

The challenges of food wastage to European Society

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Abstract

Food which is suitable for human consumption is wasted at all stages of the value added chain beginning in agriculture and ending at the household level all over the world. The production of food includes resource intensive processes such as water, land, energy, nutrients and human manpower. Thus, producing high quality and secure food for future treatment in composting facilities, biogas plants or biofuel processing plants seems to be not very effective. If food waste is not collected and treated properly, additional negative environmental impact can be observed. Landfilling of wasted food without pre-treatment leads to several negative environmental impacts such as emission of methane into the atmosphere. In general, food waste consists of unavoidable parts such as peels, seeds and bones which are generated during processing of food and preparation of dishes as well as avoidable parts such as spoiled whole food items or leftovers from plates.

In some countries such as the UK, Japan or Austria this problem has been recognised and several studies have been conducted to find detailed information on the current state as well as mechanisms behind that behaviour. The results of those studies were used to develop proper prevention measures to overcome the careless handling of food. Although some promising prevention measures for different stakeholders have been identified, the implementation of those measures is often stopped by apparently insuperable barriers. One example is the economic incentive to prevent food wastage. To get an idea about the impact of the wastage of food on the economy of a nation, the economic value of the wasted amounts were calculated in different studies e.g. from UK, US or Austria. The results show that billions of dollars are spent worldwide for the purchase of food which is not consumed at the end. Being aware of the amount of lost money is considered to be a promising incentive for the stakeholders to implement prevention measures.

The paper reflects the challenges with respect to implementation of food waste prevention measures in the European context of society, economy and politics. Barriers may concern marketing policies, economic development, legal restrictions, individual attitudes and others. The knowledge about specific barriers could be used for designing prevention measures or awareness campaigns in a better way. The paper shows how to overcome some of those barriers by citing examples from different case studies.