

Food waste collection: Unwrapping the biowaste potential



Wednesday 7 th December 2022, 14:45 – 16:30 CET Hybrid event
organized at the European Parliament, Brussels – Room JAN 6Q2 & online

Hosted by MEP Sarah Wiener

Speakers:

- **MEP Sarah Wiener**
- **David Newman**, Co-Founder, ECBPI
- **Enzo Favoino**, Researcher & Advisor, Waste and Biowaste Management, Zero Waste schemes and Circular Economy, Scuola Agraria del Parco di Monza
- **Johanna Bernsel**, Deputy Head of F2 Unit on 'Bioeconomy, Chemicals, Cosmetics', DG GROW, European Commission
- **Silvija Aile**, Deputy Head of B3 Unit "From Waste To Resources", DG ENV, European Commission
- **Piotr Barczak**, Senior Policy Officer for Circular Economy and Waste, EEB
- **Percy Foster**, CEO, Composting and Anaerobic Digestion Association of Ireland (CRE): "Initial Findings of Irish Research Project on Hidden Plastics in Food Waste"
- **Joan Marc Simon**, Executive Director, Zero Waste Europe

Welcome Remarks

MEP Sarah Wiener

“Food waste poses environmental, economic, and ethical questions and shows the need to change our food system”

MEP Sarah Wiener opened the event by stating that the issue of food waste and the potential of biowaste have never been more important. She explained that given the soaring food prices, the **wealth gap** is widening. Mrs. Wiener stressed that extreme weather condition, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have an impact on global food systems. Furthermore, it was said that **food waste costs** European businesses and households billions of euros each year and that it is responsible for at least 6% of the European Union’s (EU) greenhouse gas emissions. According to MEP Ms. Wiener, the two greatest threats to food security are the **biodiversity** and **climate crises** – which stress soil, our most valuable resource.

Panel discussion

Mr. David Newman, Co-Founder, ECBPI

“Plastics must be kept out of the food waste system”

Mr. David Newman highlighted the fact that the environmental costs of misuse of plastics are well known to academia meanwhile the same cannot be stated about the **economic costs** – despite being substantial. In the report “unwrapping the biowaste potential” commissioned by ECBPI, a close look is given to the **potential risks** of protracting **plastic contamination** in the waste collection system in the future years. As Mr. Newman explained, the **costs run to hundreds of millions of euros annually** and those are transferred from the biowaste collection system into landfills and incinerators. He concluded requesting the European Commission and the Parliament to take every possible action to ensure that plastics are kept out of the food waste system.

Mr. Enzo Favoino, Researcher & Advisor, Waste and Biowaste Management, Zero Waste schemes and Circular Economy, Scuola Agraria del Parco di Monza

“Legally binding targets related to separate collection of waste must be implemented across Europe”

The main contribution **Mr. Enzo Favoino** wanted to provide this event with, concerned explaining why **legally binding targets** related to separate collection of biowaste must be implemented across Europe so as to supplement the obligation on separate collection, otherwise collected biowaste might have poor performing quality and quantity results. Mr. Favoino illustrated the **surveys** carried out in the “unwrapping the biowaste potential” research as well as the **methodology** which led to the **findings on the potential economic savings of moving from bad performing collection systems towards good performing ones**. Researchers were able to do so by calculating the total potential of biowaste at EU level (including the UK and Norway), the percentage of biowaste in typical schemes (either door to door or road containers collection), and the dragging factor to ascertain the total amount of rejects (including biowaste and compost) stemming from plastics to be screened out. All of these calculations were specifically focused on kitchen waste. The abovementioned research found out that the total gain of moving from a poor to a good performing system would be of **2 billion euros**. Finally, Mr. Favoino highlighted the several **recommendations** singled out based on the findings such as the fact that door-to-door systems are remarkably more performing than bring banks and should therefore be preferred; conventional plastic bags should be banned or made compostable and digestible; items that after use are inherently including food waste should be made compostable; the “dragging factor” should be minimised; and, finally, management of rejects should be made more expensive.

Mrs. Johanna Bernsel, Deputy Head of F2 Unit on ‘Bioeconomy, Chemicals, Cosmetics’, DG GROW, European Commission

“Regulate food waste to increase fertiliser production”

Mrs. Johanna Bernsel particularly focused on fertilisers and stated **the EU mineral fertiliser industry is struggling** as there is no access to the raw materials and notably the natural gas needed for production of nitrogen fertilisers. Talking about figures, Mrs. Bernsel affirmed that when gas prices spiked in August this year, the European fertilisers industry closed 70% of its ammonia production, severely threatening the agricultural yields in Europe and therefore food security. The Commission – she continued – is looking into **measures to mitigate this threat** and, apart from avoiding nutrient losses, it also wants to try to increase the access to organic fertiliser products in the EU to improve soil quality. For this reason, the Commission’s work is focusing on increasing access to biowaste and compost while reducing dependency on natural gases. In addition, Mrs. Bernsel also mentioned the **EU Fertilizing Products Regulation (FPR)**, namely a new tool at EU level regulating biowaste in fertilisers which will simplify the market access and improve the business case

for organic fertilisers while also **regulating the way food waste in biowaste can be used** to produce fertilising products.

***Mrs. Silvija Aile, Deputy Head of B3 Unit “From Waste To Resources”, DG ENV,
European Commission***

“Without serious action taken on biowaste management, the other waste targets cannot be reached.”

Mrs. Aile informed the audience of the Commission’s work on the different measures related to biowaste management. She explained that the Commission is focused on **monitoring** Member States’ work in this regard and checking their progresses. In addition, Mrs. Aile also confirmed that Member States are facing **difficulties in complying with the waste legislation** and there is risk that this will impact their compliance with future obligations too. Many of them – she continued – have legislated and **expanded their biowaste jurisdiction** as well as set standards for the **separate collection systems**. Despite such improvements, the desired results are still lacking, and, for this reason, the Commission is now focusing on **facilitating the exchange of best practices related to waste management**. In addition, Mrs. Aile highlighted that the key objectives related to the policy outlook consists of **ensuring waste reduction** through next generation particularly in relation to **food waste** as this also guarantees food security. In this regard, she shared the Commission’s work on a **legislative proposal introducing food waste prevention targets** while respecting local conditions. Moreover, she added that the **proposal for packaging regulation** tabled last week is going to bring a **positive impact** in relation to **upstream plastic reduction**. Indeed, it proposes a set of product requirements which ensure recyclability of packaging and proper management of biobased. To ensure success, **Member States’ implementation** of such rules must be **monitored**.

Mr. Piotr Barczak, Senior Policy Officer for Circular Economy and Waste, EEB

“In waste hierarchy, priority must be given to food waste reduction”

Mr. Piotr Barczak sees the revision of the EU Waste Directive as a unique opportunity to set binding food waste reduction targets. In this regard, Mr. Barczak cited **Article 9** and Article 22 which – in his opinion – must be made binding. **Article 22** – he explained – concerns separating waste at source collection, therefore either collect waste separately or carry out home compost. He continued by showing that research states **contamination of plastics creates costs** worthy billions of euros for the EU, creating a loss of potential for every European tax-payer. Mr. Barczak supported the idea of creating the smoothest conditions for citizens

to be encouraged to **collect biowaste at household level** as well as use compostable bags or no bags at all. Finally, he believes the EU Waste Directive should include a **5% cap in biowaste content in residual stream**.

***Percy Foster, CEO, Composting and Anaerobic Digestion Association of Ireland (CRE):
“Initial Findings of Irish Research Project on Hidden Plastics in Food Waste”***

“Plastic contamination is a real issue: prevention is better than cure”

Mr. Percy Foster showed the outcomes of **research on plastics and food waste in Ireland** investigating the scale and quantities of plastics found in food waste in the country. The study is based on literature review, stakeholders’ engagement, food waste characterisation studies to identify plastic products, laboratory testing of products determining their plastic content and final recommendations to eliminate those. In this regard, Mr. Foster discussed the **plastic content of different products** we engage with daily such as vegetables net, rubber band, and fruits stickers, to demonstrate his support for **plastic-free products design**. Despite having limits on plastic in the final compost already in place, Mr. Foster believes that is a too advance stage already since technologies are not fully competent in removing **plastic contamination**. Mr. Foster suggested to have **limits on the waste producer, waste collector, and waste processor** at the very gate of the product design. Finally, he concluded stating the **many opportunities biowaste collection and recycling uncover**, such as food waste prevention and optimisation of the achievement of the EU recycling targets and recyclables quality improvement.

Joan Marc Simon, Executive Director, Zero Waste Europe

“We need quantity and quality requirements for the separate collection of biowaste”

Mr. Joan Marc Simon opened his contribution to the event with some facts and figures: the production of **plastic** in the EU is 55 million tons, and 5 million tons, namely the **10%** of it, **ends up in the biowaste**. The responsibility of this – he continued – goes to the producers who contribute to a free-rider effect for packaging and plastic industries. For what concerns the implementation of **separate waste collection**, Mr. Simon affirmed that door-to-door collection system is the one providing less contamination rates, highest capture rates, and highest quality. Furthermore, he is also very concerned about the missing opportunities in this regard as the EU does not present qualitative requirements nor quantitative target. Mr. Simon believes more **binding norms** such as a **cap** set in biowaste residual, or a **plastics ban** are necessary.

Closing remarks

MEP Sarah Wiener

MEP Sarah Wiener concluded this event by, first, mentioning **the pollution and contamination of compostable biowaste by pesticides**. Indeed, she explained that pesticides residuals in food and vegetable waste are a huge problem for both human health and the environment. MEP Wiener stated that urgent tools and solutions are needed, and policy makers should take the proposals mentioned today and place the most prominent issues in the EU agenda. In addition, she believes **consumers must be sensitized** on the problems around waste collection and separation as well as the promotion of compost use because strategic plans at country level are not enough. Finally, she thanked the audience and the participants for feeding her all those information she will bring with her to the political level.