

Reducing food loss at Service Centre Helsinki

Service Centre Helsinki took part in a nationwide research program entitled Foodspill in the early 2010s, which aimed to tackle the problem of wasted food throughout the entire Finnish food sector. The results of the Foodspill studies suggested that of all food handled and prepared in the Finnish food sector, about 20%, or 75–85 million kilograms per year, was wasted. The main drivers of food wastage are buffet services and overproduction.

Service Centre Helsinki provides more than 100,000 meals every day in City-run schools, day care centers, various service centers, service homes and hospitals. In order to cut down on food loss, they are constantly developing daily routines and trying out innovative operation modes. The total amounts of food wasted have already begun to trend downwards. The main driver for this change is the well-motivated personnel of the Service Centre.

The direction is promising

The whole food service chain has been considered in efforts to reduce food loss, from planning of the menus to procurements, logistics, storage and service. This approach has proved successful at Service Centre Helsinki. The amount of food wasted in the various phases of cooking and storage has been cut down to near minimum. The amount of customer leftovers varies between the locations and customers types, but it has diminished to a reasonable level of 1–5 percent of the total amount of food prepared.



Yearly theme week in October. Special attention is payed to cutting down on food waste.

The greatest challenge is still the service waste from the lines and the buffets. Daily variation is considerable, in the range of around 3–15 percent of the total amount of food prepared.

In comparison, a monitoring study of the nationwide Food-spill program (Wastestimator 2016–2017) revealed that the total amount of food loss has diminished from 20% to around 17% in Finnish food services. In particular, the amount of customer leftovers has decreased. The greatest decrease in total food wasted, from 25 to 17%, was detected at workplace and student canteens in this study.

Tasty food and changes in daily routines

Tasty food is the most important factor in avoiding customer leftovers and service loss. In 2017, the Service Centre developed 50 new vegetarian recipes!

Service Centre Helsinki co-operates actively with customers and discusses the menus, selections and practices with them, for instance in cases where a class will not be dining at school. Many schools have restaurant committees, which include students and the kitchen staff. Pupils can influence food issues and learn to take responsibility and cooperate.

The amount of food waste is monitored daily at the service outlets, and the data is used to develop ways to cut down food waste with the personnel, for instance when planning upcoming procurements. Personnel can also take advantage of their digital ERP system to systemize the purchasing of raw materials and ready-made portions. Development work focusing on even better monitoring modes is ongoing.

From hot to cold deliveries

The surplus food, which is delivered hot, always goes to bio-waste, mainly due to safety regulations. Therefore, the Service Centre is exploring whether day care centers could move from hot food to cold food deliveries. Furthermore, the renovation plan for the central kitchen aims to switch from hot deliveries to cold deliveries, which will reduce the number of transports and the loss of food.

Collection of packaged biowaste

The amount of waste produced in the Service Centre's central kitchen has decreased, while the sorting process has also become significantly more efficient. Starting the collection of packaged biowaste has cut down the amount of mixed waste to one third of its previous level in the central kitchen.



Mobile application for marketing of surplus

Digitalization is coming to food services, and even to delivery services. In 2018, Service Centre started a pilot in which a mobile application (Lunchie Market) is being tested for the sale of surplus food in locations, such as some municipal schools, day care centers and service outlets in the care sector. These kinds of applications are already widely used in private food services. Service Centre Helsinki is also taking part in a development movement called Urban Food, the aims of which include easing the marketing of surplus food in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Urban Food is an initiative launched by the Smart & Clean Foundation, and it started with a challenge to create open discussion on a digital platform: Envision a truly sustainable urban food ecosystem.

Let's not forget social sustainability

Service Center Helsinki donates some surplus portions, mainly packaged portions for home service for the elderly. For instance, one congregation picks up the leftover portions directly from the central kitchen.

More information about the Foodspill and Wastestimator projects is available at the Natural Resources Institute Finland (www.luke.fi)

Article: Silvennoinen et al. 2015. Food waste volume and origin: Case studies in the Finnish food service sector. *Waste Management*. Volume 46, December 2015, Pages 140–145.

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