

## **Parliament pushes to slash food waste in Europe**

The European Parliament wants to cut food waste in half, warning that fresh and packaged foods tossed out every day pose a threat to Europe's environment and efforts to reduce global poverty.

The European Commission estimates that up to 140 million tonnes of food and plant rubbish are produced each year in the EU, amounting to 300 kg per person – two thirds of which is edible.

In a resolution set to be approved today (19 January), MEPs argue that such levels are unsustainable.

MEP Salvatore Caronna (Socialists and Democrats, Italy) told a news conference in Strasbourg yesterday (18 January) the Commission should move quickly to develop a food waste strategy.

“For the first time a European institution is raising the point and it is going to goad the other institutions to act as well,” said Caronna, the parliamentary rapporteur for the resolution. “Now the ball is in the Commission's court and the Commission is going to have to very swiftly come up with replies.”

MEPs want to cut food waste by half in the EU through measures such as encouraging small- and medium-scale farming and crop production that is geared to local market demand. They also call for rethinking expiry dates on packaged foods.

The resolution calls food waste unethical in a world facing population growth and rising nutritional challenges in poor countries that are particularly vulnerable to a climate changes.

“The demand for food as you look forward might well be more than the actual supply of food and the ability to be able to produce it, and we have to integrate that into our thinking,” Caronna said.

Although food manufacturing and processing industries account for the largest single source of waste, households and restaurants combined are far more frivolous. By comparison, supermarkets are relatively efficient, says a report by the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC).

The resolution was approved by the Parliament's agriculture committee on 23 November. It calls for the European Commission and members states to:

- Take “radical measures” to reduce waste – “from farm to fork” - by 50% before 2025.
- Improve enforcement of existing EU and national government sanitation laws that mandate recycling of bio-degradable waste.
- Set food waste-prevention targets for member states under the current waste-reduction target to be in place by 2014.
- Declare 2013 the 'European Year Against Food Waste'

## Food packaging and labelling

MEPs are also encouraging changes to food packaging to reduce confusion over “best buy”, “sell by” and “use by” labels found on most packaged products.

But such measures may only have limited impact. There is little wiggle room in expiry dates, with consumer groups and retailers themselves wary of health risks and choosy buyers overlooking foods that are not at peak freshness.

The Commission has already taken steps to address some of the MEPs’ concerns, such as setting targets to eliminate landfill disposal by 2020.

“Food waste is environmentally bad, economically bad and morally bad,” William Neale, a member of Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik’s cabinet, said at a recent forum on food waste.

He acknowledged that eliminating landfilling by 2020 is “a quite ambitious goal,” but said cutting food waste could go a long way in reaching the target. Food and other bio-degradable waste, such as garden clippings, account for 40% of landfill disposal across the EU, according to the [JRC](#).

Neale said there was a moral imperative to cut down on waste. Food scraps from Italy alone, he said, could address the nutritional deficit in Ethiopia, where more than 4 million people faced hunger last year in one of the worst droughts in half a century.

Food also plays a role in addressing the Commission’s push for wiser resource use, Neale said, noting that more efficient food production saves water, fuels and pesticides. Organic waste could also be redirected from dumps to produce compost and energy from bio-gas.

Positions:

Speaking at a news conference in Strasbourg, two members of Parliament’s agriculture committee made the case for cutting food waste.

“Today food safety and food security are world requirements. There is a daily reference to the imbalances. Every year there is more and more surplus of demand over the supply side and that gives rise to more and more imbalance,” said **Paolo de Castro** (Socialists and Democrats, Italy), who heads the committee.

**Salvatore Caronna** (Socialists and Democrats, Italy) the parliamentary rapporteur for the resolution, said: “Wealthy Europe include more than 70 million people who live in conditions of poverty and malnutrition, and that’s worth remembering.”

Other MEPs also backed the resolution in advance of the vote today (19 January):

"To improve resource-efficiency at all stages of the supply chain we need both a coordinated European strategy as well as sharing of best practices across member states," said **Graham Watson** (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, UK). "Most importantly, however, all players in the food supply chain need to be brought on board and help devise guidelines to improve efficiency and minimize waste."

**Liam Aylward** (Fianna Fáil, Ireland), who negotiated the report on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, said: "It is outrageous that almost 90 million tonnes of perfectly fine food gets wasted each year while an estimated 79 million people in the EU live beneath the poverty line and around 16 million depend on food aid from charitable institutions."

Next steps:

- **2013:** MEPs call for the 'European Year Against Food Waste'  
Timothy Spence  
External Links  
**EU official documents**
- McKinsey Global Institute: [Mobilizing for a resource revolution](#)  
**European Union**
- European Commission: [Join Research Centre](#) Supporting Environmentally Sound Decisions for Bio-Waste Management  
**Parliament**
- European Parliament: [Resolution on Food Waste](#)
- European Parliament: [Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development](#)  
**International Organisations**
- UN Food and Agriculture Organization: [Global food losses and food waste](#)

## COMMENTS

- This is the first time that I have read of a real statement from the EU (European Union) about the issue of Waste derived from food sources but the way that this is presented in the EurActiv article covers up a small flaw in presentation and the reporting.

You have quoted the following -

The European Commission estimates that up to 140 million tonnes of food and plant rubbish are produced each year in the EU, amounting to 300 kg per person – two thirds of which is edible.

Whilst this article states “Parliament pushes to slash food waste in Europe” unfortunately the details are somewhat misleading for it conveys a message that this is 140 Million tonnes and inadvertently compromises that message by stating later on that it includes “food and plant rubbish.” I have attempted to reconcile these figures with those produced by DEFRA within the UK and on their base the figures for Food Waste (6.7 Million tonnes valued at €12 Billion from 60 Million people) would suggest that your figure should be over 51 Million tonnes as pure Food Waste! None-the-less, Sirs, this is still a shocking indictment for this is a huge amount, and at the current time it is possibly worth up to €90 Billion per year!

We all therefore welcome the fact that there will be a major attempt to reduce the quantity of Food Waste we produce in the EU, but this is not just an issue in the EU, it is a world-wide one and it is inevitable that there will always be some food waste: it is inevitable. What we have to do is accept the fact that there will always be some and the question has to be asked “How much?” and “what is an acceptable amount?” In respect of the other sector, plant based waste, we have to accept that it will always be around to some degree.

During the past two years or so various articles and comments within this journal EurActiv (and its sister publication BlogActiv) have variously brought to our attention that across the EU (and elsewhere) there is a concern that needs addressing. Although these quantities are large as a fraction of the total quantity of organic wastes being produced throughout the EU at over 300 Million tonnes per annum it is a relatively small proportion. And by the time we add in all the other sources of Biomass found in Wastes across the EU smaller still!

One of the concerns also expressed, here, in this article is the effect these sources of Biomass have on total GHG (Green House Gas) emissions in the EU. I do not think enough serious address is being made to answer these effects. The calculations for the GHG emissions and their prevention are tied up with a reluctance to be realistic. In the current system these calculations have in themselves have always been of concern to me for they appear to grossly underestimate the reality. A simple system based upon a chemical mass balance of the effects of the degradation of Biomass (Ligno-Cellulose) which continues to be dumped year in year out for a typical period of calculation at 15 years confirms that each 1.5 Million tonnes of Biomass (dry mass) produces 1 Million tonnes of tCO<sub>2</sub>eq per year! This is a significant upsizing of the current estimates calculated by other means, and little if any address is made to take note of this. The calculations for this are being used in a number of scenarios for presenting this both under the Voluntary and CDM applications to the UNFCCC which I have been reviewing in the applications by others.

So then how can we deal with this issue? The article suggests reducing waste quantities being Dumped in Land Fill sites by 2020! Is this credible? It is almost certainly unlikely. What we can do though is look at the joined up thinking process of trying to deal with the issue as one. We are reducing the quantities of waste being dumped in land fill sites by the application of the “4Rs” (Rethink, Reuse, Reduce, and Recycle) but even then we can only go so far. For the residues which are dominated by Biomass the most logical in most people's opinions is to convert this to its most valued use consistent with meeting environmental objectives the Renewable Transport fuels.

We are currently embarking on this in a major campaign within the EU where our family of Companies in their local practices are developing this option in a major roll out to convert this wasted biomass to the production of the Biofuels Ethanol and Butanol. This system uses the oldest and simplest procedures dilute acid hydrolysis (discovered in 1826) which was used extensively during the 20th Century but remained caught in a time warp when oil became king. It has been updated and made continuous by the founder of the originating company Genesyst Intl. Inc. by its founder James Titmas CEO and Chairman. As a result the process

is much more efficient and cost effective. Several major projects being developed, and in brief these are:

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- (i) Hardenberg (Netherlands - by Genesyst Netherlands) for converting Biomass from Municipal and Agricultural Waste to Ethanol and Methane and Furfural; and then
- (ii) by Genesyst UK in [a] Malta the first plant for converting Biomass from various sources to make Ethanol and two more using similar sources to make Butanol and Aviation Fuels; [b] South Milford (Yorkshire) using Biomass from Municipal Sources and Food Waste to make Ethanol and Goole to make Butanol Ethanol and Methane; and
- (iii) in the wider arena in Canada, Houston and Kentucky (USA), VietNam, the Middle East and North Africa.

With the change in emphasis and need for “sustainable sourcing” the demand for Biofuels from using Biomass derived from Waste (including Food Waste) removes the uncertainty that has created the malaise of the Food versus Fuel debate to which we in our Company gave lectures during early 2005 onwards to 2007. This subject has continued to become an even greater issue in the EU and World. Now it repeats itself in in the débâcle of these major Grain to Ethanol plants in the EU being unable to compete in the market as a result of the high raw material (grain) costs and the demand for food being the dominant issue and determinant of cost. This is the consequence of that “Mad dash for Biofuels” which we all predicted would result, and is continuing because of the shortages of such crops due to flooding and drought around the World. Is it any surprise that Ethanol is now being shipped from the USA to Brazil because sugar is worth more as a food!

We have said all along that using Biomass from Waste (the ultimate Non-Food Source) is the way forward, and although this article highlights one facet of the issue that there are large quantities of Food and Plant Waste available in the EU we should also bear in mind that this is a potential real source for aiming to make the EU self-sufficient in transport fuels from the non-food and non-oil sources.

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