

What can politics do about fruit and vegetable losses from the field to the retailers' warehouse? Supply chain actors' perspectives on food loss policy options.

Ronja Herzberg and Felicitas Schneider

Thuenen Institute of Market Analysis, Braunschweig, 38116, Germany

Abstract

The occurrence of food loss and waste burdens our food system with an unnecessary consumption of natural resources such as soil, land and water as well as with the preventable emergence of further climate-relevant emissions. These negative externalities provide a clear rationale for public sector intervention. The German National Strategy for Food Waste Reduction relies heavily on cooperative and information-based policy approaches. Theories in the context of environmental and economic policy however, offer a broader portfolio, including economic and regulatory instruments as well as instrument-mixes. Opportunities with respect to political intervention might therefore not yet be fully exhausted to tackle food loss and waste in Germany. However, which further policy instruments may assist in effectively addressing the manifold drivers of food loss and waste at the producer-retailer interface? We approach this question at the example of fresh fruit and vegetables: a highly perishable and therefore loss-prone category of food products. The content analysis of 22 semi-structured expert interviews with growers, representatives of producer organisations and food retailers across Germany reveal the perspective of relevant supply chain actors themselves. Additionally, results of a questionnaire among fruit and vegetable producers add quantitative insights into present and potential policy options for action. In the eyes of the stakeholders, not only direct policy intervention measures but also the political support of already existing private sector activities are urgently needed to succeed in reducing food losses and waste in the upstream supply chain. Direct policy instruments from three overarching thematic categories were brought in: (I) communicative and cooperative approaches; (II) subsidisation and food prices and (III) regulation and adjustment of legal framework conditions. With regards to the political support of private sector activities, three further fields of action can be identified: (I) mechanisation, innovation and process optimisation, (II) communicative and cooperative approaches, and (III) (re)processing, alternative marketing and donation. The study reveals that additional leverage points for political action and support might still be unrecognised, not only in Germany but also in other countries. This political action must be embedded in a more holistic way in the sustainability transformation of the food system.

Keywords: policy instruments, public sector intervention, food loss reduction, primary production