



Inaugural event 1st International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste

FAO HQ, 29 September 2020

Speech of Mr Jacques Vandenschrik President, European Food Banks Federation

Excellencies,
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

today we are honoured to celebrate the first International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste and we thank the FAO team for organizing this remarkable moment on the way towards 2030.

This International Day has been our everyday life for 53 years, from the day John van Hengel founded the first Food Bank in 1967. For all Food Banks in all continents today is a day of celebration and we want to share it with everyone.

Today the major international networks of Food Banks, including the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), Feeding America, and The Global FoodBanking Network, bring together more than 1,500 Food Banks in 70 countries of differing socio-economic and cultural contexts across the globe. They are the frontlines of preventing food waste and reducing food insecurity in our communities, assisting 160,000 charities that help more than 62 millions of people in search of food security.

According to the FAO, there is more than enough food produced today to feed every last one of us. However, almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019 (SOFI, 2020).

This paradox of abundance in scarcity is still without an adequate answer. The present Covid-19 crisis is putting further millions of people at risk of food insecurity. In September 2020 Food Banks belonging to the European Food Banks Federation are experiencing a 30% increase of food demand at European level, with a range going from 6% to 80%.

It is inevitable that the operating model of Food Banks is driven by the intrinsic nature of the community in which they operate, by the development of the food supply chain, by specific legislations and regulations, and by logistic and infrastructural opportunities or deficiencies. However, the mission is common to every single Food Bank in the world: rescuing safe and edible food from the food supply chain to ensure that no good food goes to waste and redistributing it to charities helping people in need.

If one looks at the Food Banks over the last 50 years or so, they have been moved by commitment, dedication, creativity and innovation. Innovations have been a constant feature in the development of their operations and, when they really contributed to the realisation of their objectives, they have been received with enthusiasm.

Whether the recovery of surplus food from cruise ships or the freezing of excess meat and fish from the distribution sector, the use of technology to optimise operations or the preparation of healthy and nutritious ready-made meals, the processing of fruit and vegetables for an extended shelf-life or the recovery of unconsumed meals from schools, hotels, canteens and conferences, and so many other activities too numerous to mention here. Food Banks are constantly looking for new resources and a better cost-efficient model. Their obsession is to increase their food supply. This is their concrete and daily contribution to food waste prevention towards challenging objectives such as the SDG Target 12.3.

We must be conscious that food waste is happening mostly in industrialised countries with well-off communities. Disadvantaged communities and countries with lower income per capita cannot afford the wastage of food. In the developed world it is considered that close to 50% of food waste is arising at household. Awareness and education in this respect must be a constant preoccupation of governing authorities and all stakeholders. Food Banks may play a crucial role through their networks of millions of volunteers to bring home the message of “FOOD, NO WASTE”. The advent of artificial intelligence should promote the development of intelligent labelling that will facilitate food management in households. Development in chemistry and food manufacturing should also allow to extend the shelf life of fresh products which could significantly contribute to the prevention of food waste.

Food Banks will be on the lookout for these developments and will assist wherever possible with their adoption and promotion. Food Banks and their networks of affiliated charities should no longer be considered as a philanthropic effort to address the food insecurity of disadvantaged persons. Food Banks have shown evidence, especially in this pandemic period, to be a reliable partner to help feeding those in need and to foster the resilience of the food supply chain. Today Food Banks are doers because first they were dreamers. They are an integral part of the food system because they promote the transition from a linear to a circular economy: what could be lost or wasted is valued again. Food Banks fulfil their mission mobilising goodwill and good practises so that one day the final utopia will become a reality.

Today we cannot ensure that in the future each person will have an adequate access to food and no resources of the only planet we have got will go to waste. However, today we can immediately commit ourselves to give all our contribution to achieve this goal and the first result will be the achievement of SDG Target 12.3 to halve global food waste by 2030.