RETASTE Conference Abstracts
RETASTE-PLW-1363-In-person Oral
Rethymno, September 16-18, 2026
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DOI:10.5281/zenodo.23678352

From Guidelines to Grassroots: Integrating Systemic and Community Approaches for Food Waste Prevention in Latvia

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Abstract

Food waste prevention requires coordinated action across institutions, businesses and local communities. This paper presents Latvia's emerging multi-level approach to food waste reduction developed by Ministry of Climate and Energy within the *LIFE Waste to Resources IP project*, combining systemic interventions in food service sectors with community-based initiatives aimed at changing consumption practices. A major challenge identified during the project was limited engagement of the HoReCa sector in food waste measurement activities. While separate food waste collection introduced in Latvia in 2024 created new opportunities for monitoring, participation from catering businesses remained difficult to achieve. To address this gap, the project developed *Guidelines for Food Waste Reduction in the HoReCa and School Catering Sectors*. The guidelines provide practical recommendations on food waste measurement, menu planning, procurement, storage management, portion optimisation, plate waste monitoring and staff engagement. In addition to targeting existing businesses, the project seeks to reach future professionals through cooperation with vocational education institutions training chefs and catering specialists, helping embed food waste prevention principles into professional practice from the outset.
In the school catering sector, food waste prevention is increasingly recognised as a systemic issue requiring coordinated action beyond kitchen operations. Through the School Catering Council established under the Ministry of Agriculture, discussions are underway on reviewing the entire school meal system, from public procurement requirements and menu planning to food service delivery and waste reduction measures. The guidelines developed within the project provide a practical framework supporting this broader policy process and contribute to the dissemination of good practices across municipalities and educational institutions. Complementing these institutional measures, the project supports innovative community-based action through the campaigns #CēsisNeizmet ("Cēsis doesn't throw away") and #CēsisDalās ("Cēsis shares") implemented by Cēsis Municipality. As one of the first initiatives of its kind in Latvia, the campaign mobilises residents, businesses, schools, social services and civil society organisations around a shared goal of preventing food waste and redistributing surplus food. The initiative demonstrates how local communities can build collective responsibility, strengthen social solidarity and actively contribute to the ambition of making Cēsis the first zero-waste municipality in Latvia. Preliminary results indicate growing stakeholder engagement, improved awareness of food value and stronger cooperation between public institutions, educational institutions, businesses and local communities. The Latvian experience demonstrates that effective food waste prevention requires both systemic change and community ownership. By combining institutional guidance, policy development and grassroots action, the presented approach offers a transferable model for accelerating food

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waste reduction across European food systems.

Keywords: Food waste prevention, School catering, HoReCa sector, Community engagement, Circular economy

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