



GUIDELINES TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE-RETAILER

This chapter provides guidelines for reducing food waste in the retail sector as part of broader efforts to improve resource efficiency, embed circular economy principles, and support the transition to more sustainable and regenerative food systems.

The recommendations target retail enterprises as the primary actors responsible for waste generation and reduction, while the wider context is relevant for policymakers, local authorities, and stakeholders engaged in food system governance.

The guidelines build on the findings of the **D1.1.2 FOOD WASTE AUDIT** and reflect the EU policy framework specifically relevant to retail operations.



Retail occupies a central and highly visible position in the food supply chain, shaping distribution patterns, influencing consumer behaviour, and setting market expectations related to quality, appearance, and shelf life.

Several EU initiatives directly address the reduction of food waste in this sector. The **EU Guidelines on Food Donation** provide operational instructions for the safe redistribution of surplus food, addressing liability, hygiene, and labelling considerations (European Commission, 2017).

The **EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste**, particularly its subgroup on retail, has identified best practices such as dynamic pricing, improved storage and handling, redistribution mechanisms, and consumer engagement.

Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597 establishes the harmonised EU methodology for measuring



and reporting food waste levels, while the 2025 amendment to the **Waste Framework Directive** (Directive (EU) 2025/1892) introduces the first EU-wide legally binding food waste reduction targets, reinforcing Member States' obligations to monitor and reduce waste across all stages of the food supply chain, including retail.

The **Circular Economy Action Plan** (European Commission, 2020) supports waste prevention through sustainable product policy, packaging reduction and improved logistics, and the **objectives of SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production**, which are reflected in EU sustainability policies, emphasise the importance of retailers in shaping consumer behaviour and supporting sustainable consumption patterns (United Nations, 2015).

The **D1.1.2 FOOD WASTE AUDIT** shows that food waste in retail is primarily driven by product expiry and quality-related rejection, particularly due to strict aesthetic standards or minor packaging imperfections.

These systemic drivers are reinforced by operational challenges such as handling errors, cold-chain inconsistencies, excess inventory, and logistical shortcomings. Behavioural and informational factors, including unclear date labelling and inconsistent application of handling protocols, further contribute to avoidable losses.

Although many retailers have improved storage operations and staff training, digital tracking remains insufficiently adopted, awareness of regulatory requirements is low, and reporting is inconsistent. Stronger governance mechanisms, clearer requirements arising from the revised **Waste Framework Directive** (Directive 2008/98/EC, amended 2018; Directive (EU) 2025/1892) and targeted economic incentives could substantially accelerate progress toward waste prevention.



These findings underscore the necessity of transitioning from a linear model of production and consumption to a circular and value-oriented framework, where food is regarded as a resource that flows through an integrated, regenerative, and interdependent food system.

Through improved coordination, prevention, reuse, redistribution, and valorisation, retailers can play a pivotal role in strengthening circularity across the food system.

Key Cause of Food Waste	Recommended Action	Expected Outcome
Product expiry before sale	Strengthen FIFO/FEFO rotation; adopt dynamic pricing; shorter, more frequent replenishment cycles	Reduced expiry-related waste and improved stock turnover
Quality and aesthetic rejection	Introduce “imperfect product” shelves; relax cosmetic standards; expand donation partnerships	Higher utilisation of edible produce and reduced rejection
Excess inventory	Improve demand forecasting; automate replenishment; prioritise short supply chains	Lower surpluses and improved demand alignment
Handling, storage, and cold-chain issues	Continuous staff training; handling SOPs; digital temperature monitoring	Reduced spoilage and enhanced food safety
Transport and packaging deficiencies	Optimised logistics; improved packaging; fewer handling steps	Reduced transport losses and lower material waste
Limited monitoring and reporting	Integrated digital waste tracking; combined sales–waste analytics	Stronger evidence base and regulatory preparedness
Misinterpretation of date labels	Clearer in-store communication and signage	Reduced avoidable disposal by staff and consumers



Reducing waste in retail begins with strengthening inventory and stock management systems. Since expiry is a major source of waste, retailers should adopt dynamic pricing for near-expiry products, refine forecasting models, and shorten replenishment cycles. Predictive ordering based on sales patterns, seasonality, and real-time inventory levels improves turnover efficiency and reduces surpluses.

Addressing strict aesthetic and packaging standards is essential for reducing avoidable waste. Introducing “imperfect but edible” product sections, using flexible cosmetic criteria where food safety allows, and reinforcing partnerships for redistribution is consistent with the operational guidance provided in the **EU Guidelines on Food Donation** (European Commission, 2017).



Improving operational practices is a central component of waste-reduction strategies. Handling errors, temperature fluctuations, and inconsistent storage practices can be mitigated through continuous staff training, clearly defined standard operating procedures, and digital cold-chain monitoring systems. Automated alerts and routine equipment inspections support safer handling and reduced spoilage.

Advancing digitalisation is critical for enabling evidence-based waste reduction. Integrated digital waste tracking systems, linked to inventory, procurement, and sales data, enable precise identification of waste hotspots, support targeted interventions, and facilitate compliance with the harmonised measurement requirements of **Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597** and the strengthened reporting obligations introduced under Directive (EU) 2025/1892.

Strengthening collaboration along the supply chain enhances freshness and reduces upstream waste. Retailers should work closely with suppliers and farmers to reduce lead times, promote seasonal and local sourcing, and prevent overproduction. Effective redistribution partnerships with charitable organisations and social supermarkets further reinforce environmental and social outcomes.

Enhancing consumer engagement contributes to reducing downstream waste. Clearer labelling, improved communication on storage and leftover use, and the promotion of responsible purchasing behaviour support sustainable consumption and reduce unnecessary disposal at household level.

Reducing food waste generates significant economic and environmental benefits. Lower disposal costs, stronger relationships with suppliers, enhanced customer satisfaction, and an improved corporate reputation strengthen retailers' competitiveness. Differentiating strategies by product type, focusing on high-volume categories in large enterprises and high-impact categories such as meat and fish in smaller ones, ensures efficient resource use and maximises environmental gains.





Reducing food waste in the retail sector requires a coordinated and systemic approach that integrates operational improvements, digital tools, behavioural interventions, and strengthened partnerships across the supply chain.

Retailers, as highly visible market actors, play a critical role in shaping both upstream production choices and downstream consumption patterns. By prioritising prevention, enhancing redistribution mechanisms, and increasing transparency through consistent monitoring and reporting, the sector can significantly reduce its environmental footprint while improving economic performance and supporting social well-being.

Sustained commitment, supported by clear regulatory frameworks and targeted incentives, is therefore essential for accelerating progress towards a more circular, resource-efficient, and regenerative food system.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

- Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on Waste (Waste Framework Directive), amended 2018. Directive- 2008/98- EN- Waste framework directive- EUR-Lex
- Directive (EU) 2025/1892 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 September 2025 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2025/1892/oj>
- Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597 supplementing Directive 2008/98/EC as regards a common methodology and minimum quality requirements for the uniform measurement of levels of food waste. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_del/2019/1597/oj
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