

A common effort against food waste

Article by Denmark's Ambassador to Latvia, Flemming Stender, for Latvijas Avize, 27 March 2020

In the past few weeks, I have been working from home due to the corona crisis. During this period, I have become much more attentive not to let any food in my fridge be wasted, or go bad, in order to limit as much as possible the need to go to the supermarket for grocery shopping.

Food waste is one of our biggest global challenges with a host of social, economic and environmental effects. Food waste is responsible for 8 percent of the world's CO2 emissions, and lowering the amount of food waste comes in third place over the world's top ten climate solutions. The fight against food waste has never been more important, and much needs to be done if we are to reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to half global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by 2030.

Around one third of the world's food is lost or wasted every year. The total amount of food lost or wasted globally corresponds to 1.6 billion tons of food worth approx \$1.2 trillion USD. It is estimated that in Europe, up to 300 kilo of food, per person is wasted each year. Food waste could potentially feed millions of people. Reducing food waste is necessary for sustainable development, but it is also a good business opportunity.

Food waste is not only about good food ending up in the bin, but also about waste along the supply chain while growing, producing, transporting, handling and packaging as well as the serving in the restaurants. Although we may not be able to eat all the food that would otherwise have been thrown out, some studies indicate that about half of the food that otherwise is thrown out could be eaten instead.

Food waste also happens due to confusion about the date stamping on products. With the consequence that eatable food is thrown away both in private households and in restaurants. Some of Denmark's largest companies in the food industry are now changing the date stamps using the wording "often good after" to signal that the products do not need to be scrapped.

Denmark is among the frontrunners and pioneers in the fight against food waste with more initiatives against food waste and promoting a more sustainable food culture than any other country in Europe. From awareness campaigns to stop food waste movements as well as innovative, creative and market-driven food waste reducing solutions and practices developed by the private sector.

Some solutions are food waste kitchens where volunteers prepare free meals from shop-donated food that has reached its sell-by date. Others are food waste supermarkets where pallets of supermarket products with packaging errors are sold alongside surplus food from commercial supermarkets at a cheap price. A Danish start-up company has developed an app where you, for a very modest price, can pick up surplus food that shops and restaurants otherwise have to throw out at closing time. It has become the world's largest on-line market place for surplus food.

The Danish government has made the fight against food waste a top priority. In 2019, the government established a think tank "One/Third" with the purpose of making Denmark a pioneer country within food loss, waste prevention and reduction. By bringing together stakeholders

representing the entire food value chain from 'farm to fork', public authorities, NGO's and the research communities, the think tank will drive the next steps in the fight against food loss and waste.

In recent years, Denmark has also become a hub for the New Nordic kitchen. Based on sustainable, organic, and locally and seasonally produced foods, Denmark has become known across the world as a place where high gastronomic quality and climate considerations go hand in hand.

High gastronomy, sustainable dining and prevention of food waste was in focus when the Danish Cultural Institute in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the Danish Embassy and the Latvian Restaurant Association in February organized the project GREAT TASTE – ZERO WASTE. The project aims to increase awareness about food waste in the restaurant business and to develop a platform for sustainable gastronomic exchange and cooperation between Denmark, Latvia and the other Baltic states.

Food waste is a problem every one of us can contribute to solving. Often we have a tendency to buy more than we need. This is not least true these days. We all have a responsibility to help reducing food waste by thinking about how much we buy. We need to tackle food waste in common and across countries working towards the same agenda.