



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : General Secretariat of the Council
to : Delegations

Subject : Food loss and food waste
- Information from the Netherlands and Swedish delegations, supported by the Austrian, Danish, German and Luxembourg delegations

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Netherlands and Swedish delegations, supported by the Austrian, Danish, German and Luxembourg delegations, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 19 May 2014.

Food losses and food waste in Europe and European legislation

Note from the Netherlands and Sweden.

Introduction

In view of food security, limited natural resources and animal welfare, it is essential to improve the sustainability of food systems. There are many factors and issues surrounding sustainable food systems, but recently food losses and food waste have become a high priority in the context of sustainable food systems. During the Rio+20 conference in 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the ‘Zero Hunger Challenge’. Eradicating food waste and food losses is one of the central tenets of this campaign. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) will publish policy recommendations in October 2014 on “food losses and food waste in the context of sustainable food systems”.

Food losses and food waste in Europe

Food losses and food waste have a social, environmental and economic dimension. Food waste has an environmental impact since, among other things, it increases greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption. The need to reduce food losses and food waste is also closely linked to the principle that everyone in the world has a right to adequate food. This sentiment is shared by the European Parliament and the European Commission. This year the Commission will launch a Communication on Sustainable Food, in which food losses and food waste will be a priority topic.

Reducing food losses and food waste across the supply chains is a high priority for many European countries. An estimated 89 million tonnes of food is wasted in Europe each year. Many EU Member States are working with all the actors in the food chain to strengthen the sustainability of the food system – from farm to fork –, whilst continuing to ensure the highest possible standards of food safety, public health and animal health and welfare, and of course reducing food waste and losses.

Under the EU Waste Framework Directive, Member States were required to develop and present waste prevention plans by 2013. The European Commission has set up a working group with stakeholders in order to identify the best action to take at EU level to reduce food waste and to share best practices. The Commission will also propose to establish a dedicated working group with all Member States to identify possible further action at EU level to facilitate food waste prevention and reduction.

Reducing waste will have financial benefits for businesses – which will become more efficient –and for consumers, who will save money by wasting less. Raising awareness of these benefits requires education and coordination, and a reliable forum to share information. A voluntary approach works well in some Member States and many Member States have introduced policies to reduce food waste. They are raising awareness among consumers, encouraging the food chains to strengthen cooperation to prevent and reduce food losses and waste, and promoting innovation and research.

Most of the Member States are of the opinion that the private sector must take the lead in reducing food losses and food waste. The responsibility is shared by all the actors throughout the food chain. Improving chain management and chain cooperation contributes significantly to the efficiency of the food chain. Although food waste and food losses cannot be completely eradicated, there is still a lot to be gained.

European legislation

To facilitate private sector efforts to reduce food waste and losses, governments should create an enabling environment and remove barriers, while still ensuring food safety. Some of these barriers might be due to certain provisions in European legislation. There may be various legislative areas where measures can be taken, but let us first focus on the 'Best before' date. In many European countries date labelling is causing unnecessary food waste. Without overturning the system as such, the Netherlands and Sweden think that some changes and actions can be taken to reduce the amount of food waste caused by the labelling system.

The subject of date marking was discussed recently at a meeting of the Member States Working Group on Labelling and will be discussed further in this working group. The Netherlands and Sweden are pleased with this initiative of the Commission and would like to support this process. More specifically The Netherlands and Sweden are of the opinion that probably more products, which have a long shelf life and retain their quality for a very long time, could be exempted from the requirement to provide a 'best before' date on the label (extension of Annex X of EU Regulation 1169/2011). It would be interesting to examine an extension of this list.

In addition, consumers often throw food away unnecessarily because of confusion about the meaning of the 'best before' date.¹ Products usually remain edible beyond this date, but are nonetheless thrown away. Confusion among consumers about 'best before' dates must be removed.

Finally, there may also be other legal barriers which cause unnecessary food waste. This should be investigated, perhaps by the special working group on food losses and waste to be established by the Commission.

The Netherlands and Sweden support the action taken by the Commission to prevent and reduce food waste and losses. In this light, we hope the Commission will consider:

- an extended list of products, which have a long shelf life and retain their quality for a very long time, that could be exempted from the requirement for a 'best before' date on the label (extension of Annex X of EU Regulation 1169/2011);
- examining, together with member states, the possible actions to be taken to stimulate a better understanding and handling by consumers of durability dates;
- reviewing existing legislation in order to identify other possible legal barriers that lead to food waste and losses.

¹ For example: Research in The Netherlands shows that around 15% of food waste is due to the rules on product labelling. Products usually remain edible beyond the best before date.