

88 million tonnes
of food waste in EU member states in 2012...



War on waste

As tough new laws were introduced in France this year, other European countries are focusing on eradicating food waste. Victoria Brownlee explores some of the solutions to a growing problem >





The discussion on food waste and its environmental, economic and social implications has gained momentum across Europe in recent years, with the publication of detailed reports exposing the level of waste across all sectors and the associated costs.

In 2016 alone, there have been a number of key developments regarding how European governments and organisations tackle the issue of food waste. From new laws in France and Italy to the growth of organisations fighting against waste, including apps and supermarkets selling discarded food, the ways operators deal with food waste are changing.

The size of the problem

EU member states were estimated to produce 88 million tonnes of food waste in 2012, equating to around €143bn in associated costs (including €20bn across the foodservice sector), according to a 2016 report from Fusions EU.

The foodservice sector accounts for 12% of food waste, equating to almost 11 million tonnes during 2012, or 21kg per person per year (households and processing account for 53% and 19% respectively). The report highlights the “pressing need to prevent and reduce food waste to make the transition to a resource-efficient Europe”.

The key to reducing food waste is managing a quality food supply, educating consumers and effective waste recycling programmes

Sustainable business practices are increasingly important to consumers and operators, as the global food supply is increasingly affected by environmental changes and food waste. Marcia Mogelonsky, director of insight at Mintel, links the growing importance of sustainable practices with climate issues: “The frequency of these extreme weather patterns could place further stress on the food supply chain and makes sustainability a more urgent and widespread concern.”

Under the umbrella of sustainability, Mogelonsky believes that food waste has become a more pertinent issue for manufacturers and consumers due to increasing educational campaigns building awareness of the problem, and the effects of the financial crisis making consumers more mindful of spending.

How Europe is responding

Governments across Europe are beginning to look at how they deal with unsold food after a new anti-waste law was passed in France in early 2016. The law requires supermarkets with a sales floor of 400 sq m or more to donate unsold food to charities and food banks, rather than destroying or binning the items.

Arash Derambarsh, the French municipal councillor who initiated the campaign that helped lead to the new law, told *The Guardian* that it was just the first step in a greater mission. The aim is now to extend the law across the EU, and “to fight food waste in restaurants, bakeries, school canteens and company canteens”.

Three unique initiatives in Europe



Too Good To Go is a social enterprise aiming to reduce food waste, founded in Denmark at the end of 2015, and now also operating in the UK. The app and website link customers to local restaurants, cafes and bakeries that offer discounted food up to an hour before closing.



Culinary Misfits, a Berlin-based catering company with a conscience, takes “three-legged carrots or voluptuous beets” that wouldn’t have made it into the supermarket and turns them into delicious meals, celebrating natural diversity and promoting sustainability.



The Sustainable Restaurant Association in the UK targets food waste at the restaurant level, through its sustainability-rating guide (covering 14 areas of sustainability), its annual Food Made Good Awards, and campaigns such as ‘Too Good To Waste’ (providing restaurants with advice on reducing waste, and encouraging the use of doggy boxes so diners can take home leftovers).





Foodservice consultant **Gilles Castel** FCSI believes that France is making solid progress in sustainable development and has the practices in place for sorting and recovery of waste to become a leader in the fight against wastage.

For Castel, the key to reducing food waste is managing a quality food supply, educating consumers and developing effective waste recycling programmes. He feels that to reduce food waste further, “producers of waste could be informed in a more comprehensible way on the actions to be taken (whether or not at a regulatory level)”, which is why FCSI France is collaborating with organisations to draft a waste management guide to be released later this year free of charge.



In mid 2016, an Italian law was also passed to make the donation of unsold food simpler and to increase the practice of taking leftovers from restaurants home. The law relaxes donation requirements and encourages organisations to give unsold food to charities rather than throwing it out, although this practice is not a legal requirement.

Among other initiatives to fight food waste in Denmark, the first non-profit surplus food supermarket opened in February 2016. Wefood was launched by DanChurchAid in Copenhagen in an effort to reduce the 700,000 tonnes of food that end up trashed in the country each year.

The supermarket sells products that cannot be sold in regular supermarkets – due to incorrect labels, passed best-before dates, and damaged packages – at a discount of 30% to 50%. They collaborate with

Danish supermarkets to receive produce, and the proceeds are used to combat famine in impoverished countries, reducing food waste locally and deprivation globally.

The benefits of reducing food waste

Beyond the environmental need to reduce waste, businesses are recognising the commercial benefits at an operational level. The UK hospitality and foodservice sector is estimated to have lost £2.5bn per year in 2011 to food waste, rising to £3bn per year by 2016. Wrap, the UK-based sustainability charity who released these estimates, is

focused on reducing waste and works with governments, businesses and communities to improve resource efficiency by providing practical solutions. Using evidence-based research, guidance and tools relating to the management of food waste, it can help operators to become more commercially sustainable.

For foodservice operators, examining what is being binned – from excessive peelings and unused ingredients to leftovers – can provide a greater understanding of how ingredients are being used and at what stage wastage is occurring. Costing the total waste gives insights into how resources might be used in a more cost-effective way. Setting waste reduction targets makes operators aware and accountable.

Whether or not operators are currently required by law to take action against waste, the benefit of measuring and reducing food waste is becoming much clearer on both a commercial and environmental level. ■

Commercial benefits for businesses

Sustainability charity Wrap lists the commercial benefits of reducing food waste, as well as the key actions operators can take. The benefits include:

- 1** Cutting costs (Wrap includes a waste prevention calculator on its website to estimate savings)
- 2** Improving supply chain resilience to remain competitive
- 3** Anticipating consumer expectations as shoppers simultaneously aim to reduce waste, and customers expect it as part of corporate social responsibility

Key actions for businesses:

- 1** Measuring the waste
- 2** Costing the waste
- 3** Setting a reduction target
- 4** Taking action
- 5** Embedding a culture of waste prevention

SOURCE: WRAP.ORG.UK

