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Counting the Peel: The EU FW Prevention Target Asks More Than It States - Is It Reachable?

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Abstract

Directive (EU) 2025/1892 establishes the European Union's first binding food waste targets: a 10% reduction in processing and manufacturing, and a 30% per capita reduction across retail, food services and households jointly, by 2030 against the 2021-2023 average. This presentation argues that the target is more demanding than its headline implies, and asks whether national evidence suggests it is nevertheless attainable.
Two design features raise its effective ambition. First, the measurement scope of Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597 includes inedible parts, which prevention reaches only indirectly. Where inedible parts constitute 27% of household food waste, as WRAP measures for the United Kingdom, a 30% reduction in the total demands 41% from the edible fraction; where they approach half, it demands over 55%. Second, aggregating three sectors of unequal weight and measurement maturity allows households, at 53% of EU food waste, to determine an outcome in which food service performance is neither visible nor attributable.
The starting position is unfavourable: Eurostat reports 58.2 Mt for 2023, 130 kg per capita and 0.7% above 2022, with the three target sectors at roughly 93 kg, which must fall to about 65 kg.
The presentation examines the strongest national trajectories. The Netherlands cut (edible) household food waste from 48.0 to 34.3 kg per capita between 2010 and 2019, approximately 29% on a scope including inedible parts, then stalled at 33.4 kg in 2022. The United Kingdom achieved, for total food waste - as in the EU definition, 22% per capita between 2007 and 2021/22, with a 6.5% increase in the latest interval. Japan reduced edible household food waste from 4.33 to 2.33 Mt between FY2000 and FY2023, a 46% reduction, yet still misses its own halving target and counts only edible parts; restated on an EU-comparable scope this equals roughly a quarter to a third, approximately the EU target, achieved over twenty-three years rather than seven.
The conclusion is double-edged. No jurisdiction has achieved what the Directive requires, at the scope it requires, over a comparable period, and reversals in two leading cases caution against extrapolation; yet the magnitude lies within the demonstrated range of national action. The presentation closes by identifying the interventions common to periods of genuine decline, and by asking what must change in policy design and scope definition for the target to move from unprecedented to attainable.

Keywords: food waste prevention, EU Waste Framework Directive, inedible fraction, food waste reduction targets

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