

Food waste is an all-encompassing problem

Written by Biljana Borzan on 15 May 2017 in Opinion
Opinion

Food waste occurs across the entire supply and consumption chain, therefore no single regulation will be able to solve the problem, writes Biljana Borzan.



Biljana Borzan | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The EU, as one of the richest and most prosperous communities in the world, has a moral and political obligation to reduce the huge quantities of food wasted every year. Wasted food and food loss also entails wasted water, soil, working hours, electricity, gasoline and other valuable and often limited resources.

The production and disposal of EU food waste leads to the emission of 170 million tonnes of CO₂ and consumes 261 million tonnes of resources. Experts argue that reducing food waste at consumer level in developed countries by 30 per cent could save roughly 400,000 km² of cropland by 2030.

According to the estimates by the FUSIONS project, 89 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in the EU. The sectors contributing the most to food waste are households, with 53 per cent, and processing, with 19 per cent. Food service sector produces 12 per cent, primary production 10 per cent and wholesale-retail five per cent.

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As rapporteur my intention was to produce an encompassing document that will address the problem of food waste along the entire supply and consumption chain and explore political and practical means and ways to reduce it. Maintaining and improving food safety is and will be a red line.

The report won the unanimous support of Parliament's environment committee, which does not happen often. This shows that there is a lot of political will to tackle the issue of food waste in all the parliamentary groups. It addresses issues such as the need for a common definition and methodology of food waste. We believe the Commission should evaluate the potential impact on food waste when conducting impact assessments on new relevant legislative proposals.

The report reiterates the Court of Auditors' opinion that the EU does not combat food waste effectively, and that existing initiatives and policies could be used more effectively to address the problem of food waste. It also reiterates that the Commission's level of ambition in tackling food waste has decreased over the years.

As estimates show that 53 per cent of food waste occurs in households, consumer education is a critical area where a concerted effort is needed.

According to Eurobarometer, over three quarters of Europeans think that the individual consumer is one of the actors involved in the prevention of food waste. Less than half of Europeans know the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' expiry dates.

There is food waste at every stage of the supply and consumption chain. That means there is no single, silver bullet regulation that the EU can enforce that would solve the problem. We need a coordinated policy response at EU and member state level that takes into account policies regarding waste, food safety and information, but also aspects of economic, research and innovation, environment, agriculture, education and social policy.

About the author

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