

PRESS RELEASE

April 2021

Report to the Flemish Parliament

How Flanders combats food waste and food loss

At the beginning of the past decade, the problem of food waste gained momentum. The Court of Audit investigated whether Flanders has a solid policy framework for reducing food loss and food waste and whether it will achieve policy objectives. It concluded, among other things, that Flanders developed a number of policy initiatives that are in line with European policy, but nevertheless contain some points for improvement. Proper monitoring of the results is still difficult for the time being due to a lack of uniform measurement methods and up-to-date data. Annual progress reports show that many actions against food waste have been carried out.

Audit

At the beginning of the past decade, the problem of food waste gained momentum. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food waste would have an economic cost of approximately \$ 1,000 billion worldwide and an additional \$ 700 billion in environmental costs. The United Nations has therefore included the fight against food waste as a sustainable development goal (SDG) in its 2030 Agenda, in which it strives to halve food waste in shops and households and to reduce food waste in production and consumption supply chains by 2030. The European Union (EU) has integrated this fight into its 2015 Circular Economy Action Plan and in its Directive 2018/851 of 30 May 2018, and aims to contribute to the UN's goals by reducing the production of food waste. The Court of Audit examined whether Flanders now has a solid policy framework for reducing food loss and waste, whether it has sufficiently followed up and realized policy actions concerned and whether it will achieve policy objectives.

Flemish policy framework

Since 2011, Flanders has developed a number of policy initiatives, which in 2015 resulted in the drawing up of a Food Loss Chain Roadmap 2015–2020. This roadmap entailed the commitment of the Flemish Government, together with the sector organizations in the food chain, to limit food loss compared to 2015 by 15% by 2020 and by 30% by 2025. Flanders is also strongly committed to the high-quality valorisation of secondary flows and food losses. The Flemish objectives are largely in line with those of Europe. However, the Flemish policymakers have not always consistently adhered to these objectives. For example, Vizier 2030, with which the Flemish Government translated the European sustainable development goals to Flanders, set the target for food loss reduction at 30% by 2030. The 2019-2024 coalition agreement and the action plan that will follow up the chain roadmap from 2021 onwards, do link up again with the SDGs.

Flanders did not link a separate government budget to the implementation of the chain roadmap and predominantly works with ad hoc project subsidies. Quantitative indicators with which to monitor the roadmap actions lack. Until 2019, Flemish government has drawn

up annual progress reports on the chain roadmap actions. As the majority of these actions have not been linked to quantified objectives and support and awareness action effects are difficult to measure, information in these reports is mainly descriptive. However, these reports do show that many Flemish actions have indeed been carried out.

Is Flanders on to its food loss targets?

Both internationally and in Flanders, methods for data collection and measurement of food loss can still be improved. After all, they still imply many estimates. An initial 2017 measurement (Monitor 2015) determined the food loss during 2015 at 907,000 tonnes. This measurement is considered as a baseline measurement. A new monitoring report was published in June 2019, with data for 2017 (Monitor 2017). However, it does not contain data on important chain links and other data cannot be compared with the baseline measurement. The 2017 measurement therefore did not provide a picture of the entire food chain and a general conclusion about the evolution since 2015 is not possible due to changes in the data collection. After the chain roadmap will have ended, a final measurement will take place in 2021, but even then comparison with previous measurements will be difficult. Moreover, the corona crisis will also distort the results of the Flemish policy against food loss.

Response of the minister

The Flemish ministers of Agriculture and Fisheries and of the Environment replied on December 17, 2020 that they largely agree with the report. They expressed their commitment to tackle the points for improvement in their new Action Plan for Food Loss and Biomass (residual) Flows Circular 2021-2025.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report on *How Flanders combats food waste and food loss* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courtofaudit.be.