



From Farm to Food Bank

Reimbursement of farmer's costs to redistribute surplus food – Proposal for the Common Agricultural Policy

February 2025
European Food Banks Federation

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Introduction

In the EU, over 59 million tonnes of food waste are generated annually ([Eurostat, 2024](#)), with an associated market value estimated at 132 billion EUR ([SWD \(2023\)421](#)). Food waste is a huge environmental problem, accounting for about 16% of the total Greenhouse Gas emissions from the EU food system, while also wasting the water, nutrients and energy involved in production ([WWF UK, 2021](#)). At the same time, over 42 million European citizens cannot afford a quality meal every second day ([Eurostat, 2023](#)).

The agricultural sector is a cornerstone of the European Union, contributing significantly to rural livelihoods, cultural heritage, and food security. Farming activities provide employment for millions of people, and are fundamental to the vitality of rural and island communities across the European Union. Farming faces significant economic challenges, with issues such as price volatility, rising input costs, and increasing competition from global markets, all contributing to a complex environment for European farmers. Additionally, the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are already negatively impacting agricultural production. ([EU CAP Network](#))

In this proposal the European Food Banks Federation – FEBA, representing Food Banks from across 30 European countries, advocates for the integration of farm payments covering or subsidising the cost of surplus food recovery from primary production into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). By securing financial support for farmers, this initiative aims to prevent food waste at its source and keep healthy, good quality food where it is needed in the human supply chain.

Food Banks across Europe tackle this issue daily by recovering and redistributing surplus good food to people in need. According to Eurostat, since 2019 the number of people at risk of poverty has been increasing from 92.4 million to 94.6 million in 2023, slowing down the previous trend to decrease poverty. ([Eurostat, 2024](#)) With a growing number of people in Europe struggling to make ends meet and to afford food, largely due to the poly-crisis effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, the need to take action is clear.

Since 2021, FEBA also noted a steady increase in people requiring food assistance within its network, from serving 11.8 million people in 2021 to more than 12.8 million people in 2023. At the same time, FEBA observed a decrease in the amount of food redistributed, from 907,280 tonnes in 2021 to 839,942 tonnes in 2023. Alternative sources of food for this increasing number of people in need must be identified. Therefore, at the primary production stage, good quality, edible food that is unharvested or graded out due to low economic profitability or failure to meet aesthetic or marketing standards should not be diverted away from the human supply chain.

As far as possible, food fit for human consumption should and must be destined to feed people, instead of being ploughed back into the field, left to rot or given to animal feed, composting and anaerobic digestion (AD).¹ However, we at FEBA believe that food fit for human consumption should be considered food waste and be primarily destined to feed people in accordance with the food waste hierarchy ([JRC, 2024](#)), instead of being ploughed back into the field, left to rot or given to animal feed, composting and anaerobic digestion .

Evidence suggests that an average of 5 million tonnes of food waste was collected at the primary production stage in 2020 in the EU, making up 9% of the total amount of food waste, excluding the food that was not harvested ([Eurostat, 2021](#)). However, limitations have been observed regarding the quantification of food loss and waste in primary production ([WRAP 2019](#); [WWF 2021](#); [2022](#)). Research from WWF UK and Tesco on the scale and impact of food waste in primary production indicates that the true figures of food loss and waste are hidden when it comes to the farm level, however estimations in the UK alone show that 3.3 million tonnes of food are lost and wasted on farms each year ([WWF UK, 2022](#)).

The following case studies and best practices from Food Banks in our membership unveil the potential and opportunities to recover surplus food from primary production for human consumption, creating substantial positive effect on the climate and people in need.

As mentioned in the [Vision for Agriculture and Food](#), food poverty as well as food waste needs to be addressed. The aim of this proposal is therefore in line with the vision, in that its goal is to benefit both farmers and people in need.

Best Practices

Ireland: “The Growers’ Project”

FEBA Member FoodCloud in Ireland, together with The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the private sector, has been running a pilot project for surplus recovery from farms since 2022. The fund supports farmers to recover food that is either unharvested, graded out for not meeting retail specifications or which is in excess of consumer demand but is edible and should go towards human consumption. During the pilot, FoodCloud engaged with 8 farmers and established that there were significant quantities of surplus available. They have piloted different models; redistributing some of the surplus through new partnerships with three local development companies (LDCs) in Donegal, Kerry and Cork and through FoodCloud’s existing charity network ([Agriland](#)). The initial pilot recovered 30 tonnes of food from farmers in Ireland. That was scaled up to over 90 tonnes in 2023 and over 230 tonnes

¹ Although empirically surplus food from primary production, especially before harvest, is considered as food loss instead of food waste (FAO definitions).

in 2024, a total of over 800,000 meals equivalent, saving approximately 805 tonnes of CO2 equivalent emissions from going to waste ([FoodCloud](#)).

In his assessment of the Growers' Project, Jim Power (Agro-Economist) stated that overall, all stakeholders involved in the project see the positive effect on food waste and poverty that results from this activity. However, more funding is necessary for farmers to cover their costs. According to him, the costs the Grower's Project at scale over 5 years is estimated to cost €2.36 million, of which, €1 million is for costs to farmers and €1.36 million to cover FoodCloud's redistribution costs. Due to the largely voluntary nature of Food Banks and charities, they would be unable to build or sustain the capacities needed to recover surplus food from primary production on a regular basis by themselves. He also pointed out the need to incentivise routes to human consumption, as it is currently cheaper to leave the crop in the ground and plough it back into the soil, or to send it for farm feed or AD. In conclusion, he recommends that this nutritious food should reach people in need and the funds should cover the basic costs of harvesting, packaging, transport, and the time commitment involved ([Jim Power Economics](#)).

FoodCloud CEO and Co-Founder Aoibheann O'Brien pointed out, “(...) Our target is to redistribute produce that would not otherwise have been harvested, or which might have been sent for animal feed. During the pilot we discovered that there are large volumes of surplus produce that are currently not reaching the market, and therefore the project presents a huge opportunity to act against climate change by reducing food waste while supporting vulnerable communities with access to nutritious, high quality, Irish vegetables.” Aoibheann continues, “Farmers are crucial partners in this shared effort and our experience so far is that growers are keen to play their part in tackling this important environmental issue. Farm level loss is significant globally and in Ireland, and this project supports the new National Strategy for Horticulture 2023-2027, the National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap, Food Vision 2030, and the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy” ([FoodCloud](#)).

Speaking on the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste in September 2023, then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Charlie McConalogue said, “I am delighted that we can continue to support projects in rural areas in reducing food waste and contribute to our commitment to reduce the amount of food we waste in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Food waste costs the average Irish home approximately €700 per year and it is estimated that between 8% and 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions are because of food waste. So, by tackling food waste we improve the climate while saving money.”

Lithuania

FEBA Member Maisto Bankas in Lithuania has actively recovered surplus from farms since 2019. They have since scaled up these efforts and received some help and funding from the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Ministry of Agriculture of Lithuania has been supporting charities since 2022 to contribute to reducing food losses and helping the people in need. For this purpose, the Ministry planned to allocate €600,000 in 2024 ([Ministry of Agriculture](#)). According to the Food Bank, in 2023, the amount of food recovered from the agricultural sector doubled, which now amounts to 12% ([Maisto Bankas](#)). The aforementioned financial support is provided to charities for the management of food collected from food business operators (primary production and the food industry). The support amounts to 50% per kilogram of food collected and subsequently donated to charity. In 2022, more than €130,000 were allocated. More than 350 tonnes of surplus food have been redistributed, including 150 tonnes of farmers' produce and more than 200 tonnes of food industry products. Support will also be provided in 2025.

Table 1: Years of government funding for surplus recovery from primary production Lithuania.

Year	Funding	Total
2022	€130,000	350 tonnes
2023	€400,000	800 tonnes
2024	€500,000	(Goal) 1000 tonnes

The legal requirements for the funding are structured as follows:

- The amount of the aid may not exceed EUR 0,5 per kilogram of food collected from food business operators and subsequently given to charity and food aid and/or still in storage (...)
- The maximum amount of aid to be paid to the applicant shall be calculated by multiplying the amount of food to be collected in kilograms over the period of time specified in the application by EUR 0,5.
- The final amount of aid to be paid to the beneficiary for food preserved during the entire period of support shall be calculated on the basis of the costs actually incurred by the beneficiary for the preservation of one kilo of food in the context of the activities supported under the Rules, up to the maximum amount of the aid to be paid.
- Value added tax (VAT) shall not be an eligible expenditure under these Rules, unless it is paid by the beneficiary, who is not subject to VAT, on the value of the goods and/or services to be acquired/acquired/imported and undertakes not to seek its recovery from the State budget.

([Lithuanian Legislation](#))

United Kingdom: "Surplus with Purpose"

While the UK is no longer an EU Member State, we believe it relevant to consider wider developments in our European network, especially where there is considerable progress on the redistribution of surplus from primary production.

"Surplus with Purpose" (SWP) is a campaign launched by FEBA Member FareShare UK in 2019 that aims to reduce food waste by redistributing surplus food to charities and community organisations that need it. It is a way of addressing both food insecurity and food waste at the same time. Surplus with Purpose helps FareShare redistribute thousands of tonnes of surplus fresh fruit and vegetables to charities and community organisations. Otherwise, this surplus food will often end up being ploughed back into the ground, used for animal feed, or sent for AD ([FareShare](#)).

Looking at SWP specifically, its activities in the primary production sector are significant. Following the launch of SWP in 2019, Fareshare was able to recover much greater quantities of produce, growing from approximately 2,000 tonnes of produce to more than 10,000 tonnes of produce by 2023 (Figure 1). The fund is open to UK-based growers, farmers and producers and helps to offset the costs involved in diverting edible surplus food to FareShare.

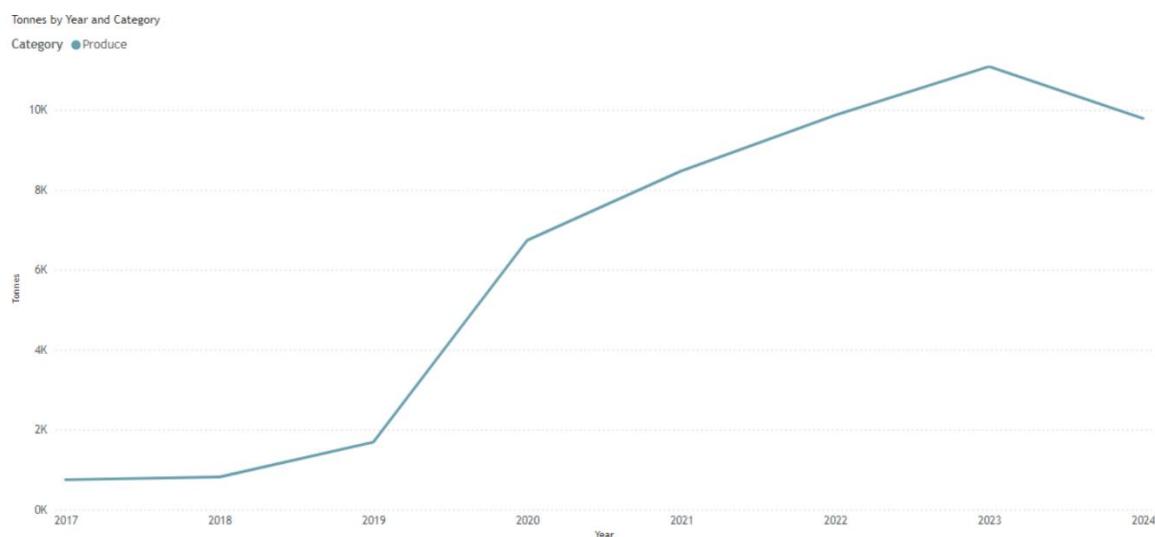


Figure 1: Tonnes of produce (fruits & vegetables) received since 2017 (Source: FareShare UK).

In December 2024, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced £15 million to help charities receive surplus produce from farms to those in need. Around 330,000 tonnes of edible food is wasted or fed to animals in the UK each year before leaving farms ([DEFRA](#)). According to DEFRA, farmers would prefer for the surplus food to be destined for people's plates. Charities that redistribute food often lack the means to collect food from farms and give it to those who need it. To

strengthen the links between farms and charities and help solve the problem of farm food waste, the funding will go towards initiatives such as SWP of FareShare to support the recovery.

Proposal: Recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy Post 2027 - Pillar II

Citizens' opinions on the CAP are in strong favour and highlight key topics of importance such as environmentally-friendly practices and a sustainable future ([Eurobarometer, 2024](#)).

Research for the AGRI Committee from the European Parliament on the objectives and contents for the next CAP (2028-2034) highlighted that addressing climate and environmental societal challenges in Pathways D and E requires a significant increase in the CAP budget, as well as in other areas notably to favour consumer diet changes and waste reduction (food policy), and to enable the poorest households to access healthy foods and diets thanks to social transfers (social policy). ([National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment \(INRAE\)](#) and [The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations \(IDDRI\)](#) for the European Parliament)

The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, under its current programming period, contains various elements for environmental sustainability. The comparison of the Eco-schemes under CAP Pillar I and the Agri-environment-climate commitments under CAP Pillar II provide a good understanding of the different levels of engagement and funding available.

Table 2: Comparison of key aspects of “Eco-Schemes” in CAP Pillar I and “Agri-Environment-Climate Commitments” in CAP Pillar II ([Source: European Commission](#)).

	Eco-schemes	Agri-environment-climate commitments
Source of funding	Pillar I budget – without co-financing by Member States	Pillar II budget – with co-financing by Member States
Possible beneficiaries	Farmers	Farmers, other land managers (e.g. environmental NGOs)
Payments' link to land	Payment per hectare Land concerned must be eligible for direct payments	Payment per hectare Land concerned need not be eligible for direct payments
Obligatory/voluntary?	Member States must make provision for them Participation voluntary for farmers	Member States must make provision for them Participation voluntary for farmers and other potential beneficiaries
Nature of commitments	Annual (i.e. “one year at a time”)	Multi-annual contracts (usually of 5-7 years)

Calculation of premia	Compensation for additional costs/ income losses arising from commitments concerned, OR Additional payment to basic income support (no particular rules over premium level)	Compensation for additional costs / income losses arising from commitments concerned
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FEBA would propose financing surplus recovery under the Agri-environment-climate commitments of Pillar II as co-financing with Member States for surplus recovery from primary production, targeting specifically crops that are not economically profitable to be harvested or do not fit the aesthetic requirements of the market:

- As some Member States already engage in the financing of such activities, as presented in the best practices from Ireland and Lithuania, this could then be matched by the European Union.
- Beneficiaries could therefore be farmers offsetting their costs in harvesting surplus and/or processing surplus produce that does not meet retail specifications or is in excess of consumer demand, as in the case of Ireland, or environmental NGO's such as Food Banks for recovering the leftover food from the farmer like in the case of Lithuania.
- In the national grants the payments are linked to the tonnes of food recovered (as in the case of Lithuania) from the farmland, which could serve as example for method of compensation in the CAP.
- The voluntary nature of participation gives farmers and Food Banks the opportunity to explore possible options to collaborate and to ensure that the food reaches people first offering an alternative avenue to AD for surplus food that is still edible, so nutritious food can reach people who need it.
- The nature of commitments would also be favourable for vulnerable individuals and communities as it would ensure a steady income of fresh fruits and vegetables for people that need it. This consistency would also improve the nutritional value that Food Banks can offer to charities, partner organisations and end beneficiaries.
- When it comes to additional costs or losses arising from these commitments, these should never exceed the funding available and only focus on what can be harvested with the funding at disposal. In addition, Food Banks have a vast network of professionals and volunteers of 98,662 co-workers, 94% of whom are volunteers, that can be included in the process to ensure cost-effectiveness.

- The CAP Pillar II offers many types of payments for the environment and climate including those for cooperation (e.g. for farms to jointly supply waste for sustainable energy production) ([European Commission](#)). FEBA believes that tertiary uses like animal feed and AD are appropriate ways to make use of surplus food not fit for human consumption, but in the case of edible food, the first priority should be to people who need it. In this respect, the relationship of the food industry towards AD is currently skewed. Subsidies to AD including the CAP and national subsidies far outweigh any government support given towards directing surplus food towards people. This distorts the market and financially incentivises the sending of fresh good food to animal feed or AD rather than charities. More importantly the volume of subsidies to AD contradicts the EU's own recommendations in their food waste hierarchy of the importance of redistribution for human consumption ([JRC, 2024](#)). In the meantime, farmers and food businesses continue to face barriers getting their surplus food to charities and Food Banks.

Conclusion

In 2023, 94.6 million people in the EU (21% of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion ([Eurostat, 2024](#)). Many of them are experiencing severe material deprivation. Food Banks work tirelessly to bridge the gap between the growing demand from charities and people in need with the food donations and surplus from retail and manufacturing.

Recovering food that would otherwise have not been harvested, would have been graded out for not meeting specifications or is in excess of consumer demand would therefore not only offer Food Banks a source of fresh and nutritious fruits and vegetables, which is hard for them to receive, but would also help to reduce emissions and while aligning with the food waste hierarchy, which favours human consumption and redistribution over animal feed and AD. It would therefore have a social and environmental impact as well as supporting farmers for their additional costs in making the surplus food available.

Authors' Note

Food Banks in the network of FEBA in various countries benefit from the EU Fruits & Vegetables Withdrawal scheme ([Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1863](#)) in France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium and Italy. However, this scheme is only possible where large agricultural production and withdrawals occur. Its purpose is also to regulate overproduction and market fluctuations; therefore, it is rather economic in nature and not aimed at recovering surplus from primary production. Because only 5 out of the 22 FEBA EU Food Banks benefit from this possibility, a more targeted approach in tackling food waste at farm stage would be favourable.

A dedicated fund to recover surplus from primary production would therefore ensure that each Food Bank across Europe has the possibility to collaborate with farmers, and each farmer the possibility to offset his costs for harvesting what is not profitable.

For more information please contact: info@eurofoodbank.org

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