

NEWSBOX

NO MORE FOOD TO WASTE: THE EUROPEAN ANSWER

In Europe (EU) around 88 million tones of food, the equivalent of 143-billion-euro, are wasted every year (FUSIONS 2016). Food waste recently became an integral part of the European Commission's Circular Economy package. This has the goal of preventing food waste and strengthen the sustainability of the food system. Committed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), adopted in September 2015, the European commission called on Member States to take actions to reduce food waste at each stage of the food supply chain. The new pledge includes a target to halve per capita food waste by 2025, taking into consideration that household waste has today the greatest impact on food waste (53%).

Following the directions of the European commission, different initiatives have been adopted by a number of EU countries, including France, Denmark, the UK, Belgium and Germany. These initiatives currently concentrate on two main targets: the review of the expiration date regulations and communication method and the modification of the standards for products aesthetic imperfections and damaged packaging. A number of studies found EU standards for food safety to be overprotective and conservative, with a number of non-perishable product being still perfectly edible after the defined expiration date (e.g. sugar, salt, etc.) (FUSIONS, 2016). In addition, survey evidences found that the majority of the consumers are not aware of the difference between the 'use by' and 'best before' terms

used to label food's shelf life. According to the EU recommendations, 'best before' only refers to the product freshness. Accordingly, if adequately conserved, the product that has past the 'best before' date can still be eaten safely. This has however been proven to be highly confusing among the consumers (EU, 2016).

With an average waste of 20 kg of food per capita per year, France has been a leading country in the war against food waste since 2013 and recently became the world's first country to adopt a food waste legislation. Firstly, a resolution imposed food producers to adopt expiration dates that more accurately reflect the food product's real shelf life. In addition, in order to facilitate the consumers, the 'best before' label will be replaced with preferably to be consumed before'. France also wants to make it easier for stores and restaurants to give away food they can no longer sell via government-run collection programs. Since July 2016, a law unanimously passed by the French parliament, imposes all large supermarkets (those approximately 4,3000 square feet and larger) the inability to throw away food that is still edible, regardless its expiration date. The edible food has to be either donated to charities or used as animal feed; food retailers could incur in fines up to \$82,000.

Meanwhile, "We Food" is the Danish innovative solution to reduce food waste. This supermarket,

which recently opened in Copenhagen (Denmark), only stocks products that have past their expiration date or fresh foods with aesthetic imperfections or damaged packaging. These *imperfect* products are sold at 30-50% lower price than their *perfect* alternatives. An unbelievable number of fruits and vegetables are wasted and thrown away before even reaching the consumers because their shapes, colors or sizes do not respect the unreasonable *traditional* standards set for food products sold commercially. Similarly, in the UK, the special boxes are used to sell-defected in-season misshaped vegetables in major supermarket chains (Tesco, M&S, Asda) at 30% lower prices compared to the aesthetically *perfect* alternatives. In addition, supermarkets have adopted local solution to recycle the expired products to charities or food banks before these have to be sent to anaerobic digestion energy plants.

Stated the relevance of food waste with regards to both food security and environmental sustainability, the transition toward a more efficient food chain system will soon become inevitable.

The new EU pledge and the country's local and independent regulations and initiatives represent an important first step toward the prevention and reduction of food waste. Anti-waste legislation and practices should be adopted in every European country and extended from large supermarkets to

restaurants, and smaller shops and food producer. The EU initiative should be of example to the rest of the world. Eventually, these practices, supported by the law, could be of pivotal importance to modify consumer's food consumption habits, redefining the concept of beauty and safety in support of a more responsible and efficient attitude toward food.

References

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