

CASE STUDY 11 Jan 18

SIRPLUS: RESCUING FOOD FROM WASTE

Germany has a big problem when it comes to food wastage, which is contributing to the country's carbon emissions. That's why SirPlus, a supermarket that only sells 'rescued food', has been created, helping people minimise their impact on the environment while picking up their groceries.

Location **Germany**

Author

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Barbara Woolsey is a Canadian journalist based in Berlin, regularly contributing to outlets such as Reuters, Thrillist and The Guardian on culture, travel, startups and more. Currently you can find her taking Greek classes.

Highlights & Data

- SirPlus is a German supermarket that sells 'rescued food' – foodstuffs that are near or past their sell by date, misshapen or overproduced
- Germany is a global leader in environmental issues, but has a bad track record when it comes to food waste
- Beyond cutting waste, supermarkets' eco-friendly initiatives can enhance brand perception
- The average German wastes approximately **82kg** of food each year, equal to roughly **one in every eight** food items purchased (*University of Stuttgart, 2012*)
- Food waste accounts for **4%** of Germany's total greenhouse gas emissions (*Umwelt Bundesamt, 2015*)
- **66.1%** of municipal waste in Germany is recycled, well ahead of the EU average of **45%** (*Eurostat, 2016*)

Scope

Germany is a world leader when it comes to eco-consciousness, ranking fifth for environmental sustainability in 2016. [1] At the same time, however, Germans are some of the worst offenders when it comes to wasting food – and it's having a dramatic effect on the country's greenhouse emissions. That's why crowdfunded supermarket SirPlus only sells 'rescued food' – produce that has been saved from going to waste at some point in the supply chain, either due to overproduction, going past its best before date, or being rejected for aesthetic reasons. "We wanted to make food-saving mainstream and available for everyone, businesses and consumers alike," says co-founder and CEO Raphael Fellmer. [2]

Fellmer's food rescue journey began nine years ago after watching a YouTube video on dumpster diving – the unglamorous practice of collecting discarded food from supermarket bins. He witnessed first-hand the abundance of discarded food, inspiring him to go five years without buying groceries. According to Fellmer, SirPlus' minimalistic setup of diverse products placed along hand-made wooden shelves makes food rescue more accessible and “sexy, hip, and cool for everyone.” [2]

SirPlus opened its doors in Berlin at the beginning of September 2017 following a successful crowdfunding campaign where 7,000 backers almost doubled the original target of €50,000. [2] Fellmer estimates the supermarket sees around 500 customers a day, excluding those who opt for the online delivery service. The concept has generated considerable media buzz too, with more than 200 reports published about the store within its first 100 days of opening. [3]



SirPlus sells produce that is misshapen, overproduced or otherwise needlessly discarded
SirPlus (2017) ©

Context

Germany ranked fifth out of 80 countries in the 2016 Global Green Economy Index, and the national recycling rate of 66.1% makes it the European leader in salvaging, well ahead of the EU average of 45%. [1][4] Eco-consciousness is especially apparent in Berlin, where flea markets and second-hand shopping are beloved by locals and tourists alike, and veganism is so popular that the capital has been rated the world's best city for vegans by online community HappyCow. [5]

However, there is one dirty mark on the nation's record – the average German wastes approximately 82kg of food each year, equal to roughly one in every eight food items purchased. [6] Food loss is a significant environmental issue in Germany. “Germany's food losses alone account for about 4% of the total national greenhouse gas emissions,” said Maria Krautzberger, president of Germany's environmental agency, Umwelt Bundesamt. “Globally, food loss equals more than three gigatonnes of greenhouse gases – if food loss was a country, it would be the third highest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China.” [7]

“ I believe more and more people want to care about the environment, about social issues, and this a very easy way to do it

Raphael Fellmer, CEO and co-founder of SirPlus

Public awareness of food wastage has been increasing steadily in Germany, thanks largely to the 2011 documentary *Taste the Waste*. Afterwards, the German government introduced the ‘Too Good for the Bin’ initiative, with a website and app offering tips for buying and storing food, as well as recipes and suggestions on using leftovers. [6] SirPlus is simply tapping into this increased awareness and consumer demand for sustainability in their everyday purchases. “I believe more and more people want to care about the environment, about social issues, and this a very easy way to do it, to combine it with a necessity that we all need to eat,” says Fellmer, adding that the supermarket helps remove the stigma attached to conventional food banks for those on a tight budget.

While SirPlus’ offering is certainly noteworthy, it is not the only supermarket in Berlin with an eco-friendly ethos. Since September 2014, **Original Unverpackt** has been selling groceries and household items without packaging. Customers either bring their own containers or rent them from the shop. [8]



Germany's eco-friendly reputation isn't as clean as it seems

SirPlus (2017) ©

Insights and opportunities

SirPlus is having an effect on a number of different industries due to the complex nature of the traditional supermarket supply chain. Farmers and producers are not only moving stock that would otherwise be wasted, but SirPlus also pays for the produce. According to Fellmer, other supermarkets and wholesalers, including German retail giant Metro, have also shown an interest in cooperating, as it would allow them to reduce wastage and enhance perceptions of corporate social responsibility. [2]

The company plans to expand in 2018 by developing a digital marketplace to streamline the surplus food supply chain. The platform is intended to involve all levels – farmers, producers, distributors, logisticians, wholesalers and supermarkets – by offering the software free to charities and non-profit organisations. Fellmer describes it as a “win, win, win” scenario. [2] It is also in discussions with other supermarket chains keen to save money and reduce excess by partnering up. With the EU becoming increasingly strict on food wastage (all member states have been urged to cut their per capita food wastage in half by 2030), businesses are shoring themselves up against potential government regulations. [9]

When it comes to global ecological issues, it can be easy for individuals to feel as though their actions do not matter in the grand scheme of things, but SirPlus changes this, offering customers the opportunity to make a conscious decision about how their choices add up. And as the issue grows bigger, so does the space for eco-first brands to operate in. Nearly three-quarters of Gen Yers, 72% of Zers and 51% of Boomers are willing to pay more for a product if it's considered sustainable, and as Grace Farraj, senior VP of public development and sustainability at Nielsen, notes, it will only cement brand loyalty in years to come; "Brands that establish a reputation for environmental stewardship among today's youngest consumers have an opportunity to build loyalty among the power-spending Millennials of tomorrow." [10]

sirplus.de

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Sources

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