Collaboratory concludes with innovative solutions to reduce consumer food waste.

Industry speakers and a diverse group of concerned stakeholders co-create a broad spectrum of solutions to contribute to solving the problem.

A one-day event Reducing Consumer Food Waste in Switzerland was organized by a group of students of Business School Lausanne (BSL) on 6 May 2014 at the IUCN Conservation Centre in Gland. Unlike a typical conference, the “Collaboratory” method (see www.50plus20.org) is designed specifically to generate innovative solutions to trans-disciplinary problems such as food waste. Dr. Katrin Muff, Dean of BSL, enabled the open-space, multi-stakeholder dialogue for the group of 40 concerned stakeholders representing the food industry, business, civil society, academia and research.

The Inner Circle of Experts

Marcus Hurschler, Director, foodwaste.ch
Violaine Berger, Director, Ecosystems and Agri., World Business Council of Sustainable Development
Catherine Martinson, Head of Regional Work, WWF Switzerland
Alain Najar, Senior Lecturer Food and Beverage Management, Ecole Hotelière Lausanne
Marc Nobs, Co-director, Partage
Samuel Vionnet, Project Manager, Quantis International

Setting the Scene

The opening session established a common understanding of the food waste issue, first with a video entitled Food Wastage Footprint, produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, and then with the invited experts revealing their points of view on the issue. The floor was then opened to all other participants to add their thoughts.
The Challenge

The objective was to find solutions to help reduce food waste in Switzerland by 50%, by 2020. But finding a solution is difficult primarily because it is due to a “patchwork of problems” in the supply chain, as well as in the western lifestyle in which food has lost its perceived value. The challenge is in addressing all of these channels where, in total, the food wasted or lost adds up to an enormous quantity.

Together, experts and stakeholder participants developed the following insights into the challenges of reducing food waste:

- There are systems blockages that encourage the destruction of the environment in food production and food waste.
- Food is lost or wasted all along the value chain, both upstream and downstream.
- Collaborative action all along the value chain is key to addressing the challenge.
- There has been a lack of a measurement standard for food waste and “what is not measured, is not managed”. This is currently under development.
- Finishing food on your plate is an old value; food has lost its perceived value.
- 60% of household food waste is due to bad planning; busy lifestyles make planning difficult.
- Changing shopping habits is a challenge; shopping once per week from large supermarkets leads to greater food waste than purchasing small amounts locally, as you need it.
- Food is also a cultural way of expressing love; more food is served than can be eaten.
- Communicating to consumers the economic savings of reducing food waste is important.

The opening session was followed by an array of breakout sessions that served to co-create innovative and practicable ideas that could be prototyped in order to cut food waste.

The Outcome: Prototypes of Solutions

A patchwork of problems implies a patchwork of solutions, and what resulted from the day’s workshop was just that, i.e. a variety of ideas that will be tested, implemented or prototyped. The first breakout session identified seven core areas to be targeted for innovation:

Stakeholders and experts divided into groups to refine these core areas into the following specific proposals with a value proposition, concrete actions and responsibilities.

7 Concrete Solutions to be Pursued

The Smart Phone Application group proposed to produce an App that would help restaurants reduce food waste by communicating through the App that unsold meals can be purchased from participating restaurants at reduced prices. This would have the effect of valorising the food instead of throwing it in the waste bin at the end of the day. It would also be an attractive opportunity for people who don’t cook, or busy workers arriving home late to purchase a healthy meal at a reasonable price. The owners of this proposition plan on researching the Lausanne market as a test.

The Portioning and Packaging group proposed a pilot to enable consumers to purchase only the quantity of food they need, thus reducing their potential waste from over-purchasing standard sizes
that may be too large. The solution involves refillable packages and using smart-phone applications for scanning and managing the product information. The owners of this proposition will start by drafting a survey geared to a retailer.

The group proposing personal actions to raise awareness of food waste proposed making it fun by creating a Food Waste! Supper Club. They propose hosting a dinner for at least four guests where a quiz game about food waste is played during the meal. The main condition to participate in the dinner is that the guests must agree to host a similar event within six weeks in order to multiply the impact of raising awareness around food waste. One of the first actions by this group is to create fifty food waste questions to be used for the quiz.

The Systems Problems and Initiatives group’s brainstorming led them to conclude, “A system’s problems deserve systems solutions”. This group proposed a number of initiatives that could be launched to generate discussions around how food and food waste are treated. For example, 1) All the goods that come into Switzerland should have a percentage of “fair-trade” equitable goodness. 2) A Value Destruction Tax (VDT) could be applied to companies that destroy the value of the environment. 3) Companies should be required to report all negative impacts (external or otherwise) associated with the production of their goods. Their action is to further develop one of the initiatives.

“Savour the flavour of a three-hour culinary journey. Toil to table!” This is the value proposition of the Education group. Their concept is to raise awareness of all age groups about food production and waste, by organising a course to teach what goes into the preparation of a meal on our plate. Their actions involve identifying a farmer/gardener, a restaurant and participants.

Along a similar idea of raising awareness of food waste in a fun, interactive manner is the Facebook Challenge proposition from the Transformative Communication group. Their idea is to challenge friends to not waste any food for one week, at home or in restaurants. Non-compliance with this challenge will result in a ‘fun’ penalty, to be negotiated at the time of the challenge. The idea is to multiply this on Facebook.

The Community and Meal Sharing group wants to promote “a wholesome eating experience that integrates fun, community and healthy food options”. The idea is targeted principally to office workers or students to give them an alternative to eating at lunchtime by finding a space where people can bring leftovers or food that needs to be used, to cook and share together.

The event wrapped up with each group highlighting the next action steps and the responsible owners. The objective of innovating solutions to the food waste issue had been achieved with a number of novel ideas resulting. Dr Katrin Muff closed the event by emphasizing her commitment to this societal issue; she pledged BSL would organise a follow-up event within the next six months.

We welcome anyone who would be interested in joining any of these initiatives. Please contact muriel.archer-galibourg@bsl-lausanne.ch.

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