



RESEARCH ON WASTE POLICIES AND SYSTEMS REPORT

Desk research for Italy



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INTRODUCTION

Food waste per capita in Italy amounts to 27.5 kilos per person per year. A challenge that closely calls into question consumer behaviour as more than half of the total waste is recorded at the domestic level.

To understand this problem well, it is important to distinguish between two similar concepts which, even if they both refer to "unconsumed food", appear in different phases of the food value chain:

- "food loss"
- "food "waste".

Food loss, according to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), is "the decrease in the quantity or quality of food resulting from decisions and actions by food suppliers in the chain, excluding retailers, food service providers and consumers".

Food waste, on the other hand, is "the decrease in the quantity or quality of food resulting from decisions and actions by retailers, food service providers and consumers".

Losses and waste can, therefore, occur in the different phases of the agri-food supply chain and can derive from excessive production, from the presence of excessive stocks in large and small distribution, from the diffusion of practices relating to excessively rigid aesthetic standards ("if fruit is not beautiful does not reach the shelves") and by poor domestic management of spending and final consumption planning.

Again, according to the FAO, in 2016, 13.8% of the total food produced on our planet was lost, excluding the retail and consumption phase (food loss).

Food waste, on the other hand, concerns the last links of the supply chain, namely retail sales, domestic use and catering: according to the 'Food Waste Index Report' report by the UN Environment Program (UNEP), 17% is wasted of all the food produced each year, equal to 931 million tons. Of these, almost 570 million tonnes (61%) are the responsibility of families, "without major differences, as previously believed, between low-middle income countries and high-income countries"

STATISTICS IN ITALY

In Italy some data on the phenomenon can be found in the following two 2022 reports:

1) Report drawn up by the Waste Watcher International Observatory on the impulse of the Zero waste campaign of Last minute market and the University of Bologna estimated that in 2021 domestic food waste in our country was 31 kilograms per person, for a total of 1.8 million tonnes – which becomes 5 million if we also consider the other phases of the supply chain: production, transformation, distribution, sale.

2) Report drawn up by the Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission which, considering the period 2000-2017, claims that in 2017 domestic food waste would have been 9.8 million tonnes, and that of the entire supply chain 14, 3 million tons.

Both reports, although not using the rigorous methodology indicated by the EU, are nevertheless useful for understanding how citizens' self-perception and awareness regarding waste evolves.

In recent years, other studies based on European methodology have been conducted in Italy: one of these is the one drawn up in the REDUCE project, coordinated by the University of Bologna, which analysed both the distribution and consumption phases and according where in 2017 domestic waste was 27.5 kilos per year per person, around 500 grams per person per week, for a total of 1.6 million tonnes. This report presents numbers compatible with those of Waste Watcher and in line with those deriving from similar reports in other EU countries

Another important report is the one called Food Sustainability Index 2021 and is the result of the collaboration born in 2016 between the Barilla Foundation and the Economist Impact: this report puts Italy on the world podium in the fight against food waste.

The food system is analysed, in the aforementioned report, according to 38 indicators, in three main areas: nutritional challenges, sustainable agriculture and the fight against food waste (an area in which Italy has particularly distinguished itself, ranking first in the world in 2021 for the actions undertaken to fight food waste).

Again according to this report, the Italian production chain loses only 2% of food (also thanks to greater attention to the circular economy of the agri-food sector), while food waste records the lowest figure recorded among the 78 countries analysed:

- at a domestic level, it is approximately 67 kg per capita per year;
- in catering it amounts to approximately 26 kg per capita per year;
- in distribution is approximately 4 kg per capita per year.

However, if Italy is a global example in the fight against food waste and for nutritional issues Italy obtains a good position in the promotion of a healthy and sustainable diet, the same is not the case for the other area analysed and in particular for water consumption.

In fact, in Italy the "pressure on surface and groundwater resources for food production" is quite high and greater and more profitable policies are needed to promote sustainable irrigation to achieve the desired results.

NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON FOOD WASTE PREVENTION

A basic concept of the national strategy launched by the Ministry of the Environment is to prevent food waste and not just recover it.

Food waste prevention refers to "all measures taken before a substance, material or product has become waste".

The Italian National Waste Prevention Plan, adopted by the Ministry of the Environment with a directorial decree of 7 October 2013, addressed the problem of food waste in Italy in an organic way for the first time, in line with what was indicated by the European Commission.

In this context, the PINPAS - National Food Waste Prevention Plan was established, which in 2014 also led to the birth of the Food Waste Prevention Day in Italy.

In line with the aforementioned national dictates, an interesting strategy implemented by the Waste Watcher International Observatory on food and sustainability and born from the joint work of the Department of Agri-food Sciences and Technologies of the University of Bologna and Last Minute Market (a which is also an academic spin off of the Alma Mater) is the Waste Meter App, which is used to measure and prevent food waste, alone or in a group (family, friends, work group, etc.).

The app also assigns scores for each decrease in individual waste over time and for each content viewed: videos, card reading, correct quiz answers, allowing you to compare yourself with other users.

Among the main anti-waste strategies it is suggested to:

- check the pantry before doing the shopping;
- freeze food at risk of perishability;
- check the optimal quantity of food before cooking it;
- check the edibility of the food even after the expiry date;
- use culinary recipes with food recovered from the leftovers of the previous meal;
- ask the restaurateur for the availability of a doggy or family-bag, for transporting uneaten food home;
- donate excess food at risk of waste to those in need.

LEGISLATION ACTIVELY ADDRESSING FOOD WASTE REDUCTION & FOOD (RE-) DISTRIBUTION

Italy is committed to implementing the strategic objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda signed in September 2015 for sustainable development in the context of economic, social and environmental planning.

The strategy was approved by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in 2017 and from March 2018 coordination passed to the National Commission for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Prime Minister or his delegate.

Furthermore, Italy, although already adhering to the 2030 Agenda, was the first European country to also equip itself with a regulatory instrument to combat food waste with law no. 166/2016 (so-called "Gadda law").

This law establishes various measures and actions aimed at encouraging the redistribution of surplus food and medicines for social solidarity purposes, through bureaucratic simplifications, tax relief and bonuses for donors (public bodies, businesses and citizens).

The law also provided for the establishment of the Coordination Table (in line with the policies contained in the European agenda of Sustainable Food Production and Consumption) which has the task of formulating proposals for the development of information and awareness initiatives regarding donation and recovery of food surpluses, promote knowledge of the tools, including fiscal ones, regarding charitable donations, encourage the definition of provisions relating to specific incentives for the subjects involved in the donation, recovery and distribution of foodstuffs and in the donation of money, goods and services, but above all carry out monitoring activities of food surpluses and waste. For this reason, the Roundtable foresees the participation of various interested stakeholders (companies, consumers, policy makers, researchers, scientists, retailers, media and development cooperation agencies).

The Gadda law introduces a notable simplification of donation procedures. The previous regulation provided for prior communication to the financial administration for each donation exceeding 5,164.57 euros and the drafting of transport documents with a detailed description of the products that were donated. The new law eliminates preventive communications, replacing them with a monthly cumulative communication, exempts from the obligation of communication for donations with a value of less than 15,000 euros or concerning easily perishable goods, and simplifies transport documents (for example, being able to simply report the weight total assets donated).

FOOD WASTE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN ITALY

In Italy there is no real legislation for education against food waste but many initiatives carried out by organizations or public bodies or often both.

In fact, currently, the Italian system does not provide for the compulsory teaching of nutritional education in schools of all levels. Some initiatives, including legislative ones, nevertheless underline the importance of a correct and healthy diet for students and on several occasions the Ministry of Education has also promoted some educational activities in this sense in primary and secondary schools (for example on the occasion of the day of 16 October 2022 dedicated to the theme of World Food Day 2022).

For this reason, a bill has also been presented a few months ago that seeks to bridge this gap.

We can also mention the recent initiatives promoted by the education ministry:

1) the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and Merit and the Coldiretti National Confederation, signed on 29 April 2023. This Memorandum intends to develop projects concerning food education, in order to promote adequate awareness of the importance of nutrition education in schools and to raise awareness of the value of correct nutrition and a healthy and balanced lifestyle for physical and psychological health;

2) the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and the Barilla Foundation (BCNF), published on 25 January 2022, concerning the "Collaboration Agreement for multidisciplinary training for correct nutrition through the use of teaching digital" which is aimed at establishing and regulating a collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the BCFN Foundation to promote and enhance education aimed at the green and digital transition, which the two Parties will deem useful to activate.

CONCLUSIONS

In Italy in recent years there has been an intense debate on food waste and many awareness campaigns have been started which have led to discussion of the issue also at a legislative level.

Although Italians appear to be quite respectful of the problem and are showing ever greater attention to tax, there is still a lot to do so that this phenomenon is significantly reduced and the objectives set by the EU are achieved.

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