

CHORIZO: Changing practices and Habits though Open,
Responsible, and social Innovation towards ZerO food waste

FLW in households and the role of date marking at the moment of purchasing food

Did you know that almost half of all food waste in the EU comes from households? Much of this waste is avoidable, often caused by confusion over date labels, oversized portions, and poor planning. Within the CHORIZO project, social norms influencing household food waste behavior were examined, and recommendations were made to reduce food waste based on this knowledge. With just a few small behavioral changes, you can cut down on food waste, save money, and make a real impact starting from your own kitchen.

Introduction/background of the study

In the EU, approximately 88 million tons of food are wasted annually, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, inefficient resource use, and economic losses. Households are responsible for nearly 50% of this waste, despite food waste being widely regarded as irresponsible and socially unacceptable. A large part of this waste stems from mismanagement of food storage, lack of meal planning, insufficient awareness of food waste, and confusion over food labeling. In fact, up to 10% of the 88 million tons of food wasted each year in the EU is linked to **misunderstandings around date markings**. In this sense, it is crucial for consumers to understand the rationale behind date marking by food industries to reveal the criteria used for establishing date marking. Therefore, improving consumer understanding of food labeling and expiration dates is crucial in reducing food loss and waste.

In this newsletter, we report on the part of the CHORIZO research project that specifically aimed to address these misconceptions around food labeling and to investigate the social norms influencing household food waste. By increasing awareness and guiding families to make more informed decisions, this part of the project also aimed to reduce food waste and promote more sustainable practices at the household level.



The study used a range of research methods to gather data on how social norms and interpretation of date marking influence household food waste behavior.

Methodology used

In the study, data was collected through various methodologies to understand food waste behaviours. Techniques included:

- **Online surveys** in Flanders, Spain, Estonia, Greece, the Netherlands and Hungary.
- **A focus group** on the role of social norms in food waste behaviours (Belgium).
- A longitudinal online survey with **pilot homes** to observe behaviour towards leftovers and food waste over five weeks (Spain).
- **In depth interviews** with individuals with intellectual disabilities to understand household trends and the impact of COVID-19 (Spain); and with representatives of the food industry to explore the relationship between food waste, date marking, and smart packaging (Spain).
- A national **workshop** with industry representatives to discuss food waste prevention and reduction (Spain).

These different methods provided valuable insights into the factors influencing food waste at the household level.

Findings and recommendations – *Tips to cut your food waste at home!*

Plan your week like a pro!

A little meal planning already goes a long way. Our research indicated that households that adopt purchasing and meal planning strategies waste less food. Furthermore, organizing meals for the week not only helps reduce waste, but it also saves money and time.



Use a grocery list!

Around 80% of our respondents indicated using a grocery list, however, a need to align this grocery list with a menu plan for the week was recommended as a promising household routine for avoiding food waste.

When you already have a meal plan in place, creating a grocery list becomes much easier. This practice helps prevent impulsive buys and saves time during your shopping trip. This simple step helps to avoid food waste and make the whole process more efficient.

Decide your own portion size!

Social norms around food preparation and portion sizes play a major role in household food waste. The habit of over-preparing meals is deeply rooted in the desire to be a good parent, spouse, host, or cook. Many people associate hospitality with serving large portions to ensure that guests or family members have more than enough to eat, often exceeding what is actually needed.

A recommendation to cut back on food waste is to serve only what you and your guests can eat and store the rest for later. Small changes in portioning habits, such as allowing guests or family members to serve themselves or offering to take home leftovers, can significantly reduce food waste while still ensuring everyone feels welcome and is well-fed.

Best before vs use-by, know the difference!

Our research showed that while all respondents were aware of date marking, many did not fully understand the difference between the two types of dates on food packages: “use-by” and “best before”, often leading to premature disposal of food.

Did you know there are two types of date marking on food products in your supermarket? Food Industry operates under strict rules and regulations, establishing date markings based on microbiological, organoleptic and physicochemical analyses.

In short, “best before” dates indicate quality aspects like taste, texture, aroma and appearance, while “use-by” or expiration dates signal safety.

For example, a yoghurt past its “best before” date might not taste as fresh or have the same creamy texture but is still safe and healthy to eat.



Be creative with leftovers!

Our findings suggest that effective skills and knowledge are crucial in breaking habitual behavior that contributes to food waste.

Turning last night’s dinner into today’s lunch is a great way to use up ingredients that otherwise would go to waste. If you are unsure how to repurpose your leftovers, try experimenting with new receipts or search online for storage tips. Also, many foods can still be frozen for later use!

Summary

In conclusion, tackling food waste in your home should not require drastic changes. Small adjustments can already make a significant impact. Although deep-rooted social norms, like a preference for food affluence and the desire to be a good host or parent, can be difficult to shift, some practical steps can be taken to effectively reduce food waste at home. For instance, improving cooking and storage skills, along with a better understanding of expiration dates and food labeling. Also, creating opportunities for behaviors that promote thoughtful food consumption, such as encouraging people to serve themselves, determine their own portion sizes, and offering guests leftovers, helps building lasting habits that make a real difference in reducing food waste.

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