PREVENTION OF FOOD LOSSES: A POLICY PRIORITY

Flanders loves its food culture and attaches great importance to the way food is produced, traded, prepared and consumed. Food has an important place in the cultural heritage of Flanders, but it is also a huge economic asset. The Flemish agricultural and food sector is among the leading in Europe. The production, processing, distribution and preparation of food makes an important contribution to Flanders’ economic prosperity and export. In 2011 the Flemish agricultural sector realized a gross output of more than 5 billion euros. Belgium has a share of 8% in the European agro-exports, ranking fourth in the European list. In 2011 the Flemish food industry had a turnover of more than 35 billion euros, creating employment for more than 65,000 people. But also in terms of sustainability the agricultural and food sector delivers important efforts. The Flemish agricultural sector is resource efficient and is continuously innovating to increase its eco-efficiency. The Flemish food industry is ambitiously taking the lead in a government-backed feasibility study to make the entire food industry climate, waste and water neutral by 2030.

Food losses have become an issue of concern worldwide. In order to maintain its leading position among food economies, the prevention of food losses and the high value valorisation of secondary flows has become a policy priority for the Flemish Government. Lowering the amount of food materials lost in the food supply chain will lower the environmental impact of our food production and consumption, save increasingly scarce resources and foster efficiency and innovation in the food supply chain, thereby creating financial benefits for businesses and consumers.

In the year 2020, Flanders wants to hold a leading position among the best performing European Regions. This ambition has been laid down in an overarching society-backed government program, called Vlaanderen in Actie (ViA) - Flanders in Action. This process resulted in a new future plan for Flanders: Pact 2020. To achieve this ambition the government of Flanders has embraced the European reduction targets for food losses. In collaboration with the food supply chain, societal stakeholders as well as member states’ governments and the European Union, the government of Flanders will take its responsibility in reducing food losses. An interdepartmental working group is coordinating activities on the Flemish level, investing considerably in research and consultation of key stakeholders and stimulating targeted actions.

FOOD LOSSES IN FLANDERS: A CHAIN PERSPECTIVE

Food losses are reductions in the amount of food available for human consumption, taking place in the food supply chain from the moment of harvest up to and including the moment of consumption. Raw food materials or food products also contain inedible biomass, which is released during the production or processing of food and its consumption. These inedible food materials are called secondary flows. Both food losses, if it cannot be prevented, as well as secondary flows, must be valorised to maximize its value, giving priority to human food consumption.
The total food losses and secondary flows combined in the Flemish food supply chain are estimated at 1,936,000 to 2,290,000 tonnes.

Food losses are a very complex issue and occur in every step of the food supply chain. The entire chain, from producer to consumer, including the government, will have to collaborate in order to find suitable solutions. To have a chain perspective on food losses, the Flemish Government consulted with the various actors in the Flemish food supply chain. The chain consultation consisted of representatives of economic sectors in the food supply chain, societal stakeholders, research institutions and government agencies. An intensive monitoring exercise resulted in food losses and secondary flows figures for Flanders. In the chain consultations four themes were explored: the role of shelf life and shelf life information on food products, innovative packaging solutions to curb losses, the contribution of the social food distribution in the prevention of food losses and the monitoring of losses in the most important production chains in Flanders. Separate research has been set up to analyse the Flemish primary sector, food services sector and households. Based on these results sector-specific measures can be taken.

**FOOD LOSSES POLICY: AMBITION & ACTIONS**

Based on the results of research projects, the Flemish Government has proposed a package of 25 measures to prevent food losses and to stimulate maximal valorisation of secondary flows. The measures are built around seven priorities: improving collaboration in the food supply chain, preventing food losses and maximizing high value valorization of secondary flows in primary production and food industry, fostering social innovation, awareness-raising of the general public, putting food losses on the international policy agenda, leading by example and investing in research and monitoring.

**DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT & ROADMAP**

The Government of Flanders and the food supply chain sectors have united themselves in a Flemish food supply chain consultative body. The consultative body has the ambition to be a dynamic forum for coordinated action on the prevention of food losses. In the Declaration of Commitment, the Flemish Government and the food supply chain sectors have committed themselves to implementing six actions, which are the foundations of the joint approach to tackle food losses in Flanders. A first and foremost important step is to make a Food Supply Chain Roadmap 2020. This roadmap will include a strategy and objectives and actions on sector and chain level, with the aim to reduce food losses as much as possible and to valorise food losses as high as possible, in line with European objectives.

**INFORMATION & COLLABORATION**

In order to achieve the ambitious European objectives on food losses, the Government of Flanders wishes to promote the exchange of knowledge and collaboration among member states. For more information, please contact Dirk Van Gijseghem, coordinator of the Flemish Interdepartmental Working Group Food Losses: dirk.vangijseghem@lv.vlaanderen.be - tel. +32 2 552 78 23.