



Ireland's Food System: Is It Wasteful?

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A scenic view of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, a grassy slope with small white flowers leads down to a rocky cliff edge. The cliff face is composed of dark, layered rock formations, showing signs of erosion. The ocean is a deep blue, with white foam from waves crashing against the base of the cliffs. In the distance, more rocky islands and a larger landmass are visible under a clear sky.

About Us

Zero Waste Alliance Ireland (ZWAI)

- Founded in 1999, established in **2004**
- Registered **environmental charity and NGO** focused on zero waste principles
- **Not-for-profit** policy-oriented organisation
- Member of the **Irish Environmental Network (IEN)** and the **Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership**
- Members of the **EEB** and the **Waste Working Group**
- Currently **65 members** and growing steadily!
- Our work involves **lobbying government and preparing policy submissions** to the Irish government and the European Commission, we also provide educational content and attend festivals and events.



Introduction to Food Waste

- **Definition:** Refers to edible food that is discarded or left uneaten at various stages of the food supply chain.
- **Global Figures:** Approximately one-third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted, amounting to about 1.3 billion tonnes annually.
- **Irish Figures:** EPA estimates that Ireland generated 750,000 tonnes of food waste in 2022.
- This equates to 146 kg of food waste per person and **is higher than the EU average** of 130kg of food waste per capita
- The irony of this is that one billion people in the world are suffering and dying from hunger.





**Clearly, we have
a problem with
food waste.**

Causes of Food Waste



Production Level:

Losses due to pests, diseases, and adverse weather conditions.
Inefficient harvesting techniques leading to uncollected produce.



Post-Harvest Handling and Storage:

Inadequate storage facilities causing spoilage.
Poor transportation infrastructure leading to damage.



Processing and Packaging:

Strict aesthetic standards resulting in rejection of 'imperfect' produce.
Overproduction and mismanagement during processing.



Distribution and Retail:

Surplus stock leading to unsold goods.
Labelling issues which might cause premature disposal.



Consumer Level:

Over-purchasing and improper meal planning.
Lack of awareness regarding food storage and shelf life.





Impacts of Food Waste



Environmental Impact

1. Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Food waste contributes to 3.3 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions annually

2. Resource Wastage:

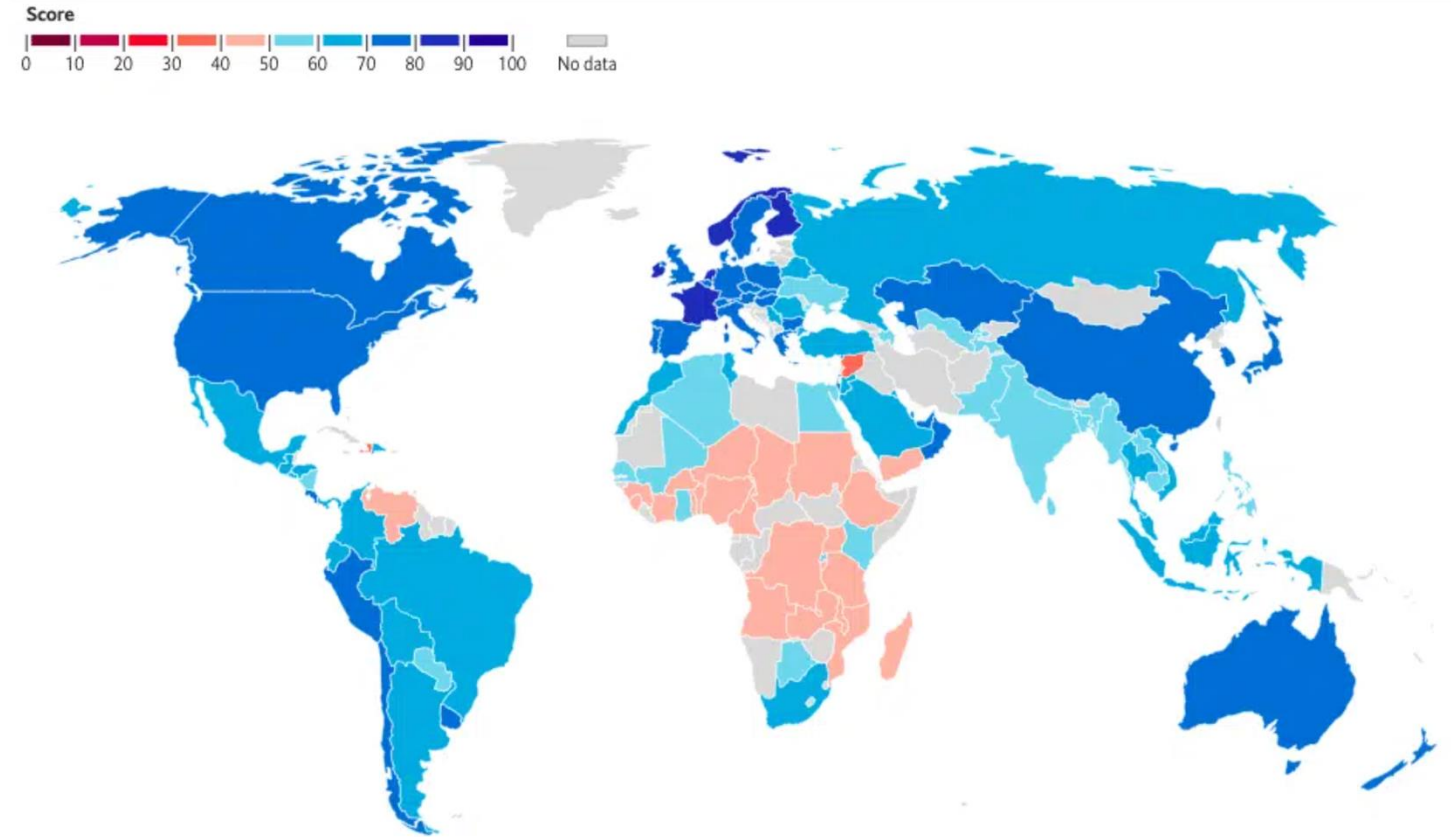
- **Water:** Significant volumes used in food production are wasted.
- **Land:** Deforestation and habitat loss occur to cultivate food that is ultimately discarded.

3. Biodiversity Loss: Unsustainable agricultural practices, such as monoculture farming, driven by demand for food contribute to species extinction.



Economic and Social Impacts

- **Economic Costs:** Global food waste results in losses of approximately €865.82 billion annually.
- **Food Security:** Reducing food waste could enhance food availability, addressing hunger and malnutrition for the one billion people facing food insecurity worldwide.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Wasting food exacerbates inequalities, especially when many lack access to adequate nutrition.



Global Food Security Index 2022. Image: The Economist

Clearly, we have a problem with food waste. So what are some solutions?



Strategies for Reducing Food Waste

Prevention:

Stronger Policies: stronger government policies can enforce better practices, set standards, and hold companies accountable.

Source Reduction: Implementing better inventory management and demand forecasting within industries.

Consumer Education: Raising awareness about meal planning and proper food storage.

Less Intensive Agriculture: less meat, more vegetarian diet (as ZWAI recommended in *Feedback to the European Commission on Food Waste Reduction Targets*)

Recovery:

Food Rescue: Donating surplus edible food to charities and food banks.

Animal Feed: Redirecting suitable food waste to livestock, reducing the need for commercial feed.

Recycling:

Industrial Uses: Converting waste into biofuels or energy through anaerobic digestion.

Composting: Transforming organic waste into nutrient-rich soil amendments. Mandatory composting bins for every household now implemented.

Policy Recommendations



Regulatory Measures:

Setting and enforcing stronger national targets for food waste reduction through policy.

Enforcing standardised date labelling to minimise consumer confusion.



Incentives:

Providing tax benefits to businesses that donate surplus food.

Supporting infrastructure development for food redistribution networks.



Public Awareness Campaigns:

Launching initiatives similar to the UK's "Love Food, Hate Waste" to educate the public. "Stop Food Waste" in Ireland could be stronger



Research and Innovation:

Investing in technologies that extend shelf life and improve supply chain efficiency.



Case Studies & Success Stories

France: Legislation mandates supermarkets to donate unsold food, leading to significant waste reduction since 2016.

Italy: Brought in a similar law 6 months after France

Ireland: Local initiatives have successfully implemented community composting programs, and the apps “Too Good to Go”, “Olio”, and “Fridgely” are now available here (mostly in Dublin though).

The collage features several key elements:

- Top Left:** A screenshot of a Guardian article titled "French law forbids food waste by supermarkets". The article, by Angelique Chrisafis in Paris, dated Feb 2016, discusses how food banks and charities welcome the law, which requires large shops to donate unsold food to deter foragers.
- Top Right:** The logo for the Olio app, consisting of the word "olio" in white lowercase letters on a vertical gradient background from yellow to pink.
- Middle Left:** The logo for Too Good to Go, featuring three overlapping white hearts on a dark green background with the text "TOO GOOD TO GO" in white.
- Middle Right:** The logo for FRIDGELY, a Food Expiration Date Tracker. It features a blue circle with a white stylized "F" and the text "FRIDGELY" and "Food Expiration Date Tracker" in blue.
- Bottom Right:** A screenshot of a Guardian article titled "Italy tackles food waste with law encouraging firms to donate food". The article, by Stephanie Kirchgaessner in Rome, dated Aug 2016, mentions that restaurant customers will be encouraged to use doggy bags to save 1m tonnes of food a year.

**So what could
the future hold
for food waste in
Ireland?**





Food waste is responsible for 10% of global GHG emissions, and according to the international research coalition, “Project Drawdown”, reducing food waste is one of the most powerful solutions to preventing further global warming. Eliminating food loss and waste to the largest extent possible, at all stages from producer to final consumer, is an urgent step towards more sustainable food systems.



Adopt mandatory food waste reporting by Member States within the EU, including data on unharvested produce.

Enforce stricter waste reduction targets and promote more incentives for food donation and redistribution.

Expand community composting programs to reduce organic waste.

Increase funding for food rescue organisations and surplus food distribution networks.

Provide financial support for farmers to adopt waste-reducing technologies and precision agriculture.

Launch nationwide education campaigns on the impact of food waste and how to minimise it.

Promote the use of food-saving apps like Olio, Friggely, and local food-sharing platforms.

Partnerships between government, businesses, and communities to develop innovative waste reduction strategies.

Share best practices from international case studies to inspire local action and policy improvements.

Ireland, it's our turn to act. We can start by educating ourselves and others!

Any questions?

***Thanks for listening. Find out more at www.zwai.ie.
Follow us below and join us as a member!***

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