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Reducing Food Waste in the EU: Challenges in Policy Implementation

Role: EU Environmental Policy Advisor
Target Audience: European Commission
Research Question: How can the EU improve the implementation of its food waste reduction policies?

KEY POINTS

1. The EU has set targets to reduce food waste by 2030, but member states need to take action to reach these targets.
2. Member states need to measure food waste, report their data regularly and check if their plans are working.
3. The EU should improve consumer awareness, support cooperation in the food supply chain and make food date labels easier to understand.

Summary

Food waste is a serious problem in the EU because it causes economic and environmental problems. In 2024, each person in the EU produced 129 kilograms of food waste on average. The EU wants to reduce food waste by 2030, but member states need to do more to reach these goals. They should prepare plans, check food waste data regularly and see if their actions are working. The EU also needs to help countries improve their methods because awareness campaigns and education are not enough on their own. Consumers should understand how to reduce food waste, and different actors in the food supply chain should work together. Also, clearer food date labels can help people understand dates on packaging. With better plans and more effective actions, the EU can reduce food waste in the future.



1. EU Food Waste Reduction Targets

The EU changed the Waste Framework Directive in 2025 and set targets for 2030. It aims to reduce food waste in processing and manufacturing by 10% and food waste per person in households, shops and restaurants by 30%. EU member states must follow these targets. The reduction will generally be measured using the average from 2021 to 2023. The European Commission will review these targets by the end of 2027.

2. Food Waste in the EU: Current Situation

In 2024, the EU produced 57.9 million tons of food waste, which means 129 kilograms per person. About 53% of this food waste came from households and 12% came from restaurants and food services. Another 19% came from food manufacturing. Primary production and shops each made up 8% of the total food waste. The total food waste increased by 0.7% compared to 2023.

Food waste negatively affects the economy and the environment in EU countries. To reduce food waste, countries need to check their data regularly and review the results of their actions. They also need to increase consumer awareness and improve cooperation between different actors in the food supply chain.

3. Member States' Responsibilities and EU Monitoring

Until 2030, the EU has some goals to reduce food waste with EU member states. EU member states need to take action to prevent food waste. They need to prepare plans to reduce food waste. The European Commission will check if member states are following these goals. Member states also need to review their plans after checking their progress.

Member states monitor food waste and report their data to the European Commission. They need to prepare and update programs to reduce food waste. They also need to encourage food donations and give priority to using food for human consumption instead of throwing it away. The EU also wants member states to take action to reduce food waste at different stages of the food supply chain.

4. Measuring and Evaluating Food Waste

The EU requires member states to measure food waste using the same method and report their data to Eurostat every year. To make the data more reliable, the EU also asks member states to prepare quality control reports. This common system helps countries compare their data with other countries and evaluate policies to reduce food waste.

5. Implementation Challenges

According to the European Environment Agency (2025), EU countries mostly use awareness campaigns and education to reduce food waste. They use fewer economic measures and legal rules. This means that more actions may be needed to reduce food waste. The EU should encourage member states to try different methods and check with ones work better.

6. Recommendations

The EU should make food date labels clearer. The difference between ‘‘best before’’ and ‘‘use by’’ dates should be explained better. Expiry dates should be easy to read, written in different places on the packaging, and should not be easily removed. This can help people understand food dates better and reduce food waste.

The EU should check food waste data from member states regularly. It should also check the results of these plans to see what works and what needs to change.

The EU should increase consumer awareness about food waste. It should also help households, shops, restaurants and food producers work together to reduce food waste.

FOOTNOTES

1. European Commission. (n.d.-a). *EU food waste: Relevant legislation.* https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/food-waste/eu-food-waste-relevant-legislation_en

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3. European Commission. (n.d.-c). *Food waste reduction targets* https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/food-waste/eu-food-waste-relevant-legislation/food-waste-reduction-targets_en

4. European Commission (n.d.-d). *Frequently asked questions: Reducing food waste in the EU.* https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/food-waste/frequently-asked-questions-reducing-food-waste-eu_en

5. European Environment Agency. (2025). *Preventing waste in Europe: Progress and challenges, with a focus on food waste* (EEA Report 02/2025). https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/preventing-waste-in-europe-progress-and-challenges-with-a-focus-on-food-waste

6. European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2025). *Directive (EU) 2025/1892 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 September 2025 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste.* https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/preventing-waste-in-europe-progress-and-challenges-with-a-focus-on-food-waste

7. Eurostat. (2026, September 29). *Food waste in the EU: 129 kg per person in 2024.* https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260929-1
8. Joint Research Centre. (2024, July 9). *Reducing food waste: How can science help*? European Commission. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/reducing-food-waste-how-can-science-help-2024-07-09_en

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The content of this policy brief lies entirely with the author. It does not reflect the official opinion of Çağ University.