



10 Minutes for the Planet **A Shameful Waste part 2**

France: the food-loving nation's stance ©

by Sarah Heath

Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

In Part 1 of A Shameful Waste, a more general overview of the shocking statistics relating to global food waste was addressed. Part 2 focuses on Europe and more particularly France's role at making a change for the positive. The greatest food lovers on the planet are leading the way in preventing such great quantities of food waste!

The European Commission has compiled a report into food waste across its member states which shows that 20% of food is lost or wasted. This equates to 47 million tonnes coming from households but there is wastage right through the food chain as a whole. In addition, 97% of organic waste ends up in landfills, creating emissions of methane as it decomposes.

The reasons behind such wastefulness are varied: amongst the general public, there are misunderstandings over best before and use by dates and insufficient planning when shopping. In the restaurant and catering sector, there are difficulties predetermining customer numbers and miscalculation when ordering standardised portion sizes. At production level, stock management issues particularly with perishable goods can be problematic, as can be damage to produce and packaging during transportation. But possibly the over-riding worry is the ignorance that each sector has of the scale of the waste they produce and how that relates to the problem globally.

At government level, France has been leading the way in changing the law on how supermarkets dispose of their food waste. In 2016, they became the first country in the world to pass legislation which prohibits supermarkets over a specified size throwing away unused products. The law dictates that they must sign donation contracts with charitable organisations such as food banks or face a fine of up to €75,000 or two years in prison. The destruction of food products disposed of in their own bins by, for example, pouring bleach over it to prevent people foraging, has also been banned.

Until this law was passed, around 35,000 metric tons of unused food products were donated to food banks and the hope of the organisation Banques Alimentaires is that an additional 15% donated by supermarket chains could mean an extra 10 million meals for France's most underprivileged citizens. But the French Ministry of Ecology, Energy and Sustainable Development also requires that organic waste is recycled if levels reach over

120 tons although, eager to include catering and hospitality industries, these levels have been slightly lowered more recently.

In 2017, a joint survey driven by the Economist and the Barilla Centre for Food and Nutrition Foundation announced that as a result of France's dedication to tackling the problem, they came out top that year in the Food Sustainability Index which analyses sustainability in 25 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas. France's levels of food waste have dropped to under 2% and French consumers now waste half that of Americans.

But consumers must nevertheless also take their share of the responsibility: Parisian residents are being encouraged to recycle their food waste in an initiative by disposal services. Waste sorting kits are to be distributed to 120,000 households including a seven-litre box into which food waste must be thrown and recycled in this new biowaste scheme. Once collected the biowaste will be converted into fertilisers or biofuels. By 2020, the entire capital should be operating and recycling under this initiative.

And those ugly vegetables? As far back as 2014, the French supermarket chain, Intermarché, launched a campaign to celebrate ugly fruit and veg. The campaign sold 1.2 tonnes of less aesthetically pleasing fruit and veg in 2 days! Who said ugly doesn't taste good?