Reducing food waste is a common responsibility

Written by Julie Levy-Abegnoli on 15 May 2017 in Opinion

The urgency to reduce food waste is such that MEPs were able to put their political differences aside to try and find solutions.

More than just a trendy concept - one that is somewhat abstract to most of us - 'circular economy' actually covers many different aspects that have a direct impact on our daily lives.

They say one man's trash is another man's treasure, and this is basically what the circular economy is all about, including when it pertains to food. Food waste is something we have all been guilty of at one point or another, and MEPs have set out to address this growing problem.

As Angélique Delahaye, Parliament's EPP group shadow rapporteur on the dossier, points out, "One third of food destined for human consumption is wasted, while millions still suffer from malnutrition,
and the problem is worsening as the world population grows."

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In her role as shadow rapporteur, the French MEP says she "insisted on the need to take into account the entire supply chain, from producers to consumers. We must all be actors in this fight - most waste ends up in our bins. It is therefore essential to provide consumers with better information - we must ensure they fully understand the dates indicated on food packaging."

Delahaye also suggests encouraging shops to donate any unsold food, through "a decrease - or perhaps eliminating - VAT on these products, and agreements between economic actors and NGOs."

She adds, "In this report I also worked on establishing a legislative framework against unfair commercial practices and adapting distribution and consumption patterns to the characteristics of different products."

The EPP group deputy highlights that, "We must rethink our relationship with food and start considering is as a common good that we must protect. There is a lot of work left to do but it is worth it and I am proud to commit to this fight."

Mark Demesmaeker, Parliament's ECR group shadow rapporteur on the dossier, says, "Combatting food waste is an essential part of the transition to a circular economy, in which prevention of waste and preserving valuable resources through reuse and recycling are key.

"I support the resolution that reconfirms our ambition already laid down in the waste package, notably to reduce food waste by 50 per cent by 2030, based on a common measurement methodology, and by bringing the cascading principle into practice with a specific food waste hierarchy. To achieve this, we call for a European action plan that involves all relevant policy areas."

The Belgian deputy adds, "I am particularly pleased that the text emphasises the importance of involving all stakeholders throughout the agro-food chain, and the role of regional and local authorities in order to tailor measures, which I believe, is of paramount importance."

In Flanders, he explains, the wheels are already in motion. "Flanders, the nation I represent in the European Parliament, has already developed an action plan to reduce food waste by 15 per cent by 2020, indeed involving the whole chain of stakeholders from farm to fork."

"Various initiatives to raise awareness and prevent food waste are emerging: Horeca Vlaanderen has launched a Chef's Charter to combat food waste, event organisers can get tips and tricks for cutting food waste via 'groeneVENTscan', online platforms and apps like 'schenkingsbeurs' and 'Rekub' facilitate food donation, and there is abundant information for consumers to combat waste at home."

"So-called 'ugly' fruits and vegetables find their way back to the shops. Moreover, federal Minister of
Finance and fellow N-VA party member Van Overtveldt has extended the zero VAT rate for donating unsold food from recognised food banks to recognised food aid and social organisations.

Demesmaeker also highlights the importance of "mandatory separate collection and recycling of biowaste and the encouragement of home composting. A recent visit to Ecowerf, a biowaste composting installation in Leuven together with a delegation from the Parliament, demonstrated the enormous opportunities to preserve valuable resources once more."

Meanwhile, ALDE group shadow rapporteur Ulrike Müller points out that, "At the European Parliament, we often have fierce debates with contrasting views of the political groups.

"On the contrary, the preparation of this report on food waste proves its ability to cooperate beyond political boarders to achieve a common (and urgent) goal: the reduction of approximately 89 million tonnes of food wasted per year in the EU."

She explains, "In September 2015, the EU signed the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development, including the sustainable development goal (SDG) 12.3, which calls for a 50 per cent reduction in food waste.

"Whereas its endorsement is an important signal, we put the cart before the horse by committing to a precise target without having a common definition or methodology to create reliable and comparable data. Our report will speed up the process and bring us closer to reach the goal."

Müller adds, "Although food waste happens at every stage of the food chain, measures to tackle two specific issues are most promising to have a meaningful impact. First, according to the FUSIONS study, consumers cause approximately 53 per cent of food waste.

"Therefore, I am quite pleased that the report extensively addresses consumer information and education, also exploring the use of modern media and technology to reach the people.

"Second, food donations must be facilitated. Having a long-time background in regional politics, I know first-hand that there is a high level of willingness among local businesses to donate unsold food rather than dispose it.

"However, often enough framework conditions hardly allow that. The report acknowledges the important role to play by regional actors as well as their readiness to act. This is not only reflected by outlining necessary improvements of the legal framework, but also by solutions for a better institutional support for local stakeholder cooperation."

Concluding, the German deputy notes, "As is so often the case, the issue of food waste can only be solved if the relevant actors are understood as part of the solution. By taking an incentivising rather than punishing approach in this report, we are on the right track."

About the author

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