

Euro Coop's reaction to the European Court of Auditors report "Combating Food Waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain"

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Introduction

Euro Coop welcomes the recent European Court of Auditors (ECA) report "*Combating Food Waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain*"¹. Food waste is a major global problem, with current estimates indicating that **one third of food that is produced for human consumption is either lost or wasted**. Euro Coop members are well aware of this major issue, tackling it on a daily basis with a combination of **technological solutions, information and education campaigns, and close collaboration with charities and NGOs**.

Better alignment of existing policies

We lament the slow progress made at EU level to address the issue of food loss and waste in a **concerted manner** and believe that much more can be done to **harmonise existing policies** to combat this problem in a more holistic way. There is a lot of discussion at EU level about the need to address policy silos. However, the example of food waste shows that each of the European Commission's Directorates-General still tend to operate with little co-ordination with the others, even when it is widely recognised that collaboration would be beneficial.

Prevention is key

As with combatting waste of any kind, we believe that the first step should be **prevention**. We agree with the European Court of Auditors' point that "*the benefits of avoiding waste outweigh those of dealing with it later*". However, we also acknowledge that a margin of waste is created by striving to meet consumer demand for a constant and varied supply of products that people have come to expect. Our members try to minimise the generation of waste by **anticipating demand with a high level of accuracy** so that they can reduce waste caused by over-supply in-store. They are also committed to donating unsold food to those in need.

¹ http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR16_34/SR_FOOD_WASTE_EN.pdf

Using existing policies to address waste during production

While a considerable amount of waste is generated at consumer level, we must not lose sight of the fact that **food is lost or wasted along the whole food chain**. We agree with the observations in the ECA's report that the **Common Agricultural Policy** should be used to finance measures to reduce food loss and waste at the level of production. Finance measures could be used to fund information activities and investments in post-harvest storage and adapted animal housing to reduce sickness and mortality. These would tackle food losses right at the beginning of the food chain.

There is also more potential to address loss and wastage in fish production. We support the European Court of Auditors' recommendation that the European Commission should do more to encourage Member States to use **the European Fisheries Fund (EFF)** and the **European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF)** to finance projects which combat fish disease, support investment in more selective fishing gear, and fund research on the survival rates of fish. Leveraging these funds in this way can make a positive contribution to reducing food loss.

School Milk Scheme and School Fruit Scheme to generate awareness of food waste amongst children

We believe that the EU should do more to get Member States to use the **EU-funded School Milk Scheme** and **School Fruit Scheme** to teach children about combating food waste. As the report points out, there is provision for this in both schemes. However, is not being taken up by Member States. This is a wasted opportunity to teach children about the **value of food** and to educate them to be responsible consumers.

Unclear rules regarding food donation

Food donation is often discouraged because of **unclear legal provisions**. The Commission needs to address the interpretation of laws governing food waste and work with Member States to **better harmonise them** and thereby facilitate the donation of food that would otherwise be wasted.

Similarly, the European Commission needs to work more concretely with Member States to address the **various interpretations of the VAT directive** which can act as a barrier to food donation. It is a true shame that perfectly good food does not get donated because of these legal ambiguities.

Delays in agreeing a common definition and a methodology for measuring food waste

Delays in agreeing on a common definition for food waste and a methodology for measuring it are hampering action at the EU level to account for food waste and therefore monitor it in a comparable way between member states. Rather than delaying the matter further, we believe that the definition² and methodology developed in the FUSIONS project³ are well considered and that they should be used.

² <https://www.eu-fusions.org/index.php/about-food-waste/280-food-waste-definition>

³ <http://www.eu-fusions.org/>

The EU Platform on Food Loss and Food Waste

Euro Coop welcomes the European Court of Auditors' assessment of efforts that have been made to date to include stakeholders and Member State representatives in the policymaking process. It is important to assess what these initiatives have achieved and to see where the pitfalls lie. Euro Coop participated in the first meeting of the EU Platform on Food Loss and Food Waste in November 2016. We value this forum for its potential to bring about a **common understanding** of the food waste issue, to lead to agreement on common definitions and methodologies, as well as to share best practices. As the Platform has just recently been set up, we believe that it is too early to take stock of its progress, however we believe that it would be beneficial to review it in the medium term.

Consumer co-operatives as part of the solution

Consumer co-operatives are **well placed to be leaders in the fight against food waste**. Co-operatives represent an **inherently sustainable business model** that is based on a defined set of **values and principles**⁴. The 7th Co-operative Principle is "*Concern for Community*". This is a crucial part of co-operative identity and intrinsic to how co-operatives function. Co-operatives **work for the good of their communities** and are guided by **policies that have been approved by their members**. The 5th Co-operative Principle, "*Education, Training and Information*" is also fundamental to how co-operatives function. Our members work with their consumer members to raise awareness about food waste and to educate them on how to reduce food waste in the home.

Euro Coop's members are very concerned about food waste and its broader implications, and have taken various steps to addressing this problem, a snapshot of which can be found here below:

Coop Sweden

To address waste in the production and processing stages, Coop Sweden became the first Swedish supermarket to sell "**wonky vegetables**" in autumn 2015. This fresh produce would otherwise have ended up as production or processing waste because of not meeting the expected aesthetic standards that consumers have become accustomed to.

In 2015, Coop Sweden donated 118 tons of food, equivalent to approximately 260,000 meals.

The Co-operative Group

Co-operative retailers are also addressing food waste that arises from bad retail practices. To avoid tomatoes from spoiling prematurely, The Co-operative Group in the UK use **laser technology** to pierce holes in the plastic packaging so that moisture levels are better regulated. The Co-operative Group have also moved away from **promotions** that are based on volume ("buy one, get one free") towards ones that are **focused on value** (half price offers).

Redistributed food from the Co-operative Group provided 730,000 meals for those in need in 2015. In addition, members, colleagues and customers of The Cooperative Group donated over 24,000 products to foodbanks in 2015, which provided meals to over 450 families in need.

⁴ <http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>

Coop Denmark

To tackle waste that is generated by the way products are sold, Coop Denmark has started to **sell all its bananas individually**, rather than in bunches. This change is associated with 6,000 fewer bananas being wasted each day.

To help consumers waste less of the food that they buy, Coop Denmark have developed a **smartphone application** that educates consumers on how best to store their food. The app has a repository of over 600 foods and guides consumers on how they can keep these foods fresh for as long as possible. This allows consumers to reduce their food waste and save money.

Furthermore, Coop Denmark use unavoidable food waste to produce **biogas**.

S Group

To incentivise consumers to buy food that is approaching its “best before” date, the S Group in Finland has had a **harmonised price reduction strategy since 2007**, whereby all food reaching the best before date is discounted.

To deal with unavoidable food waste from their stores, the S Group produce a **biofuel** called EkoFlex E85.

Coop Italy

Coop Italy has been running the “**Buon Fine**” (“Good End”) programme since 2007. This sees edible but unmarketable foods (e.g. due to the packaging being damaged, or the products being close to the “*use by*” date) being withdrawn from shop shelves and allocated to associations that redistribute it to people in need.

Hispancoop

In 2016, Hispancoop ran a campaign called “**Without Waste: Make the Most of Food**”. There were three strands to the campaign: a study on consumer behaviour with regards to managing food and how waste is generated in the home, the publication on a guide on how to best store food so that it lasts longer, and a series of 30 talks around Spain that were directed at consumers with the aim of informing them on how to best conserve food in the home.

Conclusion

We agree with the European Court of Auditors’ position that **significant improvements need to be made** to address food waste. **Better alignment of existing policies** at the EU-level is required as well as an enhanced **co-ordination between the European Commission and Member States**. We are hopeful that the **EU Platform on Food Loss and Food Waste** will be beneficial in advancing co-ordinated EU-level action, and we endeavour to **share the expertise of co-operative retailers** to that end. Our members have taken positive steps to tackle the problem of food waste and strive for a **continuous improvement**. We call for a **definition of food waste** and a **methodology for measuring food loss and waste** to be chosen expediently. A **clarification of the rules governing food donations** is also key to addressing the issue in an effective way.

About Euro Coop

Euro Coop is the **voice of the co-operative retailers in Europe**. Our associations brings together the national associations of consumer co-operatives in **19 European countries**, which represent **4,500 local/regional cooperatives**, employing **500,000 citizens** across Europe and operating **36,000 stores** which serve **32 million consumer-members daily**. Euro Coop's members together are Europe's second strongest retail force – accounting for **€76 billion in annual turnover** from sales. Euro Coop's Secretariat in Brussels represents the interests of its members before the European Institutions and facilitates the inter-member exchange between the national associations. More information is available at www.eurocoop.coop

For more information, please contact:

Maeve Howe, Sustainability Policy Adviser

Email: mhowe@eurocoop.coop

Tel: +32-2-285-00-72

Rosita Zilli, Deputy Secretary General

Email: rzilli@eurocoop.coop

Tel: +32-2-285-00-72