

JOINT STATEMENT

Food Waste Reduction – EU-funded projects call for ambitious set of reduction targets for EU Member States and policy consistency across the EU



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On 5th July 2023, the EC published a proposal to revise the Waste Framework Directive (WFD), together with several reports including an Inception Impact Assessment. In the new proposal, the EC examined policy options to set legally binding EU-level targets for food waste reduction, as called for by the EU Farm to Fork Strategy.

In acknowledgment of the alarming levels of food waste in the European Union, a set of EU-funded Research and Innovation projects, tasked to support sustainability building and reduce food waste, advocate for a more ambitious and comprehensive approach to tackle this pressing issue.

Background – Policies and actions at the EU level

The 12.3 SDG objective to address Food Loss and Waste (FLW) has been taken on board by strategic communications from the European Commission (EC), namely with its 2018 [Bioeconomy Strategy](#). This political pledge to act was further recalled in later key communications; the [European Green Deal](#) (EGD) in December 2019 and, more explicitly, the [Farm to Fork \(F2F\) Strategy](#) published in May 2020.

An action point from the F2F Strategy (already hinted in the [new Circular Economy Action Plan](#) published in March 2020), underlined the Commission's will to propose a new revision of the **WFD** (Directive 2008/98/EC) in 2023 and introduce Food Waste (FW) reduction targets.

This Directive had already established an [annual reporting obligation](#) on FW generation as of reference year 2020 (data collection is regulated by the Delegated Decision and the Implementing Decision on FW), and its 2018 [revision](#) had already laid down specific obligations for Member States (MS) regarding FW

prevention (i.e., the adoption of national FW prevention programmes, and monitoring and reporting on FW amounts). The first reference year for obligatory reporting is 2020, to be reported in 2022. Collection of FW data on a voluntary basis had already started through Eurostat in 2020 (reference year 2018), while Eurostat and the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) of the European Commission have also [called for FW data](#) in 2021 (for reference year 2019).

The 2023 WFD revision

On 5th July 2023, the EC [published a proposal to revise the WFD](#), together with several reports including its long-awaited Inception Impact Assessment. The objectives of the revision were to limit waste generation, improve re-use, and improve the cost-effectiveness in preparing waste for re-use and quality recycling. In the new proposal (art. 9a), the EC examined policy options to set legally binding EU-level targets for FW reduction and defined a preferred option (Option 2, see table 1 below).

| 2030 food waste reduction target on: | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 (voluntary) |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| primary production | n/a | n/a | 10% | n/a |
| processing and manufacturing | 10% | 10% | 25% | n/a |
| retail and consumption | 15% | 30% | 50% | voluntary target 50% |

Table 1 FW reduction targets options considered by the EC (Source: [Executive Summary of Inception Impact Assessment](#), 2023.)

Setting new legally binding targets for MS to reduce FW represents an advancement towards effective FW prevention. Nonetheless, the level of the targets expressed in the EC preferred option would prevent the EU from meeting its climate objectives (i.e. objectives set in the [Farm to Fork Strategy](#)) and fulfilling international commitments (in particular, [Sustainable Development Goal 12.3](#) aims to “*halve per capita global FW at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.*”).

Furthermore, this EC proposal is in fact undermining the current directive, as the following text was deleted from Article 9.1:

*‘(g) reduce the generation of FW in primary production, in processing and manufacturing, in retail and other distribution of food, in restaurants and food services as well as in households as a contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to reduce by **50 % the per capita global FW at the retail and consumer levels** and to reduce food losses along production and supply chains by **2030**’.*

Such provisions at least made an explicit reference to the 50% target at retail and consumer level.

The EU commitment to reduce FW must therefore be taken further by instituting and achieving comprehensive FW reduction goals

of 50% throughout the entire supply chain, including primary production and thus extending beyond manufacturing, processing, retail, and consumer levels.

Ambitious reduction targets are direly needed

At a time when FW in the EU has reached record levels, efforts to introduce mandatory FW reduction targets as part of the targeted revision of the WFD are very welcome.

“Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been”: such were the words of António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), echoed in the latest Special edition of the Sustainable Development Goals Report

2023, and repeated on several occasions by both the [European Parliament](#) and [Civil society organisations](#).

In 2021, although 828 million people were facing hunger at a global level, 13.2% of the world’s food was lost after harvest, along the supply chain from farm to consumer. As for the EU, as acknowledged by [Eurostat in late 2022](#), in baseline year 2020 (fig.1), around 131 kilogrammes (kg) of FW per inhabitant were generated in the EU, and this amount is likely to be underestimated¹. The UN report recalled how far the world still is from its target of substantially reducing post-harvest FW by 2030.

Tackling FLW is therefore urgent and requires specific policies, informed by accurate data obtained through harmonised measurement

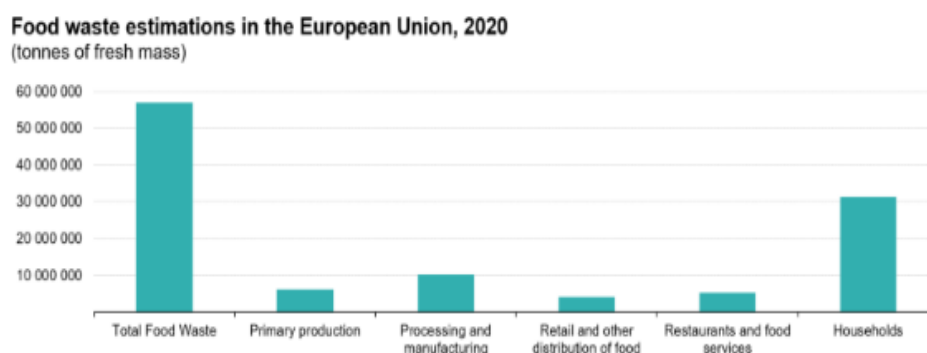


Figure 1 - FW estimations in the EU (2020). Source: Eurostat (env_wasfw).

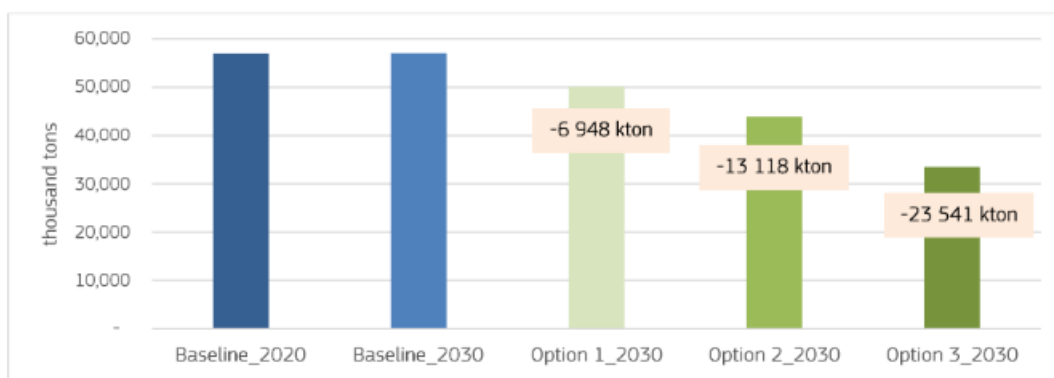
¹ The [EU delegated decision on food waste measurement](#) currently states that food waste excludes “plants prior to harvesting” under Article 2 of Regulation (EC) 178/2002 and “natural non-hazardous agricultural or forestry material used in farming [...] which does not harm the environment” under Article 2(1)(f) of Directive 2008/98/EC. On the contrary, Champions 12.3’s recommends that food waste measurement begins “from the point that crops and livestock are ready for harvest or slaughter through to the point that they are ready to be ingested by people”. The exact share of waste on farms is difficult to precisely estimate as the scope of the measurement methodology within the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) does not cover “harvest food waste” - edible food that is mature and ready for harvest but wasted at the harvest stage by being ploughed back in or left to rot, and this is therefore not reported at primary production level. See [this policy brief on EU food waste measurement methodology](#), 2019.

methodologies, as well as investments in innovation (both technological and non-technological), logistics, education, control, and monitoring; but none of this will be effective without clear and ambitious targets.

The EC’s own Inception Impact Assessment demonstrates how targets bearing a higher level of ambition perform better in reducing food waste quantities (e.g.: fig.2, fig.3) and climate change impact of food waste generation (e.g.: fig.4). However, since the EC’s third option (i.e., the most ambitious) does not consider setting a 50% reduction target beyond the consumption and retail stages, the burden of change falls mostly upon households, and

the share of contributions to FW reduction of earlier stages in the food value chain (primary production, processing, manufacturing stages) appears significantly low in the Impact assessment.

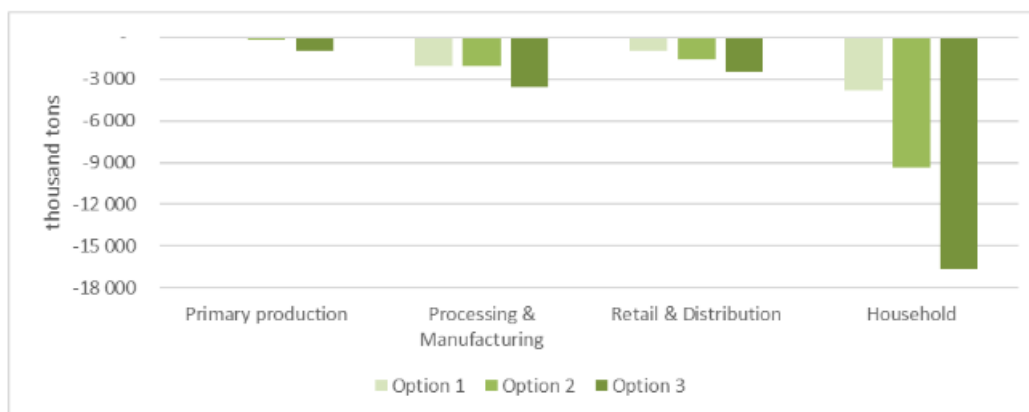
For these reasons, the EU should set targets aimed at halving (50% reduction) FW by 2030 across the whole food supply chain. This is on one hand to meet to meet its international (SDG 12.3) and own (the EGD and F2F Strategy, among others²) commitments, and on the other to guarantee that the responsibility for change is equitably distributed across all food chain actors.



Source: MAGNET simulation results (2020 baseline based on ESTAT 2022)

Figure 2 Total EU27 food waste quantities in the three options (Source: [Annex 11 of EC Inception Impact Assessment of setting mandatory Food Waste reduction targets, 2023.](#))

² For instance, as far as legal instruments are concerned, the [2018 revised Waste Framework Directive](#) also stated that “In order to contribute and ensure to be on track towards the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goal, MS should aim to achieve an indicative Union-wide food waste reduction target of 30 % by 2025 and 50 % by 2030.”



Source: MAGNET simulation results

Figure 3 Deviations in EU27 food waste quantities at the industry and consumption stages (Source: [Annex 11 of EC Inception Impact Assessment of setting mandatory Food Waste reduction targets, 2023.](#))

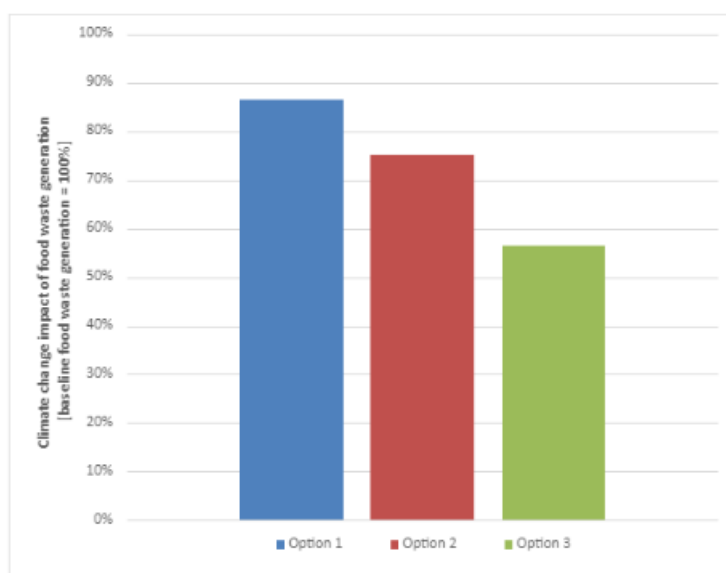


Figure 4 Relative differences in climate change impact between all EC policy options (Source: [Annex 11 of EC Inception Impact Assessment of setting mandatory Food Waste reduction targets, 2023.](#))

Measuring, monitoring and acting across the whole food supply chain

The EC did not include the possibility of extending the scope the WFD to cover food loss in primary production, i.e., food lost before, during or soon after harvest. Although the EC

admitted that this would allow setting up reduction targets that would also address food lost (or even wasted) in farms, the EC argues that this cannot be done because it would require a new set of regulations for farmers as a consequence of applying new waste management rules on biomass from primary production; and that available data at primary production are specific and scarce.

The EU and the EC have a great opportunity with the upcoming flagship [Legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems](#) to introduce principles and requirements for sustainability and FW prevention/reduction which would enable the transformation of existing legislation including, but not limited to, the [Common Agricultural Policy](#).

A successful key policy approach towards sustainable food systems also means raising consumers, food business operators (FBO) and policymakers' awareness about the true cost of food (including its social, health and environmental impacts), within currently unsustainable food systems, as well as incorporating FLW reduction objectives into any piece of legislation or policy aimed to building sustainable food systems.

To put in place effective conditions of FLW prevention and thus reduction, consider introducing reward mechanisms for front-runners in FLW reduction and, eventually, coercive mechanisms penalising waste producers ('polluter pays' schemes) and very slow performers should be considered.

However, more data and more accurate and harmonised measurements of FLW are indeed still needed, even though the 2020 baseline measurement (and the [2021 estimates](#)) have already shed some new light on the situation. This would namely increase attention to

FW occurring at the primary production level and the early stages of the supply chain, as it must be noted that the scale of pre-retail/primary production waste in Europe remains substantial in existing estimates. It is, for instance, [estimated that about at least 15% of global FW](#) occurs at the farm stage, and these numbers are likely to be optimistic – thus there is indeed a great need for mandatory measurements and harmonised methodologies for these stages as well. Such a call is backed by [Champions 12.3](#), an international coalition of executives from governments, businesses, and civil society leading global FW action, that has recommended states to interpret SDG 12.3 target as a 50% reduction in all FLW from farm to fork, including "food losses" (i.e. pre-retail FW), not just FW at the retail/consumer-level – thus calling for primary production FLW to be monitored, measured consistently, and (at least) on the agenda during policy-making processes.

For all these reasons, the EU should not limit its intervention to the manufacturing, processing, retail, and consumption stages, but extend reduction targets to the whole supply chain, with harmonised and clear measurement methodologies allowing for comparable data across sectors, countries³ and baselines.

³ This would be necessary to not penalise front-running countries, which express targets as a maximum of "kg/capita" per year along with the overall percentages (%) of FW reduction can be considered, to ensure fairness and equity for all EU MSs, regardless of the current level of reduction achieved by each of them.

Conclusions

FLW is an issue of importance to global food security and good environmental governance. Facing the lack of comprehensive data on FW at the European Union level, the EC has, for some time, started a process to assess what the impact of FLW is and what are the best actions to reduce it. Around 8-10% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are associated with food that is not consumed (UNEP, 2021). Reducing FW at the retail, food service and household levels can provide multi-faceted benefits for both people and the planet. However, the true scale of FW and its impacts have not been well understood until now.

Therefore, the project signatories call upon policymakers to take ambitious and comprehensive action to address the pressing issue of FLW. The **establishment of 50% reduction targets throughout the entire food value chain**, including primary production, the **adoption of uniform measurement methodologies**, and **alignment with other initiatives** are critical steps towards building a more sustainable and responsible food system.

By engaging in such actions, the EU can demonstrate its steadfast dedication and commitment to attaining global sustainability objectives and fulfilling the pledges of the SDGs and the F2F Strategy.

The moment for decisive measures is now, and through decisive and resolute actions, the EU institutions can establish a fresh benchmark for reduce and minimise FW reduction and pave the way towards a greener, more conscious, and socially accountable future.

About the projects



SISTERS – Systemic Innovations for a Sustainable reduction of the European food waste

Website: <https://sistersproject.eu>

Social media accounts: [X.com](#) – [LinkedIn](#) - [Facebook](#) - [Instagram](#) - [YouTube](#)

Contact email: safeoffice@safefoodadvocacy.eu

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under grant agreement No 101037796.



ClieNFarms – Climate Neutral Farms

Website: <https://cliefarms.eu/>

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Contact email: cliefarms@gmail.com

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036822.



ZEROW – Systemic Innovations Towards a Zero Food Waste Supply Chain

Website: <https://www.zerow-project.eu/>

Social media accounts: [X.com](#) – [LinkedIn](#)

Contact email: communications@safefoodadvocacy.eu

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under grant agreement No 101036388.



ENOUGH – European Food Chain Supply to Reduce GHG Emissions by 2050

Website: <https://enough-emissions.eu>

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036588.



Agro2Circular – Territorial Circular Systemic solution for the Upcycling of residues from the Agrifood sector

Website: <https://agro2circular.eu/>

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Contact email: sofiamartinez@ctnc.es

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under grant agreement No 101036838.



PestNu – Field -testing and demonstration of digital and space based technologies with agro-ecological and organic practices in systemic innovation

Website: <https://pestnu.eu/>

Social media accounts: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#)

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under grant agreement No 101037128.



ECOEFISHENT – Demonstrable and replicable cluster implementing systemic solutions through multilevel circular value chains for eco-efficient valorisation of fishing and fish industries side-streams

Website: <https://ecofishent.eu/>

Social media accounts: [X.com](#) - [Linkedin](#) - [Facebook](#) - [Youtube](#)

Contact email: rainisio@filse.it

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under grant agreement No 101036428.



FOLOU – Bringing knowledge and consensus to prevent and reduce FOod LOss at the primary production stage.

Understanding, measuring, training and adopting

Website: <https://www.folou.eu/>

Social media accounts: [X.com](#) - [Linkedin](#)

Contact email: folou@uvic.cat

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe programme under grant agreement No 101084106



NeoGiANT – The power of grape extracts: antimicrobial and antioxidant properties to prevent the use of antibiotics in farmed animals

Website: <https://www.neogiant.eu/>

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036768.



WASTELESS – Waste Quantification Solutions to Limit Environmental Stress

Website: <https://wastelesseu.com/>

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