
- One of the challenges is to not overburden teachers to come up with all the activities and ideas on their own. For this reason, a framework or guidelines with proposed activities is very important to make it possible for all pupils in all schools to benefit from this initiative.

RECOMMENDATION 22

To provide consumers keys to be aware and independent on their impact on food waste and to understand how to process, preserve and reuse a product before and after the date has passed. (“use by” date is a safety date after which a product should not be consumed; “best before” indicates the date until which a product keeps its optimal quality)

We recommend the deployment of information tools to enlighten and (re)equip consumers in their ability to judge whether a product is truly expired. To make consumers aware of the use of their food products, we are in favour of better identification of the labelling of the best-before date: same place for each product and larger font size. Furthermore, we want to affix a QR code directly on the product label (the possibility of also using the barcode). What is the purpose of this? To transmit information on the best ways to preserve it, to recognize (by the taste and the smell) if it is still consumable, and to transmit culinary tips to transform the product (example of adapted recipes). The producers are, for us, the best placed to formalize the information available via the QR code. Concerning unlabelled products such as fruits and vegetables, the QR code should be put where the products are sold to avoid unnecessary packaging. For this source of information to be accessible to everyone, we are not betting essentially on digital technology. We also wish that paper communication tools (guides in supermarkets, for example) be made available.

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because, for us, this is a challenge to make consumers responsible in their food management. Completing the information available on a product is a way for consumers to understand the issues around the expiration date. It is also an opportunity to overcome the “misconceptions” or “fear of getting sick” after the expired date. Indeed, we know that producers are cautious with best-before date to protect themselves. In reality, the product can be consumed afterwards. We do not question the importance of indicating a use-by date. Indeed, it remains a key indicator of freshness.

Additional notes

A benefit is that we focus on labelling to inform consumers in the best way possible about the advantages for their wallet as well as for the environment. Our catchphrase summarizes our idea perfectly: “buy reasonably and eat cheaper”. To make known and promote this new source of information to consumers, we propose to deploy a large communication campaign to explain the objective of this new tool.

RECOMMENDATION 23**The implementation of standardized practices at the retail level when promoting to consumers products close to the expiration date.**

We recommend that the purchase of products close to their expiration date be revalued by asking businesses to adopt a strategy for managing and valuing these products for the consumers. Indeed, it is a question of improving the perception by households of these products so that they are not intended for only one part of the population. This strategy is divided into several parts:

- a regulatory implementation part at the European level by creating a section dedicated to these products making them easily accessible and identifiable upon entering the store to promote better consumption practices by all users, regardless of income
- the development of a communication policy highlighting "common sense" and the attractiveness of the products as well as the responsible purchasing approach (promotional overconsumption aspects should not be on the front communication line)
- encouraging retailers to adapt their policy of putting new products close to their expiration date on the shelves at peak times (adapted to the practices of consumers in different European countries).

Rationale/justification

We recommend this because it reinforces an existing policy in many stores and standardizes "good practices" on a European scale. The group is paying particular attention to the beneficial effect of the generalization of these measures, which would change the image around low-priced products (not only available for households but to the whole population).

Additional notes

This recommendation is a way to promote companies' engagement in sustainable practices. Indeed, it can build consumers' loyalty. However, there are some challenges in putting this recommendation into practice:

- On the household side: to be more flexible and adapt the weekly menu with the products available
- On the side of professionals: to train the staff and introduce this new policy into practice
- On the side of the general population: to overcome the misconceptions and to change the perceptions of the recipients of these products, certainly at low cost, but which first fights against the unsold goods.