

Press Release

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EU can, and should, do better to combat food waste effectively, say Auditors

Although a number of EU policies have the potential to combat food waste, their potential is not being exploited, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. Action to date remains fragmented and intermittent, while coordination at European Commission level is lacking. The latest EU proposal for dealing with food waste, the creation of a platform, does not fully address the problems raised in their report, say the auditors.

Food waste is a global problem which requires action at all levels. Current estimates indicate that, globally, around one third of the food produced for human consumption is wasted or lost. This waste represents huge economic and environmental costs.

Progress to date has been hampered by the lack of a common definition of “food waste”, and the lack of an agreed baseline from which to target reductions. This is despite repeated calls from the European Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the Regions, the G20 and others for the EU to help reduce food waste.

“Our report to the Commission identified a number of missed opportunities and potential improvements which would not require new legislative initiatives or more public money”, said Bettina Jakobsen, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. “But by focusing its efforts on establishing a platform, the Commission again misses an opportunity to deal effectively with the problem. What we need now is better alignment of existing policies, better coordination, and a clear policy objective to reduce food waste.”

The auditors' report examined how current policies could be used more effectively, recommending that the Commission should:

- strengthen the EU strategy to combat food waste and coordinate it better, with an action plan for the years ahead and a clear definition of food waste;
 - consider food waste in future impact assessments, and better align the different policies which can combat food waste;

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu.

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- identify and resolve legal obstacles to food donation, encourage the further use of existing donation possibilities and consider how to encourage donation in other policy areas.

However, Mrs Jakobsen warned today that the new Platform does not contribute significantly to food waste strategy, and that there was still no single, clear definition of food waste. *“Our recommendations on how to develop future policy have either been ignored or only partially accepted, while the draft guidelines just pass the problem on to the Member States”*, she added.

In their report, the auditors examined EU action taken so far to reduce food waste and how the various policy instruments work. They found that the EU had not contributed to a resource-efficient food supply chain by combating food waste effectively.

Food waste is a problem along the entire food supply chain, say the auditors, and action should be targeted all along the chain. The emphasis should be put on prevention, as the benefits of avoiding waste outweigh the cost of dealing with it later.

The auditors found that there had been a notable lack of assessment of the impact of EU policies on the fight against food waste. Major policy areas such as agriculture, fisheries and food safety all have a role to play and could be used to combat food waste better.

Special Report No 34/2016: “Combating food waste: an opportunity for the EU to improve the resource-efficiency of the food supply chain” is available in 23 EU languages.