

Resource efficiency: Reducing food waste, improving food safety

As part of its action plan on the circular economy, the EU is aiming to give substance to a more efficient use of resources by reducing food waste and increasing food security. The European Parliament is due to vote in May 2017 on an own-initiative report proposing measures to cut the 88 million tonnes of edible food wasted annually in the EU by half by 2030.

Background

Every year, about 4 billion metric tonnes of food are produced, but poor practice in harvesting, storage and transport, as well as market and consumer wastage, mean that [30-50 %](#) of it (or 1.2-2 billion tonnes) is [wasted](#). Feeding a projected population of [9.6 billion people](#) by 2050 will be an unprecedented challenge for humankind and will require a multifaceted and integrated [global strategy](#). Increasing food production is only one among many ways to rise to this challenge. [Researchers](#) argue that one strategy to improve food availability would simply be to reduce waste. This, in turn, could help moderate the need for increased food production to meet growing food demand, which would alleviate the pressure on resources and help lower [greenhouse gas emissions](#) (which the EU has [committed](#) to reduce by 20 % compared with 1990 levels by 2020).

Food waste in the EU

In the EU, food waste along the supply chain has been [estimated](#) at approximately 88 million tonnes, or 173 kg per capita per year, and is [expected](#) to rise to about 126 million tonnes a year by 2020 unless action is taken. Households generate the largest share of EU food waste (53 %), followed by agriculture/food processing (19 %). These two sectors account for over two thirds (72 %) of EU food waste. The rest is attributed to food services/catering (12 %), primary production (11 %) and retail/ wholesale (5 %). The average per capita waste level conceals high variation between EU countries. According to a 2013 [study](#), the highest food waste generators, expressed as kilograms per capita, are the Netherlands (541 kg), Belgium (345 kg), Cyprus (327 kg) and Estonia (265 kg). The lowest are Slovenia (72 kg), Malta and Romania (both 76 kg), followed by Greece (80 kg) and the Czech Republic (81 kg). Overall, the EU-15 countries tend to waste more food per capita than the EU-12 countries.

Position of the European Parliament

The own-initiative [report](#) of the European Parliament's committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted on 11 April 2017 calls for a holistic and coordinated approach to food waste prevention as a follow-up to the Commission's [Circular Economy Package](#) (2015) covering the whole cycle – from production and consumption to waste management and the market for secondary raw materials – thus [closing the loop](#). MEPs on the committee suggest including a clear definition of food waste, a common method for measuring it, a legally binding 50 % reduction target by 2030 and an objective of at least a 30 % reduction by 2025 for EU countries. The committee feels that national authorities and stakeholders need to help consumers understand the difference between the 'best before' date – after which food may still be consumed – and the 'use by' date – which indicates the final date by which the product must be consumed. The report argues that the Commission should assess the possible benefits of removing certain dates from products where there is no risk to public health or the environment. In addition, the report calls on the Commission to propose a change in the VAT directive that would explicitly authorise tax exemptions for food donations. Similarly, it maintains that it should be possible for the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived to finance the cost of collecting, transporting, storing and distributing food donations.

Own-initiative report: [2016/2223\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: Biljana Borzan (S&D, Croatia).

