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POLICY BRIEF

FOOD LOSS AS A SYSTEMIC CHALLENGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy Brief

According to the OVAM Food Loss Monitor, approximately 3.2 million tonnes of food residues were recorded in Flanders in 2023, of which an estimated 1.19 million tonnes consisted of edible food loss. Although Flanders invests substantially in the separate collection and valorisation of food residual streams, a considerable share of edible food surpluses still does not enter the human food chain. At the same time, the number of people in Belgium relying on food aid has increased by 50% over the past ten years. Flanders and Europe also face the challenge of achieving the new food loss reduction targets for 2030. This policy brief presents recommendations to further reduce food loss and strengthen the retention of edible products for human consumption. Based on three identified bottlenecks, we formulate nine recommendations for a more systemic, data-driven and impact-oriented approach to food loss in Flanders.

Bottlenecks and recommendations to reduce food loss



Fragmented responsibilities hinder an integrated approach to food loss

- Empower and expand the Food Loss Platform (Platform Voedselverlies) as a structured consultation and action mechanism.
- Formulate shared and embedded objectives across departments.
- Strengthen alignment between the Food Loss Platform and the Flemish research and innovation agenda.



Lack of up-to-date, coherent and standardised data on food loss

- Develop a joint framework for monitoring and reporting food loss.
- Strengthen the timeliness, comparability and methodological basis of monitoring.
- Invest in shared data platforms and encourage secure and standardised data sharing.



Structural barriers to redistribution and reprocessing for human consumption

- Explicitly integrate human consumption into the cascade index and policy intervention.
- Support regional hubs and experimentation space for innovative redistribution and processing models.
- Evaluate fiscal and administrative incentives that may discourage high-value valorisation for human consumption.

These recommendations aim to improve the alignment of policy, monitoring and support, so that Flanders can not only further reduce food loss but also keep more edible food surpluses within the human food chain.

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

Food loss and food waste both refer to food that is intended for human consumption but is not consumed. This is a growing global problem, while an estimated 8.2% of the world population, or around 673 million people, faced hunger in 2024. In Europe, 58 million tonnes of food are lost or wasted each year, corresponding to an estimated net loss of €132 billion (Eurostat, 2025). This means not only that food is wasted, but also the labour, energy, time and raw materials required for production, processing, marketing and transport. Taken together, this causes 16% of greenhouse gas emissions in the European food system.

TERMINOLOGY

Different organisations use different **definitions** of food loss and food waste.

The **Food and Agriculture Organisation** of the United Nations (FAO) distinguishes between **food loss**, occurring during production, harvesting, processing, storage and distribution, and **food waste**, occurring in retail, hospitality and households resulting from choices, behaviour or poor stock management. According to the FAO, food loss encompasses any reduction in the quantity or quality of edible food at any point in the chain, while food diverted to animal feed, bioenergy or landfill is regarded as lost.

By contrast, the **European Commission** does not use a separate definition of food loss, but focuses on food waste. This refers to food that has become waste within the meaning of European waste legislation and is processed in a permitted waste treatment facility, such as anaerobic digestion, composting or incineration. Food that still used as animal feed, in material applications or for redistribution does not fall under food waste for the EU. Under current EU waste legislation, unharvested edible crops are not considered food waste.

Flanders formally aligns with EU reporting, but uses a broader definition in its own Food Loss Monitor (Voedselverliesmonitor), which also counts harvest-ready products that do not reach the market as food loss. This makes losses in agriculture more visible, which is important given the primary sector's large share of food loss in Flanders in 2023. Notably, 34% of these losses occurred in agriculture, while households and the food industry accounted for 17% and 40% respectively. This is atypical compared with other European countries, where losses generally occur later in the chain. This can be explained in part by the broad Flemish definition of food loss, the high production volume and the strong export orientation of the food industry. In addition, losses in the primary sector have long been underestimated in Europe, pointing to a structural problem that deserves policy attention. Note that the 34% of losses in the Flemish primary sector are not considered food waste by Europe.

FOOD LOSS

IN FLANDERS

According to the OVAM Food Loss Monitor, approximately 3.2 million tonnes of food residual streams were recorded in Flanders in 2023. Food residual streams include both edible food losses and non-edible by-products generated throughout the agri-food chain. Of these food residual streams, an estimated 1.19 million tonnes consisted of edible food loss. The largest share of food loss occurs in agriculture, the food industry and households. Approximately 83% of food loss in Flanders is collected separately and valorised. However, this valorisation often takes place through applications such as animal feed (55%), soil application (15%) or anaerobic digestion and composting (15%), meaning that a substantial share of the edible streams is not used for human consumption. As a result, valuable nutrients are lost, natural resources are used inefficiently and avoidable greenhouse-gas emissions are generated.

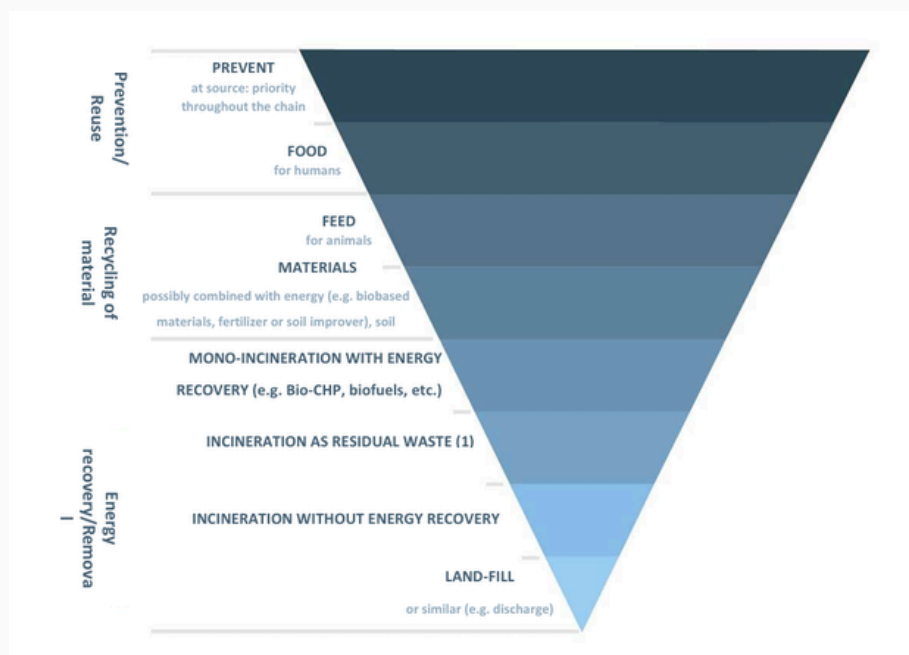
Figure 1: Value retention cascade, Action Plan Circular Food Loss and Biomass (Residual) Flows 2021-2025 (VR, 2021)

In 2021, Flanders adopted an action plan against food loss for the period 2021-2025. This action plan is based on three pillars:

1. Prevention and reuse, with maximum valorisation for human consumption.
2. More efficient sorting and collection.
3. High-value processing of residual streams according to the value retention cascade (see Figure 1).

Several programmes are being implemented to achieve these objectives:

- Chain cooperation between producers, industry and retail.
- Strengthening social circular entrepreneurship through regional food hubs.
- Mandatory separate collection of kitchen and food waste.
- Measures to reduce consumer food loss, such as adapted portion sizes and packaging.



Progress is monitored through the biennial OVAM Food Loss Monitor and the associated cascade index. The index is based on the **value retention cascade**, a hierarchical principle indicating how food and biomass should be used at the highest-value way possible. Prevention and human consumption take precedence over applications such as animal feed, materials and energy, and only as a last resort over destruction or disposal. The cascade index weights a sector's food residual streams according to their position within this hierarchy and thus indicates the extent to which streams are valorised as high-value applications.

The OVAM monitor clearly shows that not every link in the chain contributes proportionally to total food loss. At the same time, not every link offers the same opportunities for (policy) intervention. Food losses at the ends of the chain, such as unharvested or ploughed-in agricultural products, and food lost in households, lie relatively far outside the government's direct sphere of influence. An effective policy strategy therefore requires a balance between the scale of the problem and the extent to which governments can deploy effective policy levers. Following this logic, this policy brief **focuses primarily on links in the chain where substantial volumes of food loss coincide with concrete opportunities for policy interventions**. In particular, this concerns links where edible surpluses are already available and suitable for human consumption, such as the marketing, redistribution and reprocessing of harvested fruit and vegetable surpluses.

A **renewal of the Flemish action plan against food loss** is expected in 2027 and will align with the new European binding targets for food waste, included in the Waste Framework Directive that entered into force in October 2025.

Member States will have 20 months to align their policy frameworks and achieve a 10% reduction in processing and manufacturing and a 30% reduction in retail, hospitality and households by 2030. For the primary sector, Europe's ambition is to collect the necessary data by 2027 and subsequently formulate targets for that sector as well.

This policy brief brings together insights from various European research projects in which ILVO participated, including CHORIZO, ZeroW, BREADCRUMB and the FOLOU Twinning Regions programme. Although the policy brief starts from a systems perspective on food loss across the entire agri-food chain, the analysis and recommendations are largely inspired by research and practical cases from the primary sector, the fruit and vegetable chain and the valorisation of food surpluses for human consumption. **It is also important to note that the policy brief does not examine food safety regulations in detail**. These regulations, which are monitored at federal level by the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FAVV) and embedded in a European framework, are an essential precondition for all forms of redistribution and reprocessing and are assumed to be applied correctly.

Food loss is a complex and systemic issue that touches on several policy domains, including agriculture, climate, circular economy, bioeconomy, welfare and poverty reduction. Reducing food loss contributes to **climate objectives, more efficient use of raw materials, and social objectives** through the redistribution of food surpluses. However, responsibilities are spread across different Flemish, federal and European levels of government, making an integrated approach far from self-evident. The full overview of the actors and policy domains involved is documented in the Food Loss Monitor, 2023, 2025.

OVAM and the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries jointly coordinate the Flemish Action Plan on Food Loss and Biomass Residual Streams. The Agency mainly has a substantive role in primary production and supply-chain collaboration, while OVAM is responsible for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on food loss policy in the other links of the food chain. Implementation of the action plan relies on the **Food Loss Platform (Platform Voedselverlies)**, in which sector organisations, knowledge institutions, NGOs, social

organisations and local authorities work together around prevention, redistribution, monitoring and policy development.

Although the Food Loss Platform plays an important role in bringing together diverse actors, not all relevant policy stakeholders are structurally involved. In particular, policy domains responsible for social redistribution, food aid and emergency relief, such as Welfare policy domain and the Federal Public Planning Service for Social Integration, are currently only loosely connected to the Food Loss platform.

As a result, **the interfaces between food-loss policy, food security and poverty reduction** are not being used to their full potential. At the same time, reduction targets for food loss are not systematically embedded in the mandates of all administrations and services involved. Policy objectives and operational mandates can therefore exist alongside one another without actively reinforcing each other. This complicates coordination between policy domains and limits the possibilities for addressing food loss as a transversal policy challenge in a structural and coherent way.

An example of the current fragmentation is the **market withdrawals** under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Recognised producer organisations in the fruit and vegetable sector may withdraw products from the market to absorb fluctuations in supply and demand and stabilise the market. Implementation of this measure falls under the Agricultural Support and Product Quality division of the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries. Although this concerns substantial volumes of potentially edible food, 17,586 tonnes in 2020 and 15,724 tonnes in 2023, there is no explicit link between this measure and the objectives for food loss reduction. The majority of these streams are not used for human consumption but are valorised as animal feed or through anaerobic digestion. As a result, **opportunities to limit food loss while creating societal added value through redistribution remain underused**.

In addition, implementation of the action plan remains highly dependent on voluntary cooperation, project-based funding and in-kind contributions from partners.

Despite its central role, **the Food Loss Platform does not have its own structural operating budget**. As a result, actions are slow to get off the ground and remain dependent on the willingness and resources of private and public actors. This dependence on project-based efforts is not limited to the implementation of actions; it is also visible in Flemish knowledge development on food loss. A significant share of knowledge development on food loss in Flanders is currently supported by project-based European and Flemish funding. This creates a risk that research evolve in line with available calls for proposals, while certain **sector-specific or Flemish priorities are not followed up sufficiently over the long term**. This applies in particular to food loss in the primary sector, which accounts for a relatively large share in Flanders. Moreover, many research and innovation calls require co-financing or the deployment of own staff, which can make participation more difficult for SMEs, social organisations and research institutions with limited public resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS ON SHARED OBJECTIVES, CLEAR ROLES AND POLICY ALIGNMENT

CONSOLIDATE AND BROADEN THE FOOD LOSS PLATFORM

Expand the Platform by also connecting the actors involved in social redistribution. Confirm the Food Loss Platform as a structural, interdepartmental consultation and action mechanism with its own funding framework. Provide a structural operating budget for this purpose, so that the Platform can initiate, coordinate and scale up priority actions. Link these resources explicitly to shared objectives for food loss reduction, transparent monitoring and reporting across policy domains and levels of government. Such institutional embedding would **increase the Platform's impact using limited resources** by reducing its dependence on voluntary and project-based contributions.

FORMULATE SHARED AND EMBEDDED OBJECTIVES ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Strengthen alignment between the objectives on food loss and the mandates of all administrations involved. In doing so, evaluate **how existing procedures for market withdrawals can allow more room for reprocessing suitable products for human consumption**, without compromising the necessary control and traceability requirements. Such an approach can help reduce food loss while at the same time increasing the availability of healthy food for vulnerable groups. Involve all relevant services within the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries, including the divisions working on market withdrawals, producer organisations and the valorisation of biomass. This exercise is best coordinated within a strengthened Food Loss Platform.

STRENGTHEN ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE FOOD LOSS PLATFORM AND THE FLEMISH RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AGENDA

Embed food loss more explicitly within existing Flemish research and innovation programmes, including through structural alignment between the Platform, VLAIO, OVAM, the Agency for Agriculture and Fisheries and relevant knowledge institutions. Periodically **identify the main knowledge gaps and translate these into research priorities** within Flemish and European calls, for proposals. Pay particular attention to food loss in the primary sector, where Flanders reports a relatively large share of losses. In addition, provide funding instruments with limited or no co-financing requirements so that SMEs, social organisations and knowledge institutions with limited resources can also participate in research, demonstration projects or innovation initiatives.

BOTTLENECK 2

LACK OF DATA

Research shows that transparency and access to reliable data form a crucial precondition for successful and systemic food loss prevention (Messner et al., 2022). An important step was taken with the launch of the OVAM Food Loss Monitor in 2015 and the subsequent monitors for 2020 end 2023. The most recent figures relate to 2023 and were published in June 2026. This means that **several years elapse between the reference year and the publication of the results, limiting the ability to quickly follow up recent developments and adjust policy measures in a timely manner.** This not only complicates policy monitoring, but also the alignment of research agendas, practice-oriented projects and investment decision with the most up-to-date trends and needs within the food system. Companies, redistribution organisations and processing initiatives also face difficulties regarding the lack of comparable and up-to-date data on available surpluses. This can lead in turn to inefficiencies in planning, logistics and investment.

The use of MATIS data* in the 2023 monitor is an important step towards more detailed, consistent and digitally available data on food loss and food residual streams. This allows streams to be identified and tracked more effectively and creates potential for more automated reporting in the future. At the same time, **not all relevant data sources have yet been integrated.**

In the primary sector in particular, food loss figures still partly rely on expert estimates and potential calculations per crop or hectare.

The more precise measurement methods currently available are often time-intensive, costly and difficult to scale; **there is a need for pragmatic estimation methods that are sufficiently reliable without aiming for complete measurement precision.** Recent developments in drones, AI-driven image analysis, camera systems, smart storage infrastructure and digital registration tools offer opportunities to further automate data capture and make monitoring more frequent, more consistent and less labour-intensive. Although digital infrastructures for reliable and interoperable data sharing, such as DjustConnect and CEADS, are already available within the agri-food chain, they are currently still used only to a limited extent for food loss monitoring. Within the ZeroW project, the OFLW data space represented a first step in this direction.

The greatest challenges lie not so much in the technology itself, but in the ease of use of registration systems and the willingness of actors to share data. Without further coordination, standardisation and clear added value for the parties involved, **data collection will remain fragmented and insufficiently suitable for systematically monitoring food loss policy and adjusting it towards the European targets for 2030.**

*MATIS (Material Information System) is the digital data and registration platform of OVAM for tracking waste and material streams. Collecting data directly from waste collectors and processors offers MATIS a more detailed insight into the nature, quantity, and destination of food residual streams and enables more consistent and automated monitoring.

BOTTLENECK 2

LACK OF DATA

Another bottleneck regarding food loss figures is the **comparability over time** for donations and redistribution of food surpluses. Whereas historical monitors used data on the fully free distribution of withdrawn fruit and vegetables, the recent monitor reports on the basis of registrations by Food Banks and Foodsavers. The monitor itself indicates that these figures are not directly comparable. This creates **a break in the time series and makes it difficult to correctly evaluate trends in the redistribution of market withdrawals over time.**

In addition to the timeliness and comparability of data, the **fragmentation of data sources** also represents a major challenge. To properly understand the scale and dynamics of food loss, insight into the available data sources is necessary.

In Flanders, several relevant data sources exist, including the Food Loss Monitor, MATIS data, reporting on market withdrawals under the CAP, data from the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) and waste and collection figures. However, these data are collected within separate policy and reporting frameworks, by different administrations and with varying objectives and time horizons. At present, there is no structural linking and joint validation of these data outside the periodic monitoring exercises, which means that there is **no continuously available and up-to-date overview that can be used for policy, research and operational purposes.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

ESTABLISH SHARED OBJECTIVES AND AMBITIONS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ACCESS

DEVELOP A JOINT FRAMEWORK FOR DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ACCESS ON FOOD LOSSES

Through the strengthened Food Loss Platform, formulate explicit, shared objectives for data collection, data sharing and data use on food losses, and embed them in a joint framework supported by all relevant policy areas. This framework should define which data are needed, who is responsible for supplying and using them, and how monitoring and reporting take place. Pay particular attention to indicators that make prevention, redistribution and reprocessing for human consumption visible. This would also allow the highest rungs of the value retention cascade to be systematically monitored and evaluated. In this way, administrations can work from a shared strategic basis.

STRENGTHEN THE TIMELINESS AND COMPARABILITY OF FOOD LOSS MONITORING

Develop pragmatic and standardised protocols to estimate food losses in the different links of the food chain as accurately as possible, with particular attention to primary production. Build on existing knowledge and experience from other Member States and European projects, but translate these into feasible methods for the Flemish context. Work towards more **frequently updated and more comparable monitoring of food losses in production, processing, distribution, retail and consumption**. In addition, ensure consistent reporting of donations from market withdrawals by once again using the same indicators as in previous monitors, or by reporting both the historical and the new indicator in parallel during a transition period. Examine how prevention, redistribution and other forms of valorisation for human consumption can be included more effectively and consistently in monitoring. This increases transparency and enables reliable evaluation of policy measures and long-term trends. Use the results explicitly as a basis for policy monitoring, evaluation and adjustment of objectives.

INVEST IN SHARED DATA PLATFORMS AND ENCOURAGE DATA SHARING

Invest in user-friendly, secure and compatible tools and platforms to enable structured data collection and sharing on food loss. Build further on data spaces as the preferred instrument for the standardised and controlled collection and access of food loss data. Establish clear agreements on data access, data use and governance, so that governments, companies and knowledge institutions have confidence in the system. Combine this with targeted measures and proportionate obligations for companies and sector organisations to periodically make relevant data available. **In doing so, pay attention not only to the technical infrastructure, but also to creating sufficient incentives for chain actors to register and share data.** This can lay a data-driven basis for more effective food loss policy and better monitoring of Flemish and European objectives on value retention and food loss reduction.

According to the value retention cascade, the highest policy priority is the prevention of food loss. When edible surpluses nevertheless arise, repurposing them for human consumption, through donation or reprocessing into food products, is the highest-value destination. At policy level, human consumption is therefore central. However, in the OVAM Food Loss Monitor, prevention and redistribution for human consumption are not included in the cascade index. As a result, a sector that valorises all its residual streams as animal feed can score 10/10. This makes improvements in the valorisation of residual streams visible, but makes it more difficult to systematically monitor the evolution of prevention and human consumption. In practice, we also see that many edible food surpluses do not re-enter the human food chain, but are valorised through animal feed, anaerobic digestion, soil application or other applications lower on the cascade. The limited repurposing of edible food surpluses for human consumption can hardly be explained by a lack of societal demand for food.

Each month, an average of 209,000 Belgians rely on food aid through the Food Banks, an increase of 50% compared with ten years ago. Food aid organisations also indicate that sufficient supply remains a daily challenge. The limited repurposing for human consumption is therefore rather the result of a combination of structural barriers within the food chain.

First, there are economic and operational barriers. Processing fresh, often heterogeneous and seasonal surpluses into longer-life products for human consumption is more complex than bulk valorisation towards animal feed or anaerobic digestion. Available volumes are irregular, with periods of oversupply and undersupply. This complicates investment in processing, storage and logistics, because a viable business model requires sufficient predictability and scale. Without targeted support or coordination, market logic therefore often does not automatically lead to more valorisation for human consumption, although there are good examples (see box 1).

BOX 1: Examples of innovative business models around food loss

Recent initiatives show that innovative business models can indeed create economic opportunities around rescuing and processing food surpluses. Examples include Waste Warriors in Belgium and Food Waste Army in the Netherlands, which create value from streams that would otherwise be lost through strong logistical organisation, digital matching and a focus on high-value applications. A notable feature is their hybrid model, whereby consumers can not only buy rescued products, but can also choose to donate them directly to food banks or social organisations. In this way, economic viability and societal impact are combined.

These initiatives illustrate that food loss reduction is not solely a social or ecological objective, but can also develop into an economically feasible activity under the right preconditions. Cooperation between chain partners, sufficient concentration of volumes and professional coordination of supply and demand play a crucial role here.

BOTTLENECK 3 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Second, there are **barriers relating to regulation, food safety and liability**. Donation and reprocessing of course require compliance with FAVV requirements and traceability rules. Donors often perceive the responsibility for correct compliance and product safety arising from these rules as complex or risky. This can reduce their willingness to donate surpluses structurally or have them processed for human consumption.

Third, **fiscal, customs and administrative measures** can sometimes unintentionally disadvantage reprocessing for human consumption. In certain situations, destruction or low-value valorisation may be administratively simpler or financially more advantageous than reprocessing into food.

Such measures disrupt the application of the value retention cascade: products that are in principle suitable for human consumption are nevertheless diverted to low-value applications, away from the food chain, because high-value valorisation entails additional costs, uncertainties or procedures (see box 2).

Finally, the organisation of redistribution itself also presents a significant bottleneck. Auctions and other donors are currently approached by various redistribution platforms, food banks and local social organisations. Whilst this broad network is socially valuable, direct and individual collections lead to logistical complexity, limited economies of scale and a higher operational burden for donors and supervisory bodies.

BOX 2: Practical example: customs regulations favour low-value valorisation

When imported bananas or kiwis arrive too ripe at the port of Antwerp and are destroyed under customs supervision, for example through anaerobic digestion, the associated import duties may be waived or not levied on the basis of European customs provisions on destruction and remission under the Union Customs Code. If those same products are donated or reprocessed into a food ingredient for human consumption, they are deemed to have been released for free circulation and the regular import duties become payable.

These rules are established at European level, while Belgian customs (FPS Finance) is responsible for their practical application and interpretation. Recent practical examples from other Member States show that there is some room for policy flexibility within this European framework. In the Netherlands, for example, an exemption was granted for the reprocessing of surpluses of imported bananas into bread and purée intended for human consumption through donation. This indicates that more equal treatment of reprocessing and destruction is possible within the existing EU framework, provided that the rules are interpreted and applied administratively in an adapted way.

This example shows that fiscal preconditions directly influence the economic playing field, and that without explicit policy alignment, high-value valorisation for human consumption remains structurally disadvantaged.

BOTTLENECK 3 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

This fragmentation is reinforced by the seasonal and regionally concentrated nature of many fresh surpluses. Timely redistribution of vulnerable products, such as strawberries or cucumbers, requires rapid coordination, cooling, transport capacity and sufficient absorption capacity among social organisations.

Experience from recent European research and innovation projects shows that regional hubs, equipped with adapted storage and processing technology, can play a role in processing non-uniform and seasonal surpluses into longer-life food products; see the example from Catalonia in the box. Interesting results were also achieved within the Flemish living lab of the ZeroW project. That project demonstrated that one processing line is able to convert a wide diversity of fruit and vegetable surpluses, both

separately and in mixed streams, into safe, nutritious and long-life food products such as soups, juices and purées.

These results show that technological solutions for high-value valorisation of heterogeneous surpluses are already available today. The Flemish monitor and progress reporting also point to the **potential of food hubs, mobile processing and cooperation between producer organisations, Food Banks, Foodsavers and knowledge institutions**. At the same time, developing such infrastructure remains difficult as long as funding, logistics coordination, data exchange and agreements on responsibilities remain fragmented. As a result, opportunities to keep edible surpluses higher on the cascade, through donation or reprocessing for human consumption, are currently underused.

BOX 3: Inspiration for Flanders from Catalonia

An example of how legal frameworks and the associated funding can stimulate reprocessing for human consumption can be found in Catalonia, Spain. There, surplus nectarines and oranges withdrawn from the market are processed into fruit juices and redistributed by the food banks. The CAP provides the legal framework for withdrawing these products from the market and compensating farmers. This compensation is also higher when the surpluses are repurposed for human consumption than when they are used for animal feed or biogas.

The region of Catalonia provides most of the funding required to process these surpluses into fruit juices. This requires cooperation between a wide range of government departments, as well as additional checks on these withdrawn products to prevent their reintroduction into the market.

In 2023, 3,761 tonnes of fruit were withdrawn from the market in Catalonia, of which 83% was redistributed directly and 13% was processed into fruit juice before being redistributed. The remaining 3% was composted. In Flanders, the reprocessing of products withdrawn from the market into long-life products is not permitted, even though Europe does provide a framework for this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS ON HUMAN CONSUMPTION AND PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT

EXPLICITLY INTEGRATE HUMAN CONSUMPTION INTO THE CASCADE INDEX AND POLICY STEERING

Explicitly include prevention, redistribution and reprocessing for human consumption in the cascade index and ensure that only these actions can achieve the maximum score. Link targets to these indicators and then use them as a basis for evaluating food loss policy, subsidy instruments, support measures and project calls. Pay particular attention to alignment between food loss policy, the circular economy and the bioeconomy. In this way, **the cascade index will again be more closely aligned with the original policy ambition** of the value retention cascade, in which keeping edible products within the human food chain takes precedence over lower-value valorisation routes, and it will help avoid edible food surpluses being unintentionally steered towards applications with lower societal added value than human consumption.

SUPPORT REGIONAL HUBS AND SCOPE FOR EXPERIMENTATION FOR INNOVATIVE REDISTRIBUTION AND PROCESSING MODELS

Invest in **regional redistribution and processing hubs with flexible storage, logistics and processing capacity** to lower operational barriers for donors. Encourage cooperation between existing redistribution platforms, social organisations and processing initiatives, so that expertise, infrastructure and logistics capacity can be deployed more efficiently. This makes it possible to achieve economies of scale, reduce the burden on donors and professionalise the processing of seasonal and non-uniform surpluses and make it economically feasible.

In addition, provide scope for experimentation and innovation through living labs, pilot projects and other practice-oriented low-regulation sandboxes. Such initiatives can test new forms of logistics, storage, redistribution and processing in a controlled environment while respecting existing food safety and traceability requirements. Use the insights from these trajectories to further refine and scale up regulation, support instruments and logistics models.

EVALUATE FISCAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INCENTIVES THAT MAY DISCOURAGE HIGH-VALUE VALORISATION

In cooperation with the competent Flemish, federal and European actors, map where existing fiscal, administrative or procedural rules unintentionally create barriers to the redistribution or reprocessing of food surpluses for human consumption. Examine in particular whether certain arrangements result in lower-value valorisation routes being administratively simpler or financially more attractive than high-value applications within the human food chain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS ON HUMAN CONSUMPTION AND PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT

Work towards equal treatment of high-value and low-value valorisation routes within existing legal frameworks. This will help avoid edible food surpluses systematically ending up lower on the value retention cascade than is socially desirable for economic or administrative reasons.

Figure 3: Research exchange in Catalonia, Spain, as part of the knowledge exchange programme regarding food losses (ZeroW project).



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ONDERZOEKSPROJECTEN



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