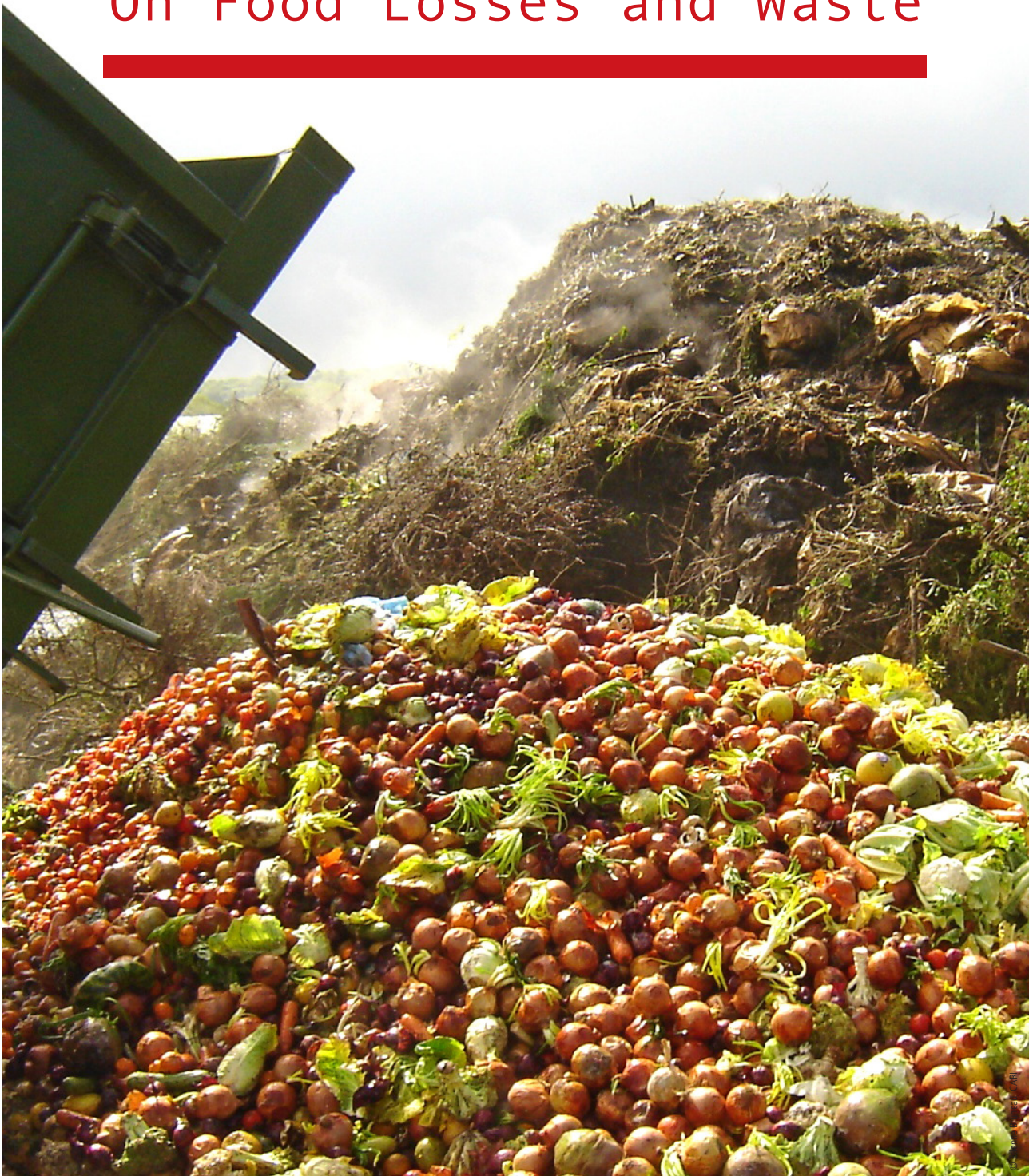


Position Paper On Food Losses and Waste



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1. Introduction

About 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted every year worldwide. In other words, about a third of all the food produced does not end up where it is intended to end up - on our plates.¹

According to an FAO study, food waste in Europe and North America amounts to between 280 and 300 kilograms per head per year – an unpleasant chain of wastefulness starting at the fields and the farmyard, continuing through processing and trading, and finishing up in our kitchens. Ninety-five to 115 kilograms per head per year of food are thrown out in households including many food items that are perfectly edible and could be consumed.²

This enormous wastage exists at the same time as one billion people in the world are suffering and dying from hunger.

Slow Food recognizes the central role of food, for our survival in its most basic terms, and in many other areas of our personal and public lives. Food plays a significant role in economic, ecological, social, cultural and political terms. It has an immense and essential value for our health, wellbeing and prosperity. Slow Food therefore considers this as an unacceptable situation, and the fight against food wastage a fundamental aspect of our work.

2. Defining food wastage

Wasted food is categorized in food losses and food waste. Food losses refer to a loss of mass or nutritional quality of food originally intended for human consumption, usually caused by inefficiencies in the supply chain.³ Food being discarded, most often at the retail and final consumption stages, is called "food waste".⁴ For the purpose of this paper, we will refer to food wastage, as it includes both food losses and waste.

Whether we call it food loss or food waste, all this food required energy, land, water, time, fuel, natural as well as human resources, money and a certain amount of polluting inputs to be produced, transported, processed, packaged, stored, sold, bought, transported again and stored at home. The production of this food generates CO₂ that contributes to changing the climate. Eventually, it becomes refuse, using up further resources for its management. So, whatever we call it, the wastage is enormous and wide ranging.

The various definitions of food wastage have taken into account, up to now, only quantitative criteria. However, mere quantitative definitions of the phenomenon are not sufficient to fully understand the reality: it is necessary to supplement them with qualitative and value elements.

Slow Food can help to integrate the definition of wastage, starting from one of its founding principles: the production of food and food itself cannot be reduced to the concept of goods or commodities. In other words, food wastage cannot be fought in a structural and radical way until we recognize food and its production as common goods.

Analyzing the causes of wastage at the various stages of the food production process leads to three simple but interesting considerations:

- Waste in the food chain happens already before planting begins, i.e. when food production is planned following parameters other than the actual food demand (for instance, contractual arrangements with retailers). Waste ends well after the last cooked dish, as its disposal requires a further waste of resources.

1 FAO. 2013. *Food wastage footprint, Impacts on Natural resources, Summary report*. Rome

2 FAO. 2011. *Global food losses and food waste – Extent, causes and prevention*. Rome

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

- ▶ Wastage highlights, at all stages of the food chain, the commodification of food and the loss of its deserved, respected value to humanity.
- ▶ Not recognizing the significance of this shift (from valued items into commodities) means not fully understanding the mechanism of wastage, and merely analyzing the effects instead of addressing their cause.

Therefore we take a new perspective on food wastage: Food wastage is the result of a lack of value attributed to the production of food and to food itself during all stages of the food chain.

This new perspective does not render superfluous the quantitative analysis of each step at which the wastage materially occurs; it rather allows a more complete vision, while providing a lens through which to direct interventions that should be used to combat it.

In other words, treating wastage as the effect of a lack of value attributed to food can guide in the construction of policies that are aimed not so much at fixing a system that does not work, but rather at reducing/ eliminating the phenomenon of food wastage from the start, precisely because this approach proposes an entirely value-oriented vision of the agri-food system.

Food wastage can be fought in the first place by producing less and producing more wisely.

3. Measuring food wastage in Europe: An incomplete picture

The Preparatory Study on Food Waste of the European Commission (2010) analyses food waste in Europe, but agricultural production does not fall within the scope of the study. As the study rightly mentions, although agricultural food waste was left out of the analysis, there may be important causes and quantities of food wastage to tackle in this sector. According to another document of the European Commission, agricultural waste may amount to a similar volume to that of households, but cannot be readily defined: no detailed data on agricultural losses is yet available in the EU.⁵ Moreover, the Preparatory Study reports, there have been several recent occasions where crops have been left in the field unpicked, because the market price of the crop did not justify the expense of harvesting.⁶ Clearly, the agricultural sector is an important statistical area for further research.

Taking into account the limited scope of the preparatory study, the Commission reports that the annual food waste in Europe amounts to 89 million tons of food, or 179 kg per capita.

The study also provides a percentage breakdown of this food waste: 42% occurs at household level, 39% during manufacturing, 14% in the food service sector, 5% in retail and wholesale. However, once again the study stresses that this breakdown is not intended to draw a comparison between household and manufacturing sector data, as the reliability of these estimates for the sectors differs.

It must be concluded that food wastage is a burning matter at EU level, yet a proper assessment of its extent and nature is missing.

Focusing on what happens at the end of the food supply chain and ignoring what goes on beforehand can only lead to incorrect analysis and policy outputs.

⁵ European Commission. 2014. *Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets*. Brussels

⁶ European Commission, DG ENV. 2010. *Preparatory Study on Food Waste Across EU 27*. Brussels

4. Drivers of food wastage

Food is wasted for different and sometimes contradictory reasons in different areas of the planet.

In the Global North, too much food is produced and bought, and it is often discarded even before it perishes. Consumers in growing numbers have enjoyed a persistently high and increasing prosperity in their lifetimes, have forgotten the lessons of their elders—who experienced hunger in the past—and developed an indulgent and wasteful approach to food. The demand for choice and quantity is often exacerbated by a loss of culinary culture and skill. People demand only the finest cuts of meat and only a few fish species, the ones that are easiest to cook. Uniformity is perceived as a merit and nonstandard fruit and vegetables are discarded. As a result, a shameful amount of food ends up being incinerated—its subsequent disposal, incidentally, requiring further energy consumption.

In the Global South, on the other hand, food is wasted for lack of adequate infrastructure, storage facilities and transport. But food is also wasted by pitting the production of biofuels, biogas and large quantities of feed for animals against food for humans. In some parts of the planet, this competition is heavily biased towards the interests of speculators and agribusiness.

According to the European Commission, in Europe the main causes of food losses and waste are:

- ▶ food overproduction
- ▶ high aesthetic market standards
- ▶ stock management inefficiencies
- ▶ packaging damage
- ▶ marketing strategies (e.g. 2 for 1, buy 1 get 1 free) that encourage over-purchase
- ▶ supply chain inefficiencies
- ▶ abundant standard portion sizes offered in catering services⁷

Consumers play a fundamental role. The main drivers of food waste at household level are:

- ▶ little value given to food by consumers, hence lack of concern to use it efficiently
- ▶ preferences for certain food parts that lead to discarding others
- ▶ lack of planning when shopping and cooking
- ▶ poor knowledge of the products
- ▶ inadequate storage and packaging
- ▶ confusion about “best before” and “use by” date labels⁸

Moreover, there is a widespread preference for cosmetic quality (good-looking produce) and for abundant availability of a wide range of products regardless of their place of production, season and even time of the day (for instance, bread shelves in supermarkets are fully supplied until closing time).

According to Slow Food, all of the causes mentioned above are actually the consequence of what in our view is the main driver of food wastage: namely, that food is considered a mere commodity.

In the current food system, food—and the values and rights related to it—has become a commodity whose value is expressed exclusively by its price. Food is sold, food is bought, and food is wasted.

It is necessary to stress that the system in which we find ourselves as consumers, producers or intermediaries is founded on a mechanism of wastage and overproduction, and on the rapid selling-off of stock to put new products on the market. In other words, wastage is no accident; it is inherent to the system. Industrial food production incurs low costs and wins high margins: this allows overproducing without losing economic profits. This is the key factor making food wastage functional to the system.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/sustainability/causes_en.htm

⁸ *Ibid*

Also the European Commission underlines this. Among the main drivers of food wastage, the European Commission identifies a culture in which food is relatively inexpensive, and is given a low value. Its impact assessment reports that “the low cost of food relative to other goods, and relative to disposable income (averaging less than 10% in Europe now compared to more than 30% in the middle of last century) is a driver of food waste, particularly in the food service and household sectors, as there are lower financial incentives not to waste food. (Buying more ‘just in case’ for convenience is an option when food is relatively cheap, and when food is generally seen as abundant and always available). At the same time the lower cost of food production, that stems from historical advances in agricultural techniques and technology, is an underlying driver linked to all others. e.g. enabling misshapen, leftover food to be thrown away without significant financial loss.”⁹

The agro-industrial approach treats food as a price-led commodity, on which it is possible to speculate and gamble. According to this approach, food has to circulate rapidly and unhindered, like other commodities. The consumer society – or rather, economy – in which we live is founded on a perpetual production-consumption-disposal-production cycle. The aim of the system is to speed up the revolution of the circle as much as possible.

This perverse mechanism cannot be endured, especially when it comes to food. Food is a product of both nature and culture, and remains inextricably linked to both. Detaching food from these factors can only result in the current system of overproduction and wastage.

5. Impacts of food wastage

A food system that generates such vast amounts of food wastage yet cannot feed all people on the planet is an unsustainable one. The amount of food wastage produced comes at a high cost: ecological, economic, ethical and cultural.

Faced with this situation, the productivism paradigm starts to creak. We cannot continue to accept a situation in which the soil is increasingly put under stress and needs to be fertilized with chemicals to conserve (or even increase) its productivity—meaning polluted, useless aquifers. Above all, we cannot accept the fact that all this is happening without calling into question the waste on which the system is based.

The analysis that follows shows that producing less food and producing more wisely is the way to feed a growing world population. The current amounts and dynamics of food wastage indicate that the issue for feeding the world is not only how much food we produce: rather, it is how food is produced, distributed and consumed, and how resources (environmental, economic, human) are used, or rather wasted, in the process.



⁹ European Commission. 2014. *Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets*. Brussels

5.1 Ecological impact

The impact of the global food wastage on natural resources is massive, for instance according to the FAO:¹⁰

- ▶ The carbon footprint of food produced and not eaten is estimated to 3.3 gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent: as such, food wastage is equivalent to the third top emitter after the USA and China. At European level, the overall CO₂ equivalents attributable to food waste is at least 170 megatonnes emitted per year, close to the total greenhouse gas emissions of Romania or of the Netherlands in 2008, and approximately 3% of total EU27 emissions in 2008.¹¹
- ▶ Globally, the blue water footprint (i.e. the consumption of surface and groundwater resources) of food wastage is about 250 km³, which is equivalent to the annual water discharge of the Volga river, or three times the volume of lake Geneva.
- ▶ Produced but uneaten food uses up almost 1.4 billion hectares of land; this represents close to 30 percent of the world's agricultural land area.
- ▶ While it is difficult to estimate impacts on biodiversity at a global level, food wastage unduly compounds the negative externalities that monocropping and agriculture expansion into wild areas create on biodiversity loss. Globally food waste may represent more than 20% biodiversity pressure.¹²

According to the FAO, although there is a wide recognition of the major environmental implications of food production today, no study has yet analyzed the impacts of global food wastage from an environmental perspective.

5.2 Economic impact

Food wastage represents significant economic losses for:

- ▶ Producers, who leave produce un-harvested or discard perfectly edible products that do not adhere to market size and aesthetic standards. The direct economic cost of food wastage of agricultural products (excluding fish and seafood) globally, based on producer prices only, is about \$USD 750 billion, equivalent to the GDP of Switzerland.¹³
- ▶ Retailers, who lose products due to mechanical or biological spoilage during transport because of long distances between the place of production and the store, or because of long journeys to slaughter, throw away products left unsold before their expiry date, throw away edible products close to their best before date or throw away edible products that have fallen below the required aesthetic standards (usually fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables).
- ▶ Households, which dispose of edible food because of confusion about best-before/consume-by dates, over-purchase and consequently of food perishing, lack of knowledge about food storage and food preparation (using all vegetables parts and all meat cuts, and cooking with leftovers). For instance, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has shown that household food waste in UK homes amounts to 8.3 megatons of food and drink wasted each year (with a retail value of £12.2 billion, 2008 prices).¹⁴ The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality estimated that Dutch consumers throw away approximately 8–11% of food purchased (2009), with an average value of €270–400 per person per year.¹⁵
- ▶ All tax-payers: food wastage means high waste management costs, including the maintenance of landfills (where food wastage is most frequently disposed) as well as transport costs, operations costs in treatment plants, and separation costs in some cases. Biogenic waste (food residues) usually have a high water content and therefore low heat value,

10 FAO. 2013. *Food wastage footprint, Impacts on Natural resources, Summary report*. Roma

11 European Commission. 2014. *Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets*. Bruxelles

12 Ibid

13 Ibid

14 WRAP. 2008. *The food we waste*. Banbury, UK. WRAP. 2009. *Household food and drink waste in the UK*. Banbury. WRAP. 2009. *Down the drain: quantification and exploration of food and drink waste disposed of to the sewer by households in the UK*. Banbury

15 Thönissen R. 2009. *Food waste: The Netherlands. Presentation to the EU Presidency Climate Smart Food Conf*. Lund

heavily influencing the calorific value of the waste and thus the energy efficiency of combustion plants. WRAP estimates that avoidable food waste represents an average economic cost of 595 Euro per household per year.¹⁶ In Germany, food waste management is estimated at 235 Euro per person per year.¹⁷

On the other hand, as reported in the impact assessment of the European Commission, reduced food waste will mean higher disposable income for EU citizens – money that can be spent in the food sector, or elsewhere in the economy. Evidence also suggests citizens who reduce food waste are ‘trading up’, i.e. purchasing higher value foods with some of their savings.¹⁸

5.3 Cultural impact

Treating food as a mere commodity implies stripping it of its social and cultural value. Food production and food consumption have deep cultural roots: we grow and eat food so as to survive and live, but also to celebrate important events, define our identity and not least, for pleasure. Food is inextricably linked to our cultures, to our individual and collective histories, and to our identity. It embeds precious knowledge, from the fields to the kitchen, passed on through the centuries.



16 WRAP. 2009. *Household Food and Drink Waste in the UK*. Banbury

17 German Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. 2013. *Contributo tedesco alla consultazione elettronica dell'HLPE sulla relazione relativa a perdite e sprechi alimentari nel contesto di sistemi alimentari sostenibili*. Berlin

18 European Commission. 2014. *Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets*. Brussels

5.4 Ethical impact

While millions of tons of food end up on the rubbish heap, the number of people who have no access to suitable food and healthy diets is rising – not only in low-income countries but also in Europe. According to Eurostat, 81 million people in Europe are threatened by poverty (which is 17% of its population), and 42 million already live below the poverty line.

Despite the fact that the current overall food production provides enough to feed 12 billion people – the world population in 2014 is just a little higher than 7 billion – 40% of the entire production is wasted, and one billion people go hungry every day.

The system of overproduction and food wastage persists at the expense of the right to food, as defined by Olivier De Schutter: the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.¹⁹

Across the world, the current system degrades farmers and food producers to commodity producers: The respect of their basic rights in intensive production arrangements is often questionable.

In the Global South, this system robs farmers of access to land and water, and communities at large of access to food: land is used, for instance, to produce animal feed for intensive factory farming supplying far-flung markets instead of being cultivated by local communities to satisfy local food needs respecting food sovereignty.

In other cases, land is used to produce export crops (like Kenyan beans exported out of season to Europe), supporting the import of food from abroad, whose price is highly volatile and co-responsible of the food crises and riots in the Global South.

Moreover, in its perversity, the current food system dumps food unwanted by the Global North (e.g. chicken wings) on markets in the Global South, at prices that drive local producers out of the market.

Finally, the system of overproduction and wastage is responsible for wasting, endangering and polluting our limited commons: water, soil, and air. It degrades living creatures, such as plants and animals, into commodities exploited to produce as much as possible, as fast as possible.

Thus, food wastage poses uncomfortable ethical questions: What attitude do we take towards the rest of humankind? And towards our commons, i.e. air, water, soils, which hold the future of the next generations? What is our attitude towards all living things?

6. Solutions to food wastage: the European debate

The European debate currently focuses mostly on food waste at household, manufacturing, retail and wholesale level. Too little is said about primary production losses, which are often left out of the picture. The measures proposed in this debate revolve around the following:

- Food Banks: donating food close to its “best before/use by” date to food banks, charitable organizations that distribute food to those who have difficulty purchasing enough food to avoid hunger.

¹⁹ <http://www.srfood.org/en/right-to-food>

- ▶ Feed: turning rejected, unfinished, damaged food, mainly from industrial production, into feed can help reduce food wastage within the current system. Regulated and monitored ways of doing so that ensure the protection of consumer and animal health are necessary. According to Slow Food, however, there is a high risk of creating a value market for damaged, rejected, and surplus food, thus possibly creating an incentive for producing more.
- ▶ Bio-Energy: turning food waste into bio-energy. From an ethical point of view, this measure is as problematic as turning food wastage into feed.
- ▶ Specialty food ingredients: reducing downstream losses by extending the shelf life and preservation of food through the introduction of ingredients typically used to preserve, texture, emulsify, color and improve the nutritional profile of processed food. For example, the shelf life of bread can be doubled through the use of enzymes and emulsifiers, in turn helping to reduce food waste.
- ▶ Technological innovation in agri-food production: enhancing performance at farm level and using products that do not comply with marketing standards in the processing industry.

Whilst it is certainly important to reduce food losses and waste at all stages, Slow Food stresses the importance of preventing the generation of food wastage in the first place: by restoring the value of food, and producing only as much food as needed for human consumption. This means moving from the prevailing system based on industrial agriculture to a system based on small-scale, family, sustainable farming, attentive of the needs of those who eat and of nature.

It is imperative to facilitate the workings of Food Banks, yet focusing only re-using food wastage or extending its shelf life are not effective measures, and do not tackle the root causes of the problem. They do not alleviate the pressure on resources or remove the injustices of the current food system.

As mentioned above, food losses and waste at all stages of the chain cannot be analyzed separately: without a comprehensive picture of the issue, we cannot devise a comprehensive analysis of the tools to solve it.

An attempt to look at the issue in its entirety can be found in the impact assessment of the European Commission²⁰. The document suggests establishing an EU wide standardized methodology for food waste data collection, ensuring reporting by Member States in relation to this, and setting national targets for food waste prevention. However, in doing so, it also argues that including the production stage in the target is not practical: agricultural losses can be affected by weather patterns which are largely outside the control of policy makers, and data of food wastage in this phase is poor compared to the rest of the food chain²¹. Also, the document states, "if too wide a target scope is defined, such as one that includes agricultural losses all the way through to consumption, then the target may be unmanageable and the measurement challenge too great"²².

While it is clear that agricultural food losses are difficult to monitor, measure and control, it is fundamental to tackle them as well, also in the setting of targets. The Commission document highlights that "the total impacts of agricultural losses are lower per ton of waste, as they occur before other resources have been used in the production of food along the food supply chain, and hence excluding this sector from a target is not so relevant"²³. Once again, disregarding food production is in our view a strategic mistake, evaluating the relevance of agricultural losses in terms of their impact per ton of waste only in relation to foods at later stages of the food chain is fundamentally flawed, and the motivations presented by the Commission weak.

20 European Commission. 2014. *Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets*. Brussels

21 Ibid

22 Ibid

23 Ibid

What has the EU done so far to stop food wastage?

According to the Landfill Directive (1999), Member States are obliged to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste in landfill by 65% by 2016 compared to 1995 levels. However, the Landfill Directive does not submit countries to binding specifications on methods for disposing of BMW not sent to landfills, a situation which has led, and will most likely continue to lead most MS to opt for incineration, as reported in the impact assessment of the European Commission.

The Waste Framework Directive (2008) includes strengthened provisions on waste prevention through an obligation for Member States to develop national waste prevention programs and prevention objectives, the establishment of a five-step hierarchy of waste management options and the clarification of definitions such as recycling, recovery and waste, as well as a delimitation between waste and by-products and end-of-life criteria. This also includes the application of Article 22 of the Directive which encourages the separate collection and treatment of bio-waste.

The Green paper on bio-waste management in the EU (2008) examines the necessity of a stand-alone EU Bio-waste Directive.

The **Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe** (2011) identifies food as a key sector where resource efficiency should be improved. It announces that it will further assess how best to limit food waste throughout the food supply chain and that it will seek incentives to halve the disposal of edible food wastage in the EU by 2020. The document also states the commitment of the Commission to assess how best to limit waste throughout the food supply chain, and consider ways to lower the environmental impact of food production and consumption patterns. The results were meant to be disseminated in the Communication on sustainable food, to be circulated by 2013, but not published to date.

The Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste makes reference to guidance document on reducing waste and its environmental impacts throughout the product lifecycle.

As stated in the European Commission impact assessment on food waste, "these policies primarily deal with food waste treatment, and while they aim to divert food waste from landfill, to other treatment streams, they do not tackle the bigger issue of food waste generation. There is though a recognition of and encouragement of waste prevention most notably in the Waste Framework Directive."²⁴

The Commission is analyzing in close cooperation with stakeholders, experts and Member States how to reduce food waste and is discussing options for EU actions.

As far as Member States are concerned, the Commission is supporting them in their efforts to reduce food waste by:

- ▶ Continuing to provide platforms for the sharing of best practice, both web based and via Member State and stakeholder meetings.
- ▶ Through funding via FP7 of the FUSIONS project – establishing definitions, measurement methods, best practice and waste prevention proposals.
- ▶ Publishing guidance for Member States on how to prepare food waste prevention strategies. (which is currently being followed up by United Nations Environment Program – that will soon launch an updated comprehensive tool-kit for preparing and delivering waste prevention initiatives.)
- ▶ By looking at clarification of 'date labelling' (including the possible reduction in the number of products requiring use by dates and the extension of date times.)
- ▶ Looking for clarification of VAT rules in relation to food redistribution.
- ▶ By making €9 million of Horizon 2020 money available for food waste research

²⁴ European Commission. 2014. Impact Assessment On Measures Addressing Food Waste To Complete Swd (2014) 207 Regarding The Review Of Eu Waste Management Targets. Brussels

In 2012 the Commission launched a Working Group on Food Waste in the context of the Advisory Group on the Food Chain, Animal & Plant Health to discuss good practices, obstacles and options for EU actions to reduce food wastage. A wide number of topics are addressed such as: donation of surplus food to food banks, date labeling, feed, short food supply chains, bio-energy, etc. Slow Food is a member of this Working Group.

In the same year, the European Parliament called in a **resolution on “how to avoid food wastage: strategies for a more efficient food chain in the EU”**, asking for urgent measures to halve food waste by 2025 and to improve access to food for needy EU citizens.

In parallel, the Commission is disseminating information: a **viral clip** on food waste, **“10 tips to reduce food waste”** in all EU languages, **clarification of “best before” and “use by” labels** in all EU languages.²⁵ The Commission is also compiling good practices on food waste reduction initiatives.²⁶

On July 2, 2014 the Commission adopted the **Communication “Towards a circular economy: a zero waste programme for Europe”** to establish a common and coherent EU framework to promote the circular economy. In the Communication, the Commission proposes that Member States develop national food waste prevention strategies and endeavor to ensure that food waste in the manufacturing, retail/distribution, food service/hospitality sectors and households is reduced by at least 30% by 2025. It is also mentioned that the Commission is considering presenting specific proposals to reduce food waste.

Slow Food appreciates the firm commitment of the EU Commission against food wastage. At the same time, Slow Food stresses the importance of framing the fight against food wastage in the wider debate on the sustainability of the food system – and not the other way around. Food wastage is one of the symptoms of the unsustainability of the current food system: it’s not the cure to that. Whilst addressing food wastage is without question of the uttermost importance, Slow Food insists on finding the cure to the overall unsustainability in our food system, and by doing so, also finding the solution to address food waste.

At the moment of publishing this paper, the Communication on sustainable food planned by the Commission has not been published. As the new Commission comes into power, we trust new momentum will be created for the elaboration of policies aiming towards the sustainability of the food system.

25 http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/sustainability/your_role_en.htm

26 http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/sustainability/index_en.htm



7. Tackling the root cause of food wastage: the Slow Food proposal

According to Slow Food, it is imperative to change the current situation radically and structurally. Trying to correct the current system or to compensate for imbalances after they have already occurred does not suffice.

It is imperative to start from the idea that food wastage can be fought even before the production, purchase and consumption of food.

To do so, it is fundamental to analyze thoroughly each sector of the food system – be it retailing, agriculture, or household consumption – so as to highlight the clear contradictions of food wastage.

Food wastage can be fought at its root only by restoring value to food.

In turn, the value of food can only be restored by recognizing the fundamental right to the pleasure of quality food, and consequently the responsibility to protect the heritage of natural resources, culture and knowledge that make this pleasure possible.

According to Slow Food, pleasure is a human right. The enjoyment of food is constantly sought with the utmost ingenuity, even where food is scarce: it is a physiological, instinctive behavior. To reject pleasure in the belief that it only accompanies abundance is a serious strategic mistake. Traditional cultures have a vast heritage of recipes and ways of preparing and processing tasty local or easily accessible food. This is true even in those areas in the world that are today most seriously affected by the problems of malnutrition and food insecurity.

The right to the pleasure of food is often seen as superfluous, as a luxury, when in fact this pleasure is deeply rooted in human behavior throughout time and place. Dismissing the right to the pleasure of food has prevented the quest for good food, and proved a perfect accomplice to industrial food production that merged the concept of “good” with food, regardless of its qualities (nutritional, environmental, social, cultural).

Without education, there can be no awareness of the value of food; and without this competence – the ability to recognize quality and value – the only criterion of choice is price. This is where market-oriented industrial agriculture comes out on top, since it has the power and/or the arrogance to lower prices.

Changes in attitude require time and a joint effort of all actors in the food supply chain. Slow Food proposes the following:

Producers can:

- ▶ explore market niches by marketing “ugly” (i.e. misshapen) vegetables
- ▶ sell directly to consumers, so as to match supply to demand and avoid over-producing

Retailers can:

- ▶ explore market niches related to food wastage e.g. “ugly” vegetables²⁷
- ▶ review contractual arrangements with suppliers (farmers or processors) that encourage over-production and the disposal of surplus production: currently, failure to supply agreed quantities renders farmers or processors liable to have their contracts cancelled; as a consequence, they plan to produce more than actually required to meet the contract and have a margin of error.

27 Si veda, ad esempio, la campagna “*Inglorious Fruits and Vegetables*”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2nSECWq_PE

Consumers can:

- ▶ use their individual and collective power: collectively, our consumer choices can bring great change to how food is cultivated and produced. To highlight this, Slow Food coined the term co-producer - a consumer who goes beyond the passive role of a consumer and takes an interest in the food system.

Civil society can:

- ▶ raise awareness on the value of food and the consequences of our daily food choices
- ▶ encourage and educate consumers to buy directly, if possible food without bar codes, for example through mail-order boxes of organic produce, or forms of community supported agriculture.

EU Institutions can:

- ▶ develop EU strategies based on a comprehensive definition of food wastage and loss and on related reliable data
- ▶ clearly define the food waste hierarchy and encourage its implementation by Member States
- ▶ reorient the political debate towards solving the main drivers of food wastage, highlighted above
- ▶ set food marketing standards that put the quality of food (where quality is defined in terms of good, clean and fair) at their core, not their aesthetics
- ▶ avoid measures that create a value market for food wastage
- ▶ support and give incentives for small-scale sustainable farming
- ▶ support direct marketing channels, strengthen short supply chains and give support to all activities that forge close links between producers and consumers – i.e. that reduce food miles, facilitate interaction between producers and consumers, ensure fair prices for consumers and producers that foster local economies
- ▶ support activities and campaigns that increase consumers' understanding of the value of food and that give a comprehensive understanding of the issue of food wastage (e.g. the School Fruit and Milk Schemes)
- ▶ encourage Member States to include in the school curricula a food knowledge and skills module – from early on to the end of secondary school education
- ▶ support labeling schemes that also provide information on the origin of the ingredients, farming and processing techniques, to enable purchases conscious of their environmental, economic and social impact
- ▶ review the legislation on Food Safety: on the basis that under no circumstance the life and health of consumers should be put into danger, it might help to avoid food waste if the current strict framework was to be revised, based on new research
- ▶ public procurement rules: demand to prioritize food wastage prevention, as the EC already did in the case of renewable energies, with the implementation of energy saving measures
- ▶ offer incentives towards wastage minimization (tax incentives, fees): for instance, taxes on food waste as measured by its weight, taxes on the disposal of food waste, no incentives for the transformation of food waste into biogas
- ▶ enable food redistribution schemes across Europe, such as food banks, support networks for sharing of surplus foods and remove obstacles to food redistribution
- ▶ support CSOs for awareness raising activities and encourage the exchange of best practices among producers, manufacturers and retailers
- ▶ encourage supply chain cooperation, for instance between the retail sector and the government (as in the UK) or between retail chains and suppliers (as in the Netherlands)

8. Slow Food in action

Towards sustainable consumption and less food waste: raising awareness – shortening the supply chain

Slow Food's approach to the fight against food wastage is based on a coordinated set of actions that see interconnected advocacy, awareness raising and grassroots projects all feeding into each other. Our approach intends to simultaneously encourage:

- ▶ consumers, to change the market with their choices, to become active about policy issues, to gain awareness of the importance of preventing food waste and of its impact on the global food system
- ▶ producers, to support them in implementing sustainable models of production and to collect their demands, specifically in connection with food loss when it is caused by the necessity to follow market demands, or due to framework legal conditions
- ▶ institutions, to bring decision makers closer to good practices and the needs of consumers and food producers, so as to incorporate in future policies measures aimed primarily at preventing food wastage and at avoiding the creation of a market for food surplus.

Reaching out to only one of the above mentioned groups cannot be effective, as their actions are strictly interrelated. Slow Food organizes local, regional and international events, launches campaigns and develops networks around food wastage, and creates space for dialogue to engage stakeholders and decision-makers.

Raising awareness

These are some of the events organized to raise awareness on food losses and waste:

- ▶ **Disco soups** in Germany, France, Greece and the Netherlands, as well as beyond Europe: Hundreds of volunteers, mostly young people, collect vegetables that farmers cannot sell because they do not comply with the market standards. They rinse, chop and cook them in soups and salads, to the sound of disco music. The free meal is served in public events involving up to 6,000 people.
- ▶ **Food waste workshops** and **Master of Food courses on Food Waste**: participants learn recipes, tips and ideas, based on a mix of creativity and tradition, for preparing dishes that are just as good as the originals.
- ▶ **Slow Food Day**, Italy: in 2013, more than 300 Italian convivia (Slow Food local groups) hosted free events in piazzas across the country (such as markets, tastings, meetings with producers and educational workshops) to raise awareness on food waste and solutions to it.
- ▶ **Zu Gut für die Tonne (Too good for the bin)**, Germany: nationwide days of action against food waste organised by Slow Food Deutschland e.V. in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and the Bundesverband Deutsche Tafel.

Moreover, Slow Food launched the **narrative labels** initiative, a label that does not replace the mandatory label, but supplements it by providing additional information regarding varieties and breeds, cultivation and processing methods, areas of origin, animal welfare, and advice on storage and use.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com/narrative-labels

Shortening the supply chain

Slow Food coordinates the following projects to bring producers and consumers closer, and thus prevent food wastage.

Slow Food Presidia, projects to safeguard and promote food products at risk of extinction
slowfoodfoundation.com/presidia

Slow Food Chefs' Alliance, to bring chefs, producers and consumers closer
www.slowfoodfoundation.com/alliance

Earth Markets, community-run farmers' markets promoting educational activities
www.earthmarkets.net/

Furthermore, in 2014 Slow Food Italy collaborated in the creation and diffusion of the first Italian platform of item-sharing against food waste, NextDoorHelp: through the platform, users can publish or look for a geolocated announcement on food leftovers, thus having the chance of exchanging food surpluses and avoiding they go to waste.

Slow Food is a worldwide association involving millions of people dedicated to and passionate about good, clean and fair food. This includes chefs, youth, activists, farmers, fishers, experts and academics in over 150 countries. Slow Food proposes linking the pleasure of good food with a commitment to local communities and the environment. According to Slow Food, food must be:

- **Good.** The flavor and aroma of a food, recognizable to educated, well-trained senses, is the result of the competence of the producer and the choice of raw materials and production methods, which should in no way alter its naturalness.
- **Clean.** The environment has to be respected, and sustainable practices of farming, animal husbandry, processing, marketing and consumption applied throughout the food chain. Every stage in the agro-food production chain, consumption included, should protect ecosystems and biodiversity, safeguarding the health of the consumer and the producer.
- **Fair.** Social justice should be pursued through the creation of conditions of labor respectful of humans and their rights, and capable of generating adequate rewards; through the pursuit of balanced global economies; through the practice of sympathy and solidarity; through respect for cultural diversities and traditions.



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