

# Ring in the New Year with less food waste

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While fighting food waste is a year-round mission, it's more important than ever around the holidays. This is something to consider during this year's festivities, typically known for an abundance of food.

Across Europe, holidays have become synonymous with overeating and

[food waste](#). While celebrations are marked with a glut of festive fare, latest reports from the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme warn that [45 million people](#) across 43 countries are on the brink of famine.

The good news is there is plenty that can be done to save food, according to Toine Timmermans, Programme Manager of Sustainable Food Chains at Wageningen University & Research. 'Solutions for reducing food waste are within everyone's reach,' he said. 'Wageningen University and its research has committed to reducing food waste by 50% in 2030.'

It won't be easy. Even among the waste-conscious Dutch, more than 2 million tonnes of edible food is binned each year. This is based on data compiled by the research headed by Timmermans. The data also shows households are responsible for more than half of this wastefulness, particularly during the holidays.

This is why the Dutch national campaign "Together Against Food Waste" is the busiest over the holidays calling on consumers to keep food waste in mind during their celebrations.

Launched in 2018, the campaign was driven by the headline figure that 6% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions come from food waste.

## **Why reducing food waste is the perfect New Year's resolution**

Promises to exercise and eat healthier are among the most popular New Year's resolutions. But what if this year's resolution extended to reducing the amount of food that gets binned?

That's a commitment in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal

the European Union (EU) has committed to achieving.

'The end of the year is approaching. It's a time to contemplate your resolutions for the coming year,' said Timmermans. 'These do not interfere with the holiday spirit, in fact they stand to make it more enjoyable. The [festive season](#) can help the environment and ward off overspending through wastage—more money for presents.'

The tips are simple and easy to follow. 'Start by making a plan, write a shopping list and stick to it.' Then, 'cook to size of your party so weigh portions before cooking.' When the meal is finished store leftovers.'

Timmermans is also quick to stress the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' expiration dates. 'Use by' is an instruction and is not to be ignored. For food safety reasons, food must be used by this date or thrown away. For this reason, consumers must be regularly aware of these dates and check to avoid food waste.

Most products with a 'best before' date can often still be safely consumed days after the date, one example is pasta. 'Use your senses,' advised Timmermans. 'By looking, smelling and tasting, the quality of the product can be assessed.'

Timmermans has more than 15 years of experience in cutting food waste. As coordinator of the [REFRESH](#) project, he and his team formed coalitions aimed at creating positive social change. While this initiative concluded in 2019, the experts involved in the project went on to form part of the [EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste](#).

'Although REFRESH finished in 2019, its legacy lives on,' said Timmermans referring to the Dutch food waste-free week, the foundation of a national event aiming to halve food waste and the charity [Food Waste Free United](#).

The results speak for themselves. Researchers in 2019 found that each Dutch citizen wasted 7 kg less food, discarding just 34.3 kg, compared to 2016 and 29% less compared to 2010.

'Without a doubt, consumer behaviour and consequently the social norms regarding food waste are changing for the better,' noted Toine Timmermans, but there is still a lot of work to do.'

## **Farming around festivities**

Back on the farm, the latest data shows a whopping 700 million tonnes of crops are wasted every year in Europe alone. This includes the increased harvest of all the fruit and vegetables we associate with the season—oranges, satsumas, Brussels sprouts, carrots, sage, onion not forgetting the humble carrot.

Efforts to reverse this wasteful trend are underway across Europe. One initiative, backed by researchers and industry stakeholders in 11 European countries, is repurposing residues and by-products from the farming and food processing industry for use in products for food, packaging and farming sectors.

In Spain, Alexandra Poch and Cristina Fernandez are working together at IRIS Technology Solutions to cut waste, mainly in the olive and tomato industries. As joint coordinators of the [AgriMax](#) project, they have overseen the building of two groundbreaking pilot plants in Spain and Italy, to sustainably process the staples of the Mediterranean diet: the olive and the tomato.

From small beginnings deep in the southern European countryside, these facilities are promising to revolutionise the way we use crops and not only eliminate waste, but also put it to good use.

Both factories can use different crops as feedstock, allowing them to run throughout the year and avoiding downtime caused by seasonal fluctuations and variations in yields. Peak olive harvesting time is December, while tomato picking starts in April. Waste crop material will therefore be available even during the winter and festive season.

## **Seasonal hues from tomato skin and seeds**

'Lycopene, the powerful antioxidant found in tomato skins and seeds, may be destined for the bin, but it is actually a high-value waste product, so it's extracted by the processing plants,' said Poch. With its vivid red colour, it's also a natural colourant. Lycopene can be used to create a palette of super-stable colours for a range of foods and beverages—from carbonated drinks, fruity yoghurts and the tantalising sweets on the holiday table.

When olives are processed, they are pressed to produce olive oil. The solid residue, olive oil pomace, sounds nice but, as a thick sludge, is inedible. The good news for waste recycling is that it is chock-full of chemicals known as polyphenols 'With antimicrobial and antioxidant properties, polyphenols from olive waste can be incorporated into active packaging,' outlined Poch.

'We have demonstrated how unavoidable crop and food processing waste can be turned into multiple, high-value bio-based products for the food ingredients, food packaging and farming sectors, even at Christmas,' said Poch.

Timmermans wraps up the subject of food wastage in the home with a festive flavour. 'While enjoying your festive feast, you can support [food waste](#) initiatives. Make your apples into jam and veggie stalks into an attractive salad.'

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