



Declaration of commitment: Together against food losses



Introduction

It has been estimated that up to a third of the food produced for human consumption is lost¹. Food losses are a problem in both developing and industrialised countries. Food is wasted throughout the food supply chain² and for various reasons³.

Food losses are undesirable from multiple points of view:

- From an ethical perspective, food waste is unacceptable in a world where anno 2014 one out of eight people suffers from chronic hunger⁴. Even in Europe food poverty is increasing, aggravated by the financial crisis: 43 million Europeans do not have a sufficient amount of food at their disposal⁵.
- Food losses have severe financial implications. They mean a loss of income for farmers and companies active in food industry, distribution and food services. Moreover, they cause unnecessary costs for the consumer.
- From a food security point of view, food waste is a structural problem. In the next decades, population growth will continue to put pressure on food security by increasing the demand for food. According to the United Nations, world population is projected to reach 9.6 billion people in 2050⁶.
- Food losses clearly have an effect on the environment⁷. Food losses are a loss of high-grade and scarce natural resources, necessary for food production. They represent an unnecessary negative impact on the environment.

The importance and urgency of the matter is clear to everyone. In order to tackle these societal challenges, the prevention of food losses has become a priority.

¹ FAO (2011) *Global Food Losses and Food Waste. Extent, Causes and Prevention*.

² A food supply chain is a sequence of multiple links: agricultural suppliers, primary production, food industry, distribution, catering industry and consumers. When we talk about 'sectors', we refer to the primary sector up until the catering industry. Consumers are part of the food supply chain, but they are not classified as an economic sector.

³ Some part of food losses are unavoidable or hard to avoid. For example, the losses in the primary sector due to unfavourable and unpredictable weather conditions (such as flooding, drought, storms, etc.) are difficult to predict. We can find similar examples in every link of the food supply chain.

⁴ FAO (2013) *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013*.

⁵ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2013) *Think differently. Humanitarian impacts of the economic crisis in Europe*.

⁶ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013) *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*.

⁷ FAO (2013) *Food wastage footprint. Impacts on natural resources*.

When a raw material or product is intended for human food consumption, it is called a food commodity or food product. A food commodity or food product consists of two parts: food (the edible biomass) and secondary flows (the biomass that is non-edible like peels or bones)⁸. When food is lost for human consumption, regardless of the cause, we refer to it as a food loss⁹. We use the following definition:

“Any reduction in the amount of food available for human consumption, taking place in the food supply chain (from the harvest up to the consumption) is defined as food losses.”¹⁰

Turning losses into profit

The prevention of food losses creates enormous opportunities. It’s a story with positive dynamics. We can turn problems into opportunities, turn losses into profit!

Besides relieving the pressure on food security and contributing to food sustainability, tackling food losses can also lead to a more efficient supply chain, which can lead in turn to cost savings. A food loss reduction can optimise existing processes, but it also encourages innovation, both technological and organisational. It creates new business models and partnerships and it encourages the circular economy. Dealing with food surpluses in a social way makes an essential contribution to food aid for those who are less fortunate. Amid the current culinary hype, the attention given to food losses can amplify the societal trend to reconnect with our food and increase the respect for food in all its aspects.

Flanders in action: together against food losses

The problem of food losses is something we will not and cannot afford. That is why this issue is already for several years on the Flemish policy agenda. Several initiatives have been undertaken to map food losses, to reduce it and to valorise it as highly as possible. This was done in close collaboration with food supply chain partners, the government and the various stakeholders. A lot has already been done, but together we want to move forward.

⁸ There is a clear difference between avoidable food losses and unavoidable secondary flows. In the academic literature, both concepts are often integrated. However, food losses and secondary flows are separate problems with separate characteristics and solutions or destinations. When we speak of secondary flows, we want to emphasise the opportunities in high-value valorisation.

⁹ The concept of ‘food wastage’ describes the loss of food that is still perfectly consumable by humans. This concept is mainly used for communication with the general public and awareness campaigns. ‘Food losses’ is a general term.

¹⁰ Official definition used by the Flemish Government - Interdepartmental Working Group on Food Losses. For more information on the conceptual framework: “Synthesedocument Voedselverlies in Vlaanderen” (IWV, 2012) en “Voedselverlies in Ketenperspectief” (OVAM, 2012).

The entire food supply chain wants to make a voluntary and ambitious commitment to further reduce food losses through sustained efforts, in collaboration with the Government of Flanders and all stakeholders. Therefore we have jointly taken the initiative to draft this declaration.

The increased public awareness of food losses and the organization of 'Feeding the 5000' in Brussels are strengthening our commitment. Moreover, we want to take part in the growing global and European movement and be a pro-active player. With this declaration of commitment, we wish to show our commitment to the European policy makers, who are currently drafting a European Communication on Sustainable Food, in which the prevention of food losses plays a key role.

Ambition

Throughout the food supply chain (production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption) we want to prevent food losses as much as possible and valorise them as high as possible. The cascade of value retention is our guiding principle, the European policy objectives our framework. We start from a common vision and put our declaration of commitment into concrete actions.

Vision

Shared responsibility

Food losses challenge all sectors in the food chain, from production to consumption. Moreover, the food supply chain is dynamic: the actions of one sector can have an impact on another sector in the chain or even on the chain as a whole. The prevention of food losses is a common and shared responsibility of the entire food supply chain and of the Flemish Government, and it therefore requires a food supply chain approach. We need to help one another in a positive way.

The Flemish Government plays a coordinating, facilitating and supporting role in this food supply chain approach. The subject also forms an integral part of its policies and functioning.

Complimentary to the food chain approach, a sector approach is essential. Sector measures should be based on the specific context and problems that the various links in the chain are confronted with.

Finally, consumers, a crucial link in the chain, have the responsibility to prevent food losses.

Prevention as the starting point, the Food Losses Hierarchy as guiding principle
Food is produced, processed, distributed and prepared with the aim to provide food for humans. By focusing on the prevention of food losses, we want to avoid that food is lost for human consumption in the first place. Important aspects concerning the donation of food surpluses are maintaining the quality of the food, ensuring the cold chain and the cost of selectively collecting and transporting.

When food losses do occur and the food cannot be used for human consumption, we must strive, just as with the non-edible secondary flows, to valorise these losses as high as possible. The application of the Food Losses Hierarchy depends on the legal framework and the specific economic, environmental and social context at sector and company level.

Food Losses Hierarchy:

- Prevention: avoid food losses at the source
- Redirect for human consumption¹¹
- Redirect to animal feed
- Redirect as a resource for (non-food) industrial use
- Process into fertilizer through anaerobic digestion and/or composting
- Use for renewable energy production¹²

Collaboration and consultation

Collaboration and consultation between the various sectors in the food supply chain, on both chain and company level, results in a great number of win-win opportunities to tackle food losses. Collaboration is indispensable if we want to act as efficiently and effectively as possible and if we want to achieve structural progress.

That's why we, actors of the food supply chain (production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption) and the Flemish Government, unite ourselves in a Flemish food supply chain consultative body. We want to involve all stakeholders closely and we want to achieve maximal coherence with other policy levels.

The Flemish food supply chain consultative body has the ambition to be a dynamic forum for coordinated action on the prevention of food losses. It will offer structure and a framework for implementing the actions listed below.

Actions

We commit ourselves to implementing the following six actions, which are the foundations of our joint approach to tackle food losses in Flanders.

Prepare a Food Supply Chain Roadmap

With this declaration and the efforts already undertaken, the members of the Flemish food supply chain consultative body, will make a Food Supply Chain Roadmap 2020, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This roadmap will include a strategy and

¹¹ See also the joint call of Comeos, Fevia, the federation of food banks, the social groceries, social restaurants and the anti-poverty organizations on the one hand, and the Federal Government and the governments of the three regions on the other hand, upon all businesses in the manufacturing and distribution sector to donate food surpluses.

¹² At the bottom of the hierarchy there are two more steps, but only if all other steps are no longer possible. These are 'incineration without energy recovery' and 'landfilling' (forbidden in Flanders). For more information about the Food Losses Hierarchy, see section 2. "Problem analysis" in the OVAM report "Food Losses in Food Supply Chain Perspective".

objectives and actions on sector and chain level, with the aim to reduce food losses as much as possible and to valorise food waste as high as possible, in line with European objectives.

Build a knowledge base

We want to build a solid knowledge base on food losses in all sectors of the food supply chain. This knowledge base includes a statistical basis, an analysis of the causes and hotspots and an overview of efficient and effective actions, good practices, smart innovations and successful partnerships.

Raise awareness

We want to raise awareness about food losses and their negative impact in every step of the food chain, from the primary producer up to consumers. We are committed to establish a broad societal awareness about food losses together with all relevant stakeholders. We will make a communication plan for the Food Supply Chain Roadmap.

Call for a Food Losses Coalition

We call upon all companies and organizations in the food supply chain, as well as all relevant societal stakeholders, to join us in our effort to combat food losses. We call on them to endorse the Declaration of Commitment and to tackle food losses with the Food Losses Hierarchy as guiding principle. Our aim is to bring about a broad societal coalition to reduce food losses in Flanders.

Involve consumers

We want to make a joint and coordinated effort to raise awareness amongst consumers. We want to support them in a positive way to prevent food losses and by doing so, to consume in a more sustainable way and save money.

Deal with food surpluses in a social way

We seek an enduring partnership with social initiatives active in food aid in order to support dealing with food surpluses in a social way and to inform all relevant stakeholders about these initiatives.

Signed by:

Minister-President Kris Peeters, Government of Flanders

Marc Rosiers, advisor to the Chairman for Piet Vanthemsche, Chairman Boerenbond

Jan Vander Stichele, Chairman Fevia Flanders

Jan Delfosse, Director-General Comeos Flanders

Michel Croisé, Chairman Belgian Catering Union

Danny Van Assche, Managing Director Horeca Flanders

Christel Verhas (Gezinsbond), member of the Board of Directors of the Research and Information Centre of the Consumer Organizations (OIVO)

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