



Legally binding targets to reduce food waste

The position of FEBA and its members



Introduction



On 5 July 2023, the European Commission published a [proposal](#) for a directive amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste introducing legally binding food waste reduction targets.

The [European Green Deal](#) and the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) call for reinforced and accelerated EU and Member State action to ensure the environmental sustainability of the food sector.

While food loss and waste have become a central point of interest at the EU level, with harmonisation measures and the establishment of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste in 2016, this legislative text aims to go one step further. Indeed, this proposal aims to reduce the environmental and climate impacts of food systems associated with food waste generation.

The consequences of food waste on the environment in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use and marine eutrophication spurred the Commission to take further action. In addition, it points out that preventing food waste would also contribute to food security.

If this directive is adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, Member States will have the obligation to take any necessary and appropriate measures to reduce food waste by

- 10% in the processing and manufacturing sector, and
- by 30% at retail and consumption level,

by 31 December 2030 in comparison with the baseline year 2020. To avoid penalising Member States, which have already been making efforts, national governments are allowed to choose an earlier baseline for the reduction targets, so long as the available data is sufficiently robust.

According to [Eurostat](#), in 2020 in the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food went to waste. [1]

[1] Eurostat, [Food Waste and Food Waste Prevention](#), 10 July 2023.

**132 bn
EUR**

associated market
value of food waste

**252 million
tonnes of CO₂**

GHG emissions of food waste

**59 million
tonnes of food**

went to waste

**131 kg of
wasted
food**

per individual in
the European Union



*Eurostat, 2020

That is 131 kg of wasted food per individual in the European Union or roughly 10% of all food supplied to restaurants, food services, retail, and households. Scientists of the JRC estimated that food waste accounts for about 16% of total greenhouse gas emissions from the EU food system.

Not only is the reduction of food waste beneficial for the environment but it can also have a positive economic impact on individuals and food prices: according to the JRC, households in the European Union could save EUR 220–720 on average every year.

This would mean over 6% decrease in the share of food expenditure in total household expenditures. In addition to that, wasting less food could help to mitigate food prices, the JRC report estimates that the price of vegetables could decrease by up to 2.6%, while fruit prices could come down by 1.4%.

The proposal in a summary:

- Member States shall take appropriate measures to prevent the generation of food waste in primary production, in processing and manufacturing, in retail and other distribution of food, in restaurants and food service as well as in households, with different measures which include encouraging food donation and other redistribution for human consumption, prioritising human use over animal feed and the reprocessing into non-food products (Art. 9a);
- Member States shall ensure that all relevant actors in the supply chain are involved proportionately to their capacity and role in preventing the generation of food waste along the food supply chain (Art. 9a);
- Member States shall take the necessary and appropriate measures to achieve, by 31 December 2030, the following food waste reduction targets at the national level:
 1. By 10% in processing and manufacturing;
 2. By 30% in retail and other distribution of food, in restaurants and food services and in households (Art. 9a);
- By 31 December 2027, the Commission shall review the targets to be reached by 2030. The Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council, accompanied, if appropriate, by a legislative proposal (Art. 9a);
- Member States shall review and adapt their food waste prevention programmes, containing the measures laid down in Art. 9a, including food donation (Art. 29a).

FEBA's Position

The European Food Banks Federation welcomes this proposal to tackle food waste at different stages of the food supply chain. **When food is wasted, it implies a waste of all resources necessary to produce, transport, and store it, but it also means a lost opportunity to provide nutritious food to charities helping people in need.**

Material deprivation is widespread in Europe, but preventing food waste through food redistribution is a triple win: saving food for human consumption, helping food business operators to become more efficient, and lowering the environmental impact of food production.

over **58%**

of the food handled by FEBA Members is surplus food saved from becoming waste

*recovered from food business operators and received through the EU Fruits and Vegetables withdrawal scheme.

While nearly 59 million tonnes of food are wasted (2020) 32.6 million European citizens cannot afford a quality meal every second day.[2]

In 2022 alone, in 30 European countries, FEBA Members redistributed 876,316 tonnes of food (+14% in comparison with 2019 as a pre-COVID benchmark) to 44,884 charitable organisations assisting 12.4 million most deprived people (+29% in comparison with 2019 as a pre-COVID benchmark) thanks to the commitment of 97,949 co-workers (93% volunteers).

Over 58% of the food obtained is surplus recovered from food business operators and received through the EU Fruits and Vegetables withdrawal scheme, thus saved from becoming food waste. In addition, FEBA Members also redistribute food financed through the EU (e.g. FEAD, REACT-EU, ESF+) and national programmes, , and individual and corporate food collections.

1. Firstly, FEBA and its members welcome that **food donation for human consumption is mentioned among the appropriate measures that the Member States shall take to prevent the generation of food waste.** In this way, human use is clearly prioritised over animal feed and reprocessing into non-food products.[3]
2. FEBA also welcomes that **the European Commission encourages Member States to ensure that all relevant actors in the supply chain are involved proportionately to their capacity and role in preventing the generation of food waste along the food supply chain.** However we strongly recommend that the entire food supply chain also includes primary production. Indeed, collaboration and partnerships of all stakeholders play a prominent role in preventing food waste.

[2] Eurostat, [How many people can afford a proper meal in the EU?](#), 10 July 2023.

[3] European Commission, [Food Waste Reduction Targets](#), 10 July 2023.

For instance, at the EU level, the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste is a good example of the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

3. Regarding the **introduction of legally binding food waste reduction targets**, FEBA and its members believe that this can be a **promising tool for achieving SDG Target 12.3** to halve food waste per capita by 2030. However, this would require targets of a 50% reduction at the EU-level, thus more ambitious than foreseen in the current proposal. In addition, FEBA strongly recommends the coverage of the entire food supply chain, i.e. addressing also food loss at primary production stage. FEBA encourages a more ambitious approach, which is necessary for the achievement of SDG 12.3 in the European Union. According to the [assessment report](#) of the JRC, because reducing food waste is akin to increasing the supply of food, meeting the food waste reduction targets laid out in the proposal should decrease market prices by less than 0.5% for meat and up to 2.6% for vegetables. Because of existing differences in the sources of waste at the domestic level, differences there can be marked between countries in price reduction: from about 8% for vegetables in Finland to less than 2% for the same products in Ireland. This is a very positive step taken by the European Commission, and we urge the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to go even further and set more ambitious food loss reduction targets.

For example, the primary production sector is not mentioned in the legislative proposal, yet it contributes to 11% of the EU's food waste, a higher percentage than restaurants and food services.[4]

Food waste targets need also to be in line with the Member States' national legislative frameworks and existing strategies and initiatives. This will for instance facilitate the donation of surplus food while ensuring that food safety and hygiene standards are not compromised for the benefit of end recipients. It is important to highlight though that higher quantities available for the recovery by Food Banks must go hand in hand with targeted financial and in-kind support enabling them to efficiently and safely pick up, store, and redistribute the products to the charities helping the most vulnerable of our societies.

4. Furthermore, FEBA stresses the importance to accompany food waste reduction targets by accelerated efforts to **improve the understanding of date marking across all Member States as well as to encourage food business operators to donate food after its 'best before' date** if it is fit for human consumption taking into account, for instance, the integrity of packaging and the organoleptic conditions (see Regulation (EC) 2021/382).

5. In addition, FEBA encourages the **support of food redistribution organisations such as Food Banks in the field of transformation, processing, and freezing of food that can enable the extension of the shelf life of products like fish, meat, bread, and fruits and vegetables** while preserving nutrients and vitamins.

[4] [Frequently Asked Questions: Reducing Food Waste in the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

These can be effective measures to reduce food waste of easily perishable products but require the availability of resources such as trained staff and suitable equipment to guarantee hygiene and food safety.

6. Finally, FEBA highlights that it will also be important **to collect robust and reliable data on food waste** from Member States.

This will enable tracking the progress, assessing the achievement of food waste targets, and proposing adjustments to food waste prevention strategies at the national level if needed. In 2020, FEBA launched the project “Quantifying the Impact of European Food Banks – From Farm to Fork” which aims to implement an efficient method for data collection and analysis, through the fortification of the capability of FEBA and its members. This project has been essential not only to build an accurate data collection system but also to gather information about the intended and unintended long-term effects produced by the activities of Food Banks at the European level.

Reactions from other stakeholders

EuroCommerce

In the statement by EuroCommerce Christel Delberghe, Director General of EuroCommerce, welcomed the food waste targets emphasizing that retailers and wholesalers have long recognised the urgency of taking action

and have implemented many measures to reduce food waste, including awareness raising and collaboration. However, EuroCommerce highlighted that since retailers have limited influence at the household level, combining retail targets with those for households could cover meaningful progress made by the sector.

European Environmental Bureau

The European Environmental Bureau, a network of over 180 environmental associations, approves of the general principle of the legislation, but it believes that it is not ambitious enough. As part of its international engagement, the EU must reduce food waste by half by 2030 (compared to 2015). As such, the EEB calls for legally binding targets set at 50% of waste reduction for every step of the food supply chain, including at production level for which the current proposal does not set any target at all. “While the proposal is a step in the right direction, [it] may lack teeth to effectively slash overproduction”.

Zero Waste Europe

Zero Waste Europe, an organisation dedicated to reducing waste and promoting circular economy, also voiced concerns about the effectiveness of the directive in reducing food waste by 50% by 2030, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the environmental organisation, a proposal truly fit for purpose would set reduction objectives of 50% for every step of the supply chain, from farm to fork. The exclusion of producers from the text is described as “highly regrettable” and the non-profit organisation hopes that upcoming negotiations in the European Parliament and Council of the EU will raise the bar higher.

FoodDrinkEurope

On the same day that the European Commission published its proposal, FoodDrinkEurope, the food processors and manufacturers association, published a [short statement](#) explaining its view on the food waste reduction targets. FoodDrinkEurope declared that it “remain[s] supportive of the UN target, and the Commission's aspiration” but defended the possibility to change the baseline when estimating waste reduction. Some sectors or some countries have been proactive in their fight against food waste for a longer period of time and their efforts should now be taken into account.



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