

The Consumer Voice in Europe

## REDUCING FOOD WASTE IN THE EU

BEUC's position on the proposal for a revision of the Waste Framework Directive setting binding food waste reduction targets



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## Why it matters to consumers

In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food (131 kg/inhabitant) are wasted annually - 53% of which at the consumer level.

Besides its negative environmental (incl. climate) impact, food waste is unacceptable from an ethical perspective and has financial consequences for consumers - even more so in times of high food price inflation.

While consumers have a role to play in reducing food waste, all actors in the chain – incl. farmers, manufacturers, and retailers – must take their full responsibility to tackle food waste. The setting of binding food waste reduction targets from farm to fork can contribute towards this goal.

## Summary

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The European Consumer Organisation, BEUC generally welcomes the European Commission's proposal introducing binding food waste reduction targets to be met by 2030.

Nevertheless, we see some gaps in the legislative text and, in view of its forthcoming amendment by the Council and European Parliament, we would like to share the following comments and recommendations:

- The proposed food waste reduction targets are insufficient to reach the United Nations' goal to halve per capita global food waste and cut food losses along production and supply chains by 2030.
- Food waste reduction targets should apply from farm to fork. We would like to see a target for reducing food waste on-farm, including crops left unharvested.
- A distinction should be made between edible and non-edible food waste.
- Over half of food waste occurs at household level. With confusion around date marking being one of the causes for consumer food waste, the Commission should come forward as soon as possible with its proposal revising EU food labelling rules - including date marking.
- Consumer organisations can play a key role in raising awareness and informing consumers on food waste. This role could be better recognised and reflected in the proposal, including access to funding for activities contributing to fighting food waste.

## 1. Introduction

In July 2023, the European Commission published a legislative proposal amending the EU Waste Framework Directive to introduce binding targets for food waste reduction.<sup>1</sup>

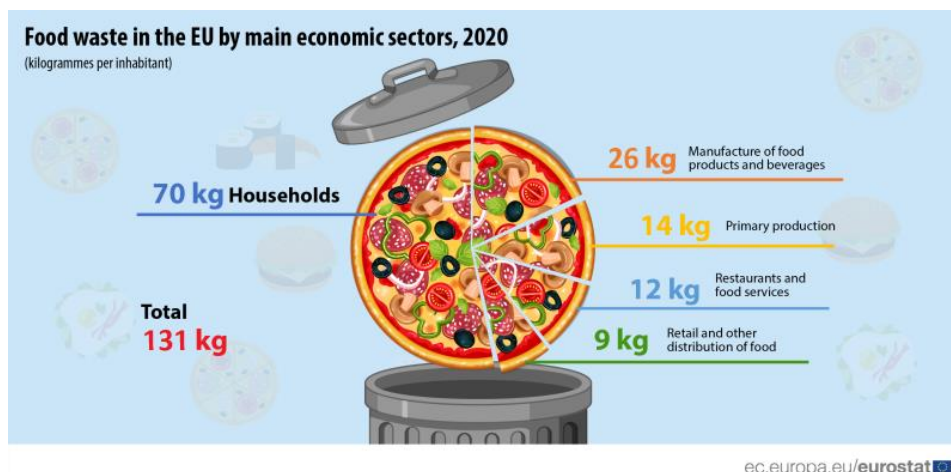
The Commission proposes that, by 2030, Member States reduce food waste by 10% in processing and manufacturing, and by 30% (per capita) jointly at retail and consumption levels (restaurants, food services and households). The results of the first EU-wide monitoring of food waste levels carried out in 2020 will serve as a baseline to assess progress.

Member States will have full freedom as regards the selection of the measures to reach the targets. EU countries are in fact already required to implement food waste prevention programmes to reduce food waste at each stage of the food supply chain, and to monitor and report on progress achieved. By the end of 2027, the Commission will review the targets and possibly modify, extend and/or complement them with new ones if evidence suggests that the EU can go further.

In view of the public consultation on the Commission's proposal and the European Parliament's and Council's upcoming legislative work on the text, BEUC wishes to share the following comments and recommendations on the proposal.

## 2. Why Europe needs to cut food waste

A large amount of our food is wasted in the EU. The total food waste measured in 2020<sup>2</sup> nearly reached 59 million tonnes. Household food waste represented 53 % of the total, followed by the processing and manufacturing sector (20%), the primary production sector (11 %), restaurants and food services (9 %), and retail and other food distribution sectors (7 %) (see figure 1 below).<sup>3</sup>



*Figure 1: Food waste in the EU by main economic sectors (expressed in kg per inhabitant, data from 2020 - source: EUROSTAT)*

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2023). [Proposal for a Directive amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste](#). COM(2023) 420 final.

<sup>2</sup> Using the harmonised food waste measurement method set out in the Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597.

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Food\\_waste\\_and\\_food\\_waste\\_prevention\\_estimates&stable=0&redirect=no#Amounts\\_of\\_food\\_waste\\_at\\_EU\\_level](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Food_waste_and_food_waste_prevention_estimates&stable=0&redirect=no#Amounts_of_food_waste_at_EU_level)

**Food waste has negative impacts on the environment and climate.** The total amount of food wasted in the EU in 2020 caused GHG emissions corresponding to 16% of the emissions resulting from the EU food system.<sup>4</sup> Food waste is also responsible for the unnecessary use of (already scarce) natural resources such as water.

Besides its negative environmental impact, **food waste is unacceptable from an ethical perspective and has economic consequences for consumers.** Eurostat estimated that food waste of the consumer, retail and food service sectors may account for 10% of the total food supply in the EU, when at the same time, some 32.6 million people cannot afford a quality meal every second day.<sup>5</sup>

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) analysed the potential socio-economic impacts of cutting food waste and found that households could save 220-720 euros on average every year (depending on the extent of the food waste reduction). This would decrease the share of food expenditure in their total budget by over 6%.<sup>6</sup> The JRC also estimated that less food waste could help to mitigate food prices (e.g. the price of vegetables could decrease by up to 4%, while fruit prices could come down by 2%).

Furthermore, reducing food waste in the EU could contribute to global food security since food wasted at the consumer level also affects the total demand for food.

### 3. Food waste reduction targets should apply from farm to fork

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The proposal provides that Member States shall reduce food waste by 2030 (compared to 2020 or a reference year prior to 2020 when Member States can provide robust enough data):

- by 10% at the 'processing and manufacturing' level, and
- by 30% at the 'retail, restaurants, food services and households' level.

BEUC believes a **distinction should be made between edible and non-edible food waste** - at least at the level of households. Indeed, the more consumers cook from scratch at home - which is encouraged for health reasons -, the higher the amount of food 'waste' they are likely to generate (such as with inedible parts of fruit and vegetable such as peels, etc.).

BEUC also regrets that no reduction target for food waste and losses was set in relation to the primary production level. A 2016 report by the European Court of Auditors<sup>7</sup> evaluating the Commission's policy on food waste pointed to the need to adopt a more holistic approach looking at all stages of the food supply chain, and notably the primary production level. The UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 12.3 itself also aims at "reducing food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses."

The European Parliament's report on the Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>8</sup> similarly called for "binding targets at every stage of the supply chain, including *primary production*, pre-retail and retail" and further stressed the need to "curb food waste occurring at *primary production* level and early stages of the supply chain, including unharvested food."

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<sup>4</sup> [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/less-food-waste-could-bring-lower-eu-food-prices-and-decrease-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2023-07-06\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/less-food-waste-could-bring-lower-eu-food-prices-and-decrease-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2023-07-06_en)

<sup>5</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/safety/food-waste\\_en](https://food.ec.europa.eu/safety/food-waste_en)  
[https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/less-food-waste-could-bring-lower-eu-food-prices-and-decrease-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2023-07-06\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/less-food-waste-could-bring-lower-eu-food-prices-and-decrease-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2023-07-06_en)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16\\_34/SR\\_FOOD\\_WASTE\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_34/SR_FOOD_WASTE_EN.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0271\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0271_EN.html)

We would therefore call on the Council and European Parliament to address this gap when amending the proposal by **including a target for cutting food waste on-farm**.

BEUC is concerned that on-farm 'food losses' (including crops ploughed back into the soil or left unharvested, for instance due to low economic profitability) remain excluded from Member States' monitoring and reporting obligations - because falling outside the legally applicable definition of 'food waste' laid down in the amended Waste Framework Directive (2018). We would therefore support a **broadening of the definition of 'food waste' to cover mature and unharvested food** (as per the FUSIONS' definition of 'food waste'<sup>9</sup>). This would be in line with recommendation no. 16 of the European Citizens' Panel on Food Waste.<sup>10</sup> The present revision of the Waste Framework Directive offers an opportunity to **revise this definition, while at the same time setting targets for the reduction of on-farm food losses/waste (including crops left unharvested)**.

Finally, the **level of the targets lacks ambition** and falls short of the EU's and Member States' commitment to achieving SDG Target 12.3 to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses by 2030.

#### 4. The role of consumers and consumer organisations

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With half of food waste occurring at household level, consumers are key actors in the fight against food waste.

One of the causes for consumer food waste - albeit not the main one - is the **lack of correct understanding of the difference between the expiration date ('use by') and the minimum durability date ('best before')**. In addition, date marking is also often difficult to find on the packaging. A survey by Belgian consumer organisation Testachats/Testaankoop found that 92% of Belgian consumers want producers to be obliged to always place the date (numbers) and expiry date mention side by side (instead of having a mention referring the consumer to the lid or bottom of packaging to find the actual expiry date). The survey also showed that 84% of Belgian consumers want producers to be obliged to display the expiry date always in the same place on the packaging.<sup>11</sup>

The Commission was due to publish a proposal for a revision of EU food labelling rules by December 2022. Among other aspects, this proposal was expected to amend rules for date marking to improve its expression and presentation and as such boost consumer understanding and correct use of this information. It is therefore regrettable that this proposal, which could contribute towards the objective of cutting food waste at consumer level, has not yet been published.

We would urge the Council and European Parliament to call on **the Commission to come forward as soon as possible with the proposal revising the Food Information to Consumers regulation**.

**Consumer organisations too can play a key role in combatting food waste.** Through articles they publish in their magazines and on their websites, through campaigns they run, BEUC member organisations contribute to raising consumer awareness on food waste.

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<sup>9</sup> The [FUSIONS framework](#) defined 'food waste' as "any food, and inedible parts of food, removed from the food supply chain to be recovered or disposed (including composted, crops ploughed in/not harvested, anaerobic digestion, bio-energy production, co-generation, incineration, disposal to sewer, landfill or discarded to sea)". FUSIONS, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> [https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ECP1\\_Citizens%20Recommendations\\_EN\\_final.pdf](https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ECP1_Citizens%20Recommendations_EN_final.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Test Achats 652. Evitez le gaspillage alimentaire. May 2020.

Household food waste has a lot to do with people's routines, and many consumers just do not realise how much food they waste.

Consumer organisations regularly provide simple tips to consumers to help them change behaviour and waste less food at home. This includes food storage recommendations, encouragements to plan weekly meals and do a shopping list, tips to keep a clean fridge, recipes to re-use leftovers, etc. - and much more.<sup>12</sup>

**We would welcome if the proposal would recognise (in Art. 9a) the specific expertise and role of consumer organisations** in raising awareness and educating consumers on food waste and how to reduce it. Notably, the facilitation of "access to funding opportunities" referred to in Art. 9a (1)(d) could for instance also apply to consumer organisations for running consumer information/education campaigns on food waste.

Finally, reintroducing home economics education to the school curriculum could contribute to raising awareness of younger generations on food waste. Consumer organisations can play a supportive role in this respect: in Portugal for instance, consumer organisation DECO runs the 'Green Chef' program whereby they team up with schools to mobilise young people to combat food waste.<sup>13</sup>

ENDS.

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.beuc.eu/news/first-international-day-against-food-waste-how-are-consumer-groups-doing-their-share>

<sup>13</sup> <https://deco.pt/alimentacao/green-chef-vencedores/>

