

Why we need to tackle food waste and what social enterprises are doing about it

Introduction

With 88 million tonnes worth of food wasted annually in Europe,¹ there are strong reasons for the new [Commission](#) to keep the fight against food waste at the top of its agenda.

By 31 December 2023, the EU Commission will establish food waste reduction targets for Member States, including guidelines to ensure that targets are met by 2030 in line with SDG 12.3. As part of Member States assessments, the Commission aims to address the issue of food waste throughout the supply chain, examining why and where food waste is occurring, in what numbers and how to best remedy such losses.² The most recent review of the Waste Framework Directive (WFD), adopted on 30 May 2018 includes provisions addressing the level of food waste to be transposed into national and regional law by summer 2020.

The Role of the Social Enterprise

Increasingly, social enterprises are tackling food waste by using and distributing surplus foods in diverse ways. Communities can be directly supported, benefitting from employment and social inclusion opportunities which such initiatives provide. With the review of the WFD, comes opportunities to share best practices locally and internationally. For inspiration on what can be achieved, RREUSE highlights a few examples to encourage further collaboration amongst social enterprises, municipalities and businesses in the fight to reduce waste, including food waste.

RREUSE members: A snapshot of examples from social enterprises active in food waste

- RREUSE member HERW!N³ (Collective of social and circular entrepreneurs in Flanders) helps the Flemish region of Belgium reach its food waste prevention target with the [Foodsavers](#) project. With three objectives including 'Climate, Social Employment and Poverty Reduction,' Foodsavers is a distribution platform that recovers and redistributes surplus foods across Flanders. Almost 200 social organisations are involved in the Foodsavers programme, collectively working on the

¹ FUSIONS (2016) Estimates of European food waste levels. (Available [here](#))

² European Commission (2017) Mandate of sub-group established under the EU Platform on Food Losses and Innovation "EGLI". The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

³ Please note HERW!N was formerly called Komosie.

Flemish roadmap (2015-2020) to reduce food waste by 15%. Figures from 2018 highlight the demand for the project, with 55 disadvantaged workers employed and a growing network of 191 social organisations involved in the donation process. Over 920 tonnes of surplus food was redistributed in 2018, offsetting more than 2,300 tonnes of CO₂. In full partnership with the City of Ghent since March 2017, Foodsavers is a success story and template for how city governments can support initiatives locally and regionally.⁴

- The social enterprise FoodCloud, a member of Community Reuse Network Ireland, one of RREUSE members, is an example of building partnerships on the ground, nationally and internationally. Founded in 2014, FoodCloud has changed the way businesses interact with food waste. Using an app that connects businesses with surplus foods to charities using foods, FoodCloud offers a user-friendly platform to make food donation straightforward. To date, FoodCloud has helped over 9,100 charitable groups get surplus food in Ireland and the UK, equivalent to 50 million meals that have gone to people and not to waste. This amount has saved charities €66.1 million which is measurable to 22,000 tonnes of food.⁵
- Established by the NYC Department of Sanitation in 2016, donateNYC (U.S.A), a member of RREUSE, plays a vital role in New York City's re-use scene. With 52,254 tonnes of material diverted from landfill in 2018 and food accounting for 52% of its impact contribution, donateNYC's partners rescued 5,415 items (32,014 tonnes) of food and beverages alone.⁶ The latest donateNYC app counts 300 registered organisations (donors and recipients) and covers about 1,000 locations throughout NYC. By prioritising connections by type of food needed and then by distance, this donation portal benefits social enterprises in receiving and redistributing food on the go. With 4.5 tonnes of food diverted from landfill since March 2019, the portal also encourages small donations which other food rescue organisations in the city are unable to handle.

Concluding remarks

With a growing spotlight in recent years on social enterprises with a flair for technology to reduce food waste, RREUSE advocates for the support of enterprises that's impact intersects environmental and social dimensions. Many avenues can be used effectively to tackle food waste, with social enterprises and community led initiatives being one example of the building blocks to achieve global goals.

⁴ Foodsavers figures calculated from March 2017- March 2019 (Available [here](#)).

⁵ FoodCloud figures from June 2019 available [here](#).

⁶ donateNYC figures from Annual Report 2018 (Available [here](#))



Member States are encouraged to take favourable action in supporting the creation of platforms facilitating cross sectoral donations, composting and food waste reducing initiatives, in particular where job creation, social and environmental criteria are being met. Finally, RREUSE reminds Member States of fresh ideas of food waste solutions that will have an impact for the better.

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RREUSE is an independent non-profit organisation representing social enterprises active in the field of re-use, repair and recycling, with 26 members across 24 countries in Europe and the USA.

Our main vision is for Europe to support the role of social enterprise in a circular economy, providing meaningful work opportunities to thousands of vulnerable members of our community through innovative economic, social and environmentally beneficial activities.

RREUSE's primary mission is to help tackle poverty, social exclusion and a throwaway culture by promoting policies, best practices and partnerships that support the professionalism and development of social enterprises working in environmental services with high potential for local and inclusive job creation, notably re-use and repair.