

Reducing consumer food waste: recommendations for food businesses and other organisations

Food waste is a pressing issue with significant environmental, social and economic consequences. In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food waste (131 kg/inhabitant) are generated each year. The largest share of food waste is generated in households and food services. The food groups that are most commonly wasted are vegetables, fruits and cereals.

Consumers can change many behaviours that lead to food waste (e.g. cooking too much), but their capacity to prevent food waste is influenced by a number of factors (e.g. related policies, lifestyle factors). Reducing consumer food waste requires collaboration between all actors in the food system, in which food businesses and other organisations play a key role.

53 %

of EU food waste is generated in households (70 kg/person/year).



9 %

of EU food waste arises in restaurants and food services, including school canteens (12 kg/person/year).

The role of food businesses and other organisations

Food businesses play a crucial role in addressing the issue of food waste, as they are involved in various stages of the food supply chain, from production to consumption. They can help reduce consumer food waste by facilitating sustainable choices for consumers, informing consumers about food and food waste and promoting sustainability throughout the food supply chain (e.g. by offering a range of portion sizes, ensuring adequate packaging and logistical operations to optimise shelf life and protect products in the food supply chain and offering doggy bags in restaurants). Organisations such as coalitions or third parties involved in running, for example, voluntary agreements also play a vital role and can coordinate and facilitate actions to reduce consumer food waste.



Preventing food waste: a selection of actions

1 Nudges and tools for households

Nudges are small changes in an environment that are easy to implement and make it more likely that an individual will make a particular choice or behave in a particular way. These actions aim to enhance consumers' food management skills and support them in adopting new habits and routines to reduce food waste at home. The duration should be a minimum of 1 week to test and evaluate the effects, and then prompts and tools can be adopted for a longer period. Some tools show food waste reductions of up to 40 % compared with the baseline. Monitoring is highly recommended and can be done by either direct measurement (waste compositional analysis or food waste diaries) or surveys and control groups.

How to implement actions

- **Understand what behaviour needs to be changed** and which target audiences should be reached.
- **Identify the best channels** through which to provide the targeted households with tools/prompts.

- **Include a baseline measurement and control group** to understand the context for and levels of food waste before you start, thus allowing you to monitor the effects of the action.

Some successful examples:

- Offer stickers to place on kitchen appliances (fridges and freezers) to remind consumers about good storage habits.
- Distribute portion-based measuring cups to help consumers prepare portions according to their needs.
- Share recipes designed specifically to allow more flexibility in the choice of ingredients and encourage the use of leftover food.
- Encourage the use of shopping lists to improve meal planning and avoid impulse purchases.

2 Nudges out-of-home (food services)

These are nudges that specifically target consumer food waste in contexts such as catering services for companies, school and university canteens, festivals, restaurants and takeaways. Their aim is to influence consumers' behaviours, encouraging them to reduce food waste.

Important recommendations:

- **Know your consumers' preferences.** Information on these – which may depend on the context – can be gathered through questionnaires or open discussions, as this will increase the effectiveness of the actions.
- **Prioritise the evaluation of actions.** This will help you to understand whether actions work as expected and will allow you to adjust them as needed.
- **Share knowledge and experiences to motivate action.** Practitioners dedicated to reducing food waste often lack access to evidence-based and ready-to-use resources such as tools, best practices, recommendations and guidelines. Partnering with other actors involved in the food supply chain (e.g. waste management operators, distributors, suppliers) can maximise the impact of your actions. Partnerships with researchers and academia can help in setting up the actions.

- **Combine different actions.** Many effective strategies to reduce food waste combine several actions, such as raising awareness, providing information materials, distributing practical tools and creating a decision environment that encourages food waste reduction through nudges.

Some successful examples:

- *Use technology to monitor food waste and to display key messages for customers to increase their awareness and possibly influence their behaviour when discarding leftovers.*
- *Engage with different collaborators, such as local restaurant organisations, to encourage the use of doggy bags for food that is not consumed on the premises.*
- *Provide the opportunity for customers to adjust their portion sizes and ingredients.*

Find more information in the [compendium of tools, best practices and recommendations to reduce consumer food waste!](#)

The [European Consumer Food Waste Forum](#) is an EU pilot project of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The project has collected data and identified evidence-based, practical solutions to reduce food waste at the consumer level.






The EU and its Member States are committed to meeting [sustainable development goal target 12.3](#): halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by 2030 and reducing food losses along the food production and supply chains. Learn more about EU actions to reduce food waste [on the Commission's food waste web page](#).

Further information:



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