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GUIDELINES TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE – CONSUMERS

This chapter provides guidelines for reducing food waste at the consumer level, recognising households as the largest contributors to post-retail food waste in the food system. While households are the primary actors responsible for disposal, the measures presented here are intended for policymakers, municipalities, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders who design the enabling conditions influencing consumer behaviour. The guidelines reflect the findings of the **D1.1.2 FOOD WASTE AUDIT** and align with the broader EU policy landscape, including the **Farm to Fork Strategy** (European Commission, 2020a), the **Circular Economy Action Plan** (European Commission, 2020b), the **EU Framework for Sustainable Food Systems** (European Commission, 2023), and the global policy framework established under **SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production** (United Nations, 2015).



Consumers shape the final stage of the food supply chain, where purchasing decisions, storage practices, cooking habits, and attitudes toward leftovers directly influence the quantities of food discarded. EU policies highlight the importance of improving food literacy, strengthening date labelling practices, and promoting household-level prevention measures as part of national food waste strategies. Member States' obligations under the revised **Waste Framework Directive** (Directive 2008/98/EC, amended 2018; Directive (EU) 2025/1892) further reinforce the need for consumer-focused interventions, public awareness initiatives, and community-level circular solutions.





The **D1.1.2 FOOD WASTE AUDIT** shows that consumers generate substantially higher levels of food waste than enterprises, particularly for perishable and high-impact categories such as meat, fruit, and vegetables. Consumer-level food waste stems primarily from food spoiling before use, oversized portions, over-purchasing, and poor inventory or leftover management. Additional factors include limited understanding of date labels, difficulty reusing leftovers, selective eating habits, and insufficient knowledge of proper storage techniques. Environmental impact assessments confirm that animal-based products, particularly meat, carry the highest environmental burden per kilogram wasted, with the agricultural production stage dominating overall impacts. Plant-based products such as cereals, fruit, and vegetables show lower but still substantial impacts linked mainly to agricultural and processing phases. These findings highlight the importance of interventions addressing behavioural drivers, food literacy, and targeted management of high-impact product categories at household level.

Key Cause of Food Waste	Recommended Action	Expected Outcome
Food spoiling before consumption	Clear guidance on storage; community campaigns; apps for expiry reminders	Improved shelf-life management and reduced spoilage
Oversized portions	Campaigns promoting portion planning; household measuring tools	Reduced plate waste and improved meal planning
Over-purchasing	Shopping list tools; retailer nudges; community education	Purchases aligned with real needs
Poor inventory management	Promote “use-first” systems; fridge organisation guidance	Increased use of food already at home
Inadequate leftover management	Community education; recipe suggestions; digital platforms	Better utilisation of leftovers
Misunderstanding of date labels	Clear communication on “use by” vs. “best before”	Lower avoidable disposal
Selective eating habits	Education on edible food parts; acceptance campaigns	Broader utilisation of available food
Lack of knowledge on storage	Practical storage guides; visual instructions	Longer shelf life and reduced waste

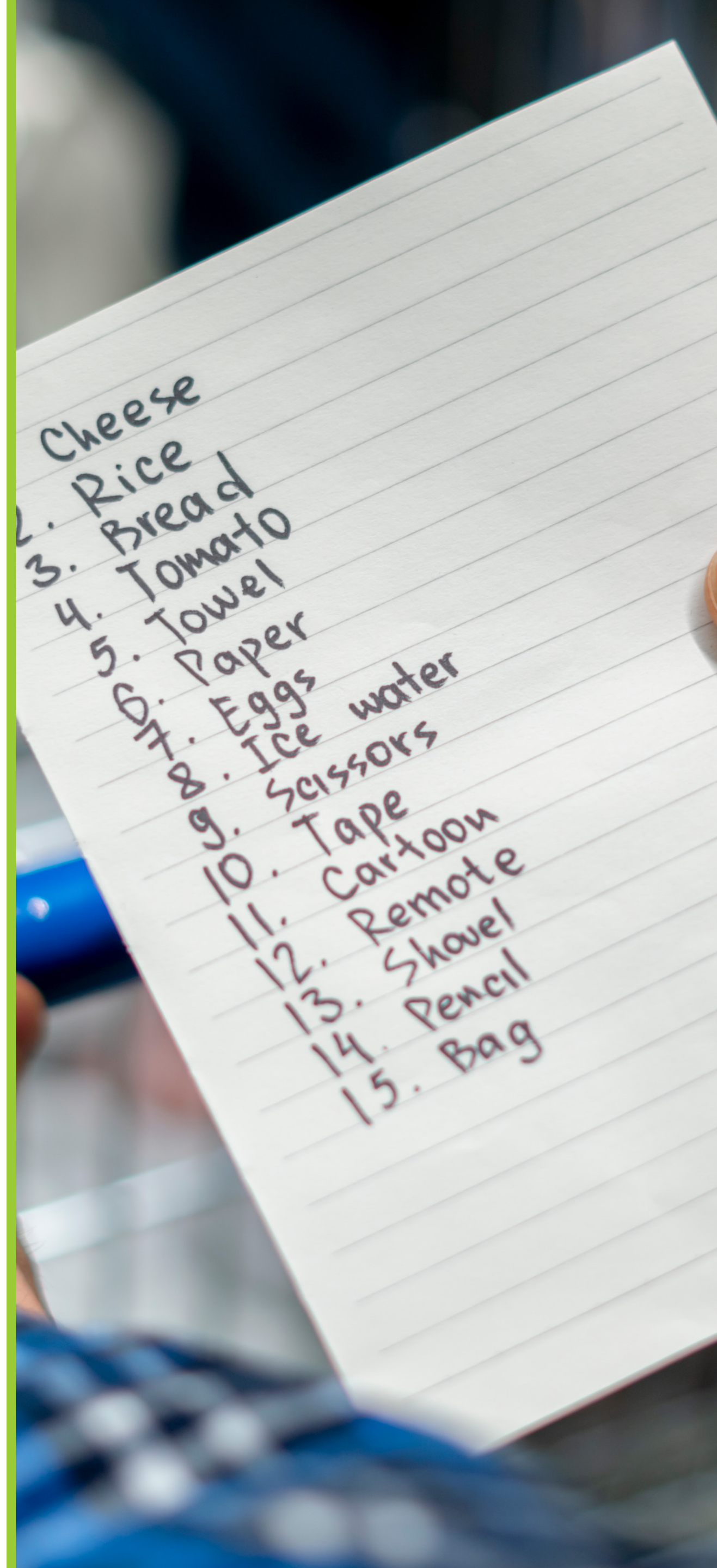
A supportive enabling environment is essential for influencing household behaviour and reducing food waste. National and local authorities should introduce public awareness campaigns on food storage, date labelling, portion planning, and leftover use, supported by the strategic direction of the **Farm to Fork Strategy** (European Commission, 2020a). Financial incentives, such as lower fees for households participating in bio-waste collection or community composting, can reinforce behavioural change. Education programmes in schools, NGOs, and community centres help embed food literacy. Clearer date-labelling rules would further reduce unnecessary disposal.



Effective prevention at the consumer level depends on improving purchasing habits, storage practices, and meal planning. Retailers and policymakers can jointly promote tools such as shopping list apps, fridge organisation guidelines, and educational materials on storage temperatures and food preservation. Practical workshops, recipe-sharing platforms, and community initiatives encourage behavioural change and help reduce waste, particularly in high-impact categories such as meat and dairy.

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Valorising unavoidable waste is crucial for ensuring that edible surplus food remains within the food system and that inedible fractions are sustainably managed. Local authorities should support community redistribution initiatives, food-sharing platforms, and social supermarkets that channel surplus food to people rather than disposal streams. For inedible waste, municipal bio-waste collection systems, home composting schemes, and community compost hubs facilitate circular solutions. Integrating households into local circular economy initiatives, such as urban gardens and neighbourhood composting networks, reinforces resource efficiency and promotes regenerative practices.

Reliable data, monitoring, and reporting are essential for evidence-based policymaking at the consumer level. Municipalities can promote citizen-science initiatives, waste-tracking applications, and periodic household waste audits aligned with methodologies defined in Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597. Standardised reporting mechanisms provide stronger analytical foundations for designing targeted interventions and ensure alignment with national obligations introduced under Directive (EU) 2025/1892.

The following figure illustrates the integrated framework that brings together all previously described guidelines for reducing food waste at the consumer level.



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Key areas	Key principles	Practical examples
Planning and Smart Shopping	Most food waste starts at the shopping stage; Weekly meal planning is essential; Buy the right quantities; Use short-dated products strategically; Don't reject "imperfect" products.	Avoid buying fresh fish/vegetables if you will dine out mid-week; A single person buys 3 bananas instead of 8; Eat discounted yogurt expiring tomorrow for the next breakfast; Use misshapen produce for soups or smoothies; Checklist: check pantry, stick to list, buy small amounts more often, don't shop hungry.
Proper Storage and Use	Correct storage extends shelf life; Understand fridge temperature zones; Know the difference between "use by" and "best before."; Use the freezer as a preservation tool; Store leftovers in transparent containers.	Meat/fish on the coldest shelves; vegetables in drawers; "Best before" does not mean unsafe; Freeze chopped herbs in oil in ice-cube trays; Keep leftovers visible in clear airtight containers; Create an "Eat Me First" box for soon-to-expire items.
Meal Preparation and Portioning	Cook the right portion sizes; Turn leftovers into new meals; Use batch cooking intentionally.	80 g of pasta per adult; Sunday roast chicken becomes Monday chicken salad; Boiled vegetables transformed into soups or pies; Cook a large pot of soup and freeze individual portions; Leftover pasta becomes a frittata the next day.
Eating at Restaurants	Choose the right portion size; Always ask for a doggy bag; Support restaurants that manage surplus responsibly; Use apps to recover unsold meals.	Choose half portions if not too hungry; At buffets, start with small servings and return if needed; Take home leftover pizza for next-day lunch; Use Too Good To Go to buy surplus meals.
Awareness and Education	Awareness drives long-term change; Educate families and children; Support school and community initiatives; Share national/international campaigns; Rediscover traditional low-waste habits.	Teach children how to store fruit and vegetables; "Food waste days" in schools or communities; Use all parts of produce; prepare homemade preserves.



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Reducing food waste at consumer level requires coordinated behavioural interventions, regulatory clarity, enhanced food literacy, and accessible community-based solutions. Households generate the largest share of post-retail waste, yet they also hold significant potential for prevention through improved planning, informed purchasing, and responsible storage and leftover management. Policymakers and local authorities play a central role in shaping the enabling environment, strengthening communication, supporting redistribution, and promoting circular bio-waste solutions. Effective consumer-level interventions are crucial to achieving EU-wide waste reduction targets and advancing a more resource-efficient and regenerative food system.