



Advisory Group on a 'Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy'

Meeting Wednesday 22 April 2020

Discussion Note - Food Waste Prevention and Management Policy

Ireland generates approximately 1 million tonnes of food waste per year (not including wasted food from agriculture); which represents a carbon footprint as high as 3.6 Mt CO₂eq. Around 40% of this comes from food processing operations, while 60% of it comes from the household and commercial sector.

Wasted Food is an issue because:

- The high level of embedded resources such as land, water, fertilizers, fuels used in growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting and storing food are wasted.
- There is an ethical problem when food is wasted where food poverty persists for some citizens.
- Wasted food and its packaging require appropriate segregation, collection and processing which all consume resources. Disposal at landfill releases methane, a GHG many times more potent than carbon, into the atmosphere.
- Regulatory oversight of food production and the disposal of wasted food (education and awareness, regulation of waste management, etc.) impose costs on the public purse.

Policy Context

The urgency and challenge of addressing food waste is highlighted at international level through Goal 12.3 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

“By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains”.

The 2015 European Commission’s Circular Economy package shares this aim requiring an EU-wide food waste reduction of 30% by 2025 and 50% by 2030, identifying food waste as one of five priority sectors. The revised Waste Framework Directive (2018/851/EC) now explicitly requires that “Member States shall adopt specific food waste prevention programmes within their waste prevention programmes”. More recently, the second Circular Economy Action Plan proposes the European Commission will propose a food waste reduction target via its forthcoming ‘Farm to Fork’ strategy.

At a national level, food waste is identified as a priority waste stream within the National Waste Prevention Programme managed by the EPA and in recent years increased resources have been assigned to the area in recognition of its strategic importance.

Ireland’s outgoing waste management policy ‘A Resource Opportunity’ (2012) considers food waste from the perspective of disposal only. The 2019 Climate Action Plan has endorsed both UN and EU ambitions around reducing waste by 50% however does not propose actions specific to Ireland.

Ireland’s new waste policy needs to focus on prevention first with supporting policy measures to address the management of reduced levels of food waste after prevention measures have taken effect.

Focus for Action on Prevention:

- Designing policy and practices that support the Food Waste hierarchy.
- Awareness raising and behavioural change initiatives towards individuals, householders and businesses.
- Data - measuring and reporting nationally and at EU level.
- Working with other strategic stakeholders in Agriculture and Food, Retail, Donation, Education, Regional Waste Management Offices and Local Authorities.

- Working with EU collaborative platforms on food waste such as the EU Food Loss and Waste Platform¹ and REFRESH².
- Research into the nature and extent of Ireland's food waste problem and appropriate solutions.



Focus for Action on Managing the Food Waste Stream: Food Waste Regulations

Under the European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015, household waste collectors are required to provide, or arrange for the provision of, a separate collection service for household food waste in designated 'brown bin' areas. The roll-out of the brown bin was phased in between July 2013 and July 2016 for population 'agglomerations' over 500 people.

Recently, there has been a marked increase in the provision of brown bins following enforcement actions coordinated by the WERLAs. Between 2017 and 2018, more than 53,000 additional brown bins were rolled out.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/food_waste/eu_actions/eu-platform_en

² EU Horizon 2020 project to reduce food and drink in the supply chain (<https://eu-refresh.org/>)

In the context the new waste policy, the Government intends to use the waste permitting system to make a brown bin collection service available to all parts of the country where it is technically and environmentally viable.

Food Waste Recycling Working Group

A Household Food Waste Recycling Working Group has been established by DCCAIE. This includes representatives from Cré, the IWMA (Barna Recycling & Clean Ireland Recycling), the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices and the Department.

Through the development and promotion of standardised education and awareness tools, the Working Group aims to:

- Increase brown bin uptake
- Reduce contamination
- Create a social norm around brown bin usage

In 2019, the tools developed were piloted across four towns (Borrisoleigh, Ballaghderreen, Buncrana and Trim). The collective findings of these campaigns are currently being collated for analysis and will inform policy development.

Commercial Waste – incentivised pricing

The EPA's 2018 Waste Characterisation Studies highlighted the level of contamination in our bins and showed particularly stark results in terms of the commercial sector where 70% of the material in the general waste bin could be diverted to the mixed dry recycling or organic bins. As set out in the **Public Consultation Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy**, the introduction of incentivised pricing for commercial waste has significant potential to drive better performance towards our EU targets but it also has the potential to secure much more of the resource value of food waste.

Some Questions to Consider:

1. The UN and EU have adopted the target of reducing food waste by half before 2030. What baseline year should be used for the purposes of reaching this target?
 2. Should food producers and retailers contribute towards the costs of food waste prevention and disposal?
 3. In addition to a further focus on incentivised pricing structures (including for commercial sector) what support measures are required for Ireland to adopt and give effect to the Food Waste Hierarchy?
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