



Takeaways from the

# Nordic Food Waste Summit 2023



Setting the  
stage for greater  
collaboration

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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:  
<https://pub.norden.org/nord2023-018>



**Karen Ellemann**  
Secretary General  
Nordic Council of Ministers

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the  
Nordic Food Waste Summit 2023.

<https://youtu.be/XzJiNGLG1Zl>

# **This is not a normal conference. This is a call for action.**

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Petter Haas Brubakk, Director-General, FoodDrinkNorway (NHO Mat og Drikke)

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**Fighting food waste is not just a climate issue. It is also an economical and ethical issue. Reducing food waste is about global equity.**



**HRH Princess Marie of Denmark**

# 1

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## **Legislation – the delicate balance between policy and innovation**

While there is strong consensus for improved food waste policies in the Nordics, there is also a constant struggle of finding a balance between increasing regulations and potentially halting innovation.

To generalise the sentiments from the panel discussions, Denmark and Sweden seem to be more in favor of keeping the playing field open for new solutions, while there in Norway is a push towards passing a stronger food waste law that makes it far more costly for producers and retailers to waste resources. In Finland, a food waste law is already in place.

While this debate is far from over, the discussions on legislation have proven that there is a strong need for more political engagement and clearer regulatory frameworks in this area.

Some participants are seemingly frustrated over complex and sweeping regulations from the European Union. With stronger Nordic collaboration, there could be room for regional solutions that are more suitable for the Nordic context.

"As politicians, we need to ensure the best possible conditions and regulatory framework for innovation to flourish and solutions to develop. Rules cannot get in the way."

Jacob Jensen, Denmark's Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, made his stance very clear.

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**As politicians, we need to ensure the best possible conditions and regulatory framework for innovation to flourish and solutions to develop. Rules cannot get in the way.**



**Jacob Jensen**, Denmark's Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

# 2

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## Harmonization – what are we measuring?

Between the Nordic countries, there is growing concern around the definitions, metrics and measurements that create the foundation of food waste mitigation. In all likelihood, this dilemma needs to be addressed before a common legislative framework can emerge.

The Nordic Food Waste Summit's workshops and panels have made it clear that there are plenty of foundational frameworks and definitions that would need to be harmonized before moving forward.

Karin Fritz, project manager at the Swedish Food Agency, emphasized this need for clearer definitions.

*"Measuring is a big challenge. It's obvious that as long as we don't know what we mean in the different countries, comparing the data is like comparing apples and pears. And that's not fair."*

There are several areas where Nordic countries differ. Measuring edible and non-edible food waste is one obstacle; liquid food waste is another. Do we mean food *loss* or food *waste* – or *both*? Are corporations and primary producers being monitored by audits or self-evaluation? How is household food waste measured and how far are the different countries' practices from each other?

Those and many other questions point to an important foundation that needs to be in place before collaborative acceleration can take place.

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**Measuring is a big challenge. It's obvious that as long as we don't know what we mean in the different countries, comparing the data is like comparing apples and pears. And that's not fair.**



**Karin Fritz**, project manager at the Swedish Food Agency



# 3

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## Consumer storytelling – making food waste socially unacceptable

There is a growing sentiment that we can change the norms in society. But it might require a push.

Proponents of legislation refer to the smoking ban and the mandatory car belt as two examples where the push from legislators has altered behaviors in ways that previously seemed almost unstoppable.

There is increasing evidence and business cases showing that consumers can change their behavior (the pandemic comes to mind). In some instances, it needs to be preceded by a ban of some sort.

In other cases, transparency and storytelling can go a long way in affecting consumer behavior. If a store is clear about *why* there are no fresh bakery products available at closing hour (let's assume from a zero-waste philosophy), most customers would probably understand and appreciate the transparency.

Selina Juul is the founder of the Stop Wasting Food movement, and a well-known media profile in Denmark. She addressed the fact that reducing food waste is solving four problems at once.

*"Many people want to contribute to the fight against climate change, but what can I do personally? Stop wasting food! You're going to save time, you're going to save money, you're going to save food, and you're going to save the planet. So this is a win-win-win situation. And the fight against food waste doesn't require you to sacrifice anything. That's why it's so cool!"*

Nudging is also a powerful tool that is increasingly being added to the fight against food waste. Smaller portions, smaller plates, à la minute servings, pricing models based on food weight, environment-friendly or reusable take-away containers, and less bulk offers, are all easy yet efficient ways of making sure customers do not create unnecessary waste.

Aligning best practice cases and creating an inclusive pool of good ideas and solutions may be important in nurturing inspiration across borders and value chain actors.

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**Many people want to contribute to the fight against climate change, but what can I do personally? Stop wasting food!**



**Selina Juul**, Founder and Chair of the Board of the Stop Wasting Food movement (Stop Spild Af Mad)

# 4

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## Retailer revolution – letting the best solutions shine

There is a strong sentiment that the cost of food waste needs to increase. For large retailers, this may prove an unpopular approach.

However, there are inspiring business cases from retailers that have gone the extra mile to reduce waste and still improve profits. An illustrative example comes from Denmark, where Rema 1000 in a sweeping decision made bulk offers obsolete – without dropping in revenue. Others will follow their lead.

Another case comes from Stora Coop in Visby, Gotland, where food waste has been drastically reduced from an annual 120 to 7 tons in only five years. The goal is a zero-waste store, and by utilizing 80-90 different methods and techniques, the staff of 95 have been able to work together with a clear vision in mind.

Store manager Markus Wahlgren shared a few of his hacks on stage.

*“We implemented the digital Whywaste solution in the store to track all expiry dates more accurately, and the next year we had halved our food waste. Some waste products are going to a local distillery making a vodka called Spill, which is a fun way to make use of resources.”*

While some of the retail solutions could easily be considered on a chain-wide level, others are not necessarily as replicable and scalable. The sharing of best practices seems like a crucial ignition in providing inspiration and actionable insights to an increasing number of retailers.

Regardless of whether the incentive is to reduce waste costs or to avoid fines, the outcome may well be the same. With food waste climbing higher on the public and political agenda, there is hope that non-financial parameters – like environment and climate considerations – also will play a more significant role in our future food retail environments.

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**We implemented the digital Whywaste solution in the store to track all expiry dates more accurately, and the next year we had halved our food waste. Some waste products are going to a local distillery making a vodka called Spill, which is a fun way to make use of resources.**



**Markus Wahlgren, Store manager**

# 5

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## **Food loss – priming primary production to prioritize**

There are plenty of wasted opportunities in primary production as well. Karin Lindow, policy analyst at the Swedish Board of Agriculture, summarized some findings from recent studies of food loss on farms and packeries.

One third of all carrots are left behind due to wrong size, color, shape and rot. These are used for compost, biogas production and animal feed, but there is still a lost income for the farmers.

Potatoes are wasted less, but at much higher volumes. 1/6 of all potatoes in Sweden are lost due to color, damages and size, which amounts to 75,000 tons every year.

*“While these products are high in volume and low in climate impact, the opposite could be said about meat and dairy products. 8% of the slaughtered weight of beef is lost, and 3% of pigs. There is also untapped potential in sideproducts like blood – 156 million servings of black pudding went to waste last year.”*

Karin Lindow concluded that farmers need to improve and optimize their production process with technology and innovation, but added that profitability is essential for investing more in sustainable practices. It all boils down to education and understanding.

*“All stages in the food system can act on this – retailers, chefs, consumers and authorities. Because this is a work we need to do together”,* said Lindow.

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**Karin Lindow**, policy analyst at the Swedish Board of Agriculture

# 6

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## Donations – where is the food most useful?

Donations is a hot topic in the world of food waste. Should retailers be able to conveniently avoid their waste problem by pushing it further down the value chain – or is it an important opportunity to give back to the local community?

As in many instances, the Nordic countries seem to have different views on food waste donations. In Norway, the VAT has been removed when donating to food banks, which has helped accelerate food being put to better use. In other countries, the receiving organizations actually have to pay for the food. Or should they rather *get paid* for picking it up? Should we increase the number of food banks or find others way to redistribute resources in our societies?

It seems like there needs to be some harmonization effort.

Matt Homewood discovered that supermarkets were wasting tons of edible food in their dumpsters every day, and through dumpster diving he started documenting this on his Instagram account An Urban Harvester. Today, he is also Head of Sustainability and responsible for the Danish market at Throw no more, a Norwegian food waste platform.

He is critical of the retailers' inability to use discounts to actually sell the food before its expiry date, which he believes is a much better solution than throwing it away – or donating to charity.

*“One of the Swedish retailers made 2.4 billion SEK in net profit last year. And they’re outsourcing a lot of their “food waste” to donations – who are unpaid. How is that fair?”*

Anja Bakken Riise from the Norwegian organization Future in Our Hands also raised the topic in a panel discussion.

*“We would like to see a system to finance the distribution of surplus food from the stores. Today in Norway, organisations like Matsentralen actually have to pay to pick up the food and redistribute it. We want to change that.”*

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**One of the Swedish retailers made 2.4 billion SEK in net profit last year. And they're outsourcing a lot of their "food waste" to donations – who are unpaid. How is that fair?**



**Anja Bakken**, Riise from the Norwegian organization Future in Our Hands



# 7

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## Nordic collaboration – stronger together

Last but not least, the overwhelming majority of participants – both online and on site in Stockholm – were evidently enthusiastic about the opportunity to debate, network and share stories with their Nordic peers. Keeping track of other countries and their regulations, cultures and industry-specific challenges is a daunting task in any sector, and food is no exception.

Even if most Nordic countries abide under a vast range of EU regulations, there is also a question of interpreting them. Individual creativity in this field may be beneficial in the short term, but in the long run there needs to be a more accessible and inclusive terminology in the regulatory framework, to encourage cross-border collaboration.

Karen Ellemann, Secretary General at the Nordic Council of Ministers raised the importance of a stronger collaboration and action ahead.

*“We’re making good on our prime ministers’ vision by bringing together stakeholders in the sector to share experiences, best practices, and challenges for joint and increased action continuing from the Nordic Food Waste Summit.”*

Nordic Food Waste Summit has made it abundantly clear that a stronger Nordic collaboration is one of the most important steppingstones towards a more resource-efficient and waste-free regional food system, and many participants went back to their daily struggles hoping for this dynamic gathering to become an annual occurrence.

In conclusion, Petter Haas Brubakk’s end sentence from the summit stage lingers with hope for the future.

*“This is not a normal conference. This is a **call for action.**”*

Author: Christian Von Essen

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**We're making good on our prime ministers' vision by bringing together stakeholders in the sector to share experiences, best practices, and challenges for joint and increased action continuing from the Nordic Food Waste Summit.**



**Karen Ellemann**, Secretary General at the Nordic Council of Ministers

# Rewatch the summit

Nordic  
**Food  
Waste**  
Summit  
2023



**Welcome!**



<https://youtu.be/60mkvRvJWy4>

# About this publication

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### **Nordic co-operation**

*Nordic co-operation* is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

*Nordic co-operation* has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

*Nordic co-operation* promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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