

EIT Food Fight Podcast - Episode 2.mp3

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:00:02] Hi, everyone. This is a food fight podcast brought to you by EIT Food.

Matt Eastland [00:00:06] I'm Matt Eastland...

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:00:07] ...And I'm Lukxmi Balathanasan

Matt Eastland [00:00:08] And we are both from EIT Food, which is Europe's leading food innovation community, which is working to make our food system more sustainable, healthy and trusted. And over the course of this podcast series, we're inviting experts from all areas of the food industry to talk about how we go about tackling some of the world's biggest food challenges and fight for that better food future.

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:00:30] So on today's podcast menu is food waste. So according to research by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, over one third of all food produced in the world is wasted. That's right, one third.

Matt Eastland [00:00:44] Bleurgh.

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:00:44] If you think about the problems the world is facing in terms of things like food poverty, malnutrition, so many people in the world not having access to enough food...

Matt Eastland [00:00:53] ...And we spoke about sustainably feeding the growing population last episode.

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:00:56] Yes. And the massive impact the food industry has on the environment. I must say, this one isn't just on the food industry, it's on all of us. We simply can't be wasting that much. It's shocking and something has to be done.

Matt Eastland [00:01:08] Yeah. And it's, I don't think it's going to be an easy fix, but it's definitely a conversation that we need to start having right now. So on that, how do we clean up all the food waste? And joining us on our podcast today, we have two guests to discuss how we tackle this weighty problem. Firstly, a warm welcome to Tessa Clark, who's the co-founder and CEO of Olio, which is a food sharing platform connecting neighbours and local businesses so that surplus food can be shared and not thrown away. And so far, Olio has saved nearly two million portions of food from the bin, which is absolutely incredible. And I'm really looking forward to hearing more. Hi, Tessa.

Tessa Clark (Olio) [00:01:45] Thank you.

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:01:46] And joining us via studio link to Belgium is Veerle Carlier. Veerle is the RFD and innovation manager for the Colruyt group. So Colruyt are one of the leading supermarket groups in Belgium and they're also based in France and Luxembourg and also partners in a number of innovation projects with EIT Food. Hi Veerle, thanks very much for joining us.

Veerle Carlier (Colruyt) [00:02:05] Hi. Thank you for inviting me.

Lukxmi Balathanasan [00:02:07] No problem.

Matt Eastland [00:02:08] Excellent. Veerle, can we start with you? So do you think the public are really aware of the scale of the food waste problem?

Veerle Carlier (Colruyt) [00:02:17] Well, I think that more and more consumers are really aware of the food waste. But we can still do better. And that's where at Colruyt, we don't only look to ourselves, but we also want to involve consumers and give them tips and tricks and inspire them to waste less food.

Lukxmi Balathasan [00:02:39] So Tessa, over to you. What do you think is at stake here, if we don't make effort to tackle this problem?

Tessa Clark (Olio) [00:02:44] I think everything is at stake. We are in the midst of a full blown climate crisis, food waste if it were to be a country, would be the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions after the USA and China. We also have a growing population, which sounds like you discussed in your previous podcast. We have another two point two billion people joining the planet by 2050. The FAO has said we need to increase global food production by 50 percent if we want to feed everyone. And today, we have no idea how we're going to achieve that.

[00:03:14] Yeah, that's when you put it like that. That's pretty horrific. So on that. So when you started earlier, I mean, did you know all about food waste? Was this something that you've always been really passionate about or is it something that, you know, kicked off this journey for you?

[00:03:29] I'll hold my hand up and say I had absolutely no idea about the problem of food waste. When I when I started earlier, Olio was really born out of a personal experience. So I was moving country four and a half years ago and I'm moving day. The removal men asked me or told me that I need to throw away all of our uneaten food. Now, I was brought up on a farm, so I know how much hard work goes into producing our food. And as a result of that, I absolutely hate the hate here, throwing pretty good food in the bin. So I set out to try and find some and share my food with. And to cut a long story short, I failed miserably. And to me, it just seemed actually absurd. I should have to throw that perfectly good food in a bin when I knew someone near me who had like it. And that was where the idea of an app that connects neighbours to share food came about. But at that point in time, I had no idea just how enormous the problem of food waste is.

[00:04:18] And in building Olio, we know what has some of the barriers that you faced.

[00:04:22] Well, I think, first of all, there is a massive awareness problem. Many people do not know just how big the problem of food waste is. But specifically, what most people don't realize is that well over half of all food waste takes place in the home. So if I had a pound for every time someone said to me, oh, it must be the retailers, I wouldn't be here today. But sadly, actually, retail in the UK, retailers at a store level account for only approx me 2 percent of all food waste, whereas we in the home account for well over half of all food waste. So our biggest sort of first challenge is spreading the word about the fact that actually we each and every one of us. Massively responsible for the food waste problem. Once people understand that, they then start to want and to seek out solutions to that. And that's where Olio comes into play. And if you could take a step back now, explain to us how does all this work? So it's really simple. If you are going on holiday, moving home, going on a diet. You know, catered for a party being given food you don't want for whatever reason, you have something you don't want or need. You just snap a photo of it

and add it to the app. Neighbours living nearby get an alert, letting them know that something new has been added near them. They can then browse the listings, request what they want and pop random picked up. And the real magic is at the point at which two neighbours connect in real life to share some food on the doorstep. Amazing.

[00:05:44] Fearless. So what are the key areas of food waste? Right. I'm looking at as a company and perhaps you can explain a little bit about some of that yeti food projects that you're working on. Yeah, sure.

[00:05:54] Almost everything of the food we sell is sold more than 97 percent in the fresh markets and in the frozen section is sold today. But with the two dots, seven percent, that is food waste there. We try to reuse it. So the first initiative that we take is we try to donate as much as possible to food banks. But of course, we cannot supply them with food that they cannot process themselves. So they have a limited supply chain themselves. And therefore, last year we donated three dots, three tons of edible food to the food banks. And next to that, we value rice, our bread voice. We we sell fresh bread. We have a collaboration with an animal feed company who is processing our breads to animal feed. So that is not waste. It's neither. And next to that, we are looking for other solutions. We had a project last year with United Fruit. It was called Food Generated Strike. And we collaborated with a few companies and also with three universities in Europe. And we gave them one challenge and that was to create food concepts with the three biggest waste streams, potatoes, breads and bananas. And they came up with some very lovely concepts. The winning team, the team from Mannheim University, they are now trying to set up a business so decorates the breakfast cereals out of our bananas.

[00:07:40] It's interesting to hear from a retailer perspective that you're doing these sorts of things. So, you know, is one of the challenges that people buy too much food? And is that attention for you as a retailer and how are you overcoming them?

[00:07:53] Yes, this is something that we are aware of and that we're discussing internally. On the one hand, of course, we are a company just like another company and we want to make money. But on the other hand, we are well aware of the fact that we also have a social and an ecological impacts. And we try to think of, yeah, several mechanisms and projects and awareness campaigns. So, for example, we try to inspire them with a lot of recipes that they can use their leftovers in. So with everything that is left in the fridge, we make up new recipes. We also have meal planners to inspire people. These are also one of the most important things to prevent food waste that is really bland buying and at school, that's certainly call it our lowest prices. One of our most important retail brands, everything is about efficiency, also efficiency for the consumer. So our consumers are already aware of food waste and they really do plan buying.

[00:09:06] Okay. And I guess I'm I'm interested in the the stigma, shall we say, surrounding food waste. You know, Tessa, from from your side. I mean, I think you've passed a million customers recently, you know. Is this something that you've encountered in terms of this social stigma of food waste here?

[00:09:23] So this is a question we're asked quite often, which is does anybody actually want to pick up food that a neighbour doesn't want? And the answer is a massive resounding yes. So half of all the food added to the Odeo app is requested in less than one hour. So our biggest challenge is absolutely trying to encourage people to actually add some food to the app. There is no shortage of people who want to come and pick up your spare food, but it does take a leap of faith. We recognize that the first time we use the app,

you take a photograph of paps ahead of broccoli or two lemons and you might be thinking. Anybody really want this, is anyone really going to come around and get it? And the answer is yes. And half all listings request in less than an hour. Half of all listings also received multiple requests.

[00:10:11] I can completely vouch for that as an earlier user. The first time I used it, I had leftovers from a baby shower with an hour. Three requests for scones and jam. I was quite impractical. I bet your neighbours enjoyed the tea.

[00:10:24] So, Vala, I know. What are you doing to work with your suppliers to to reduce food waste?

[00:10:30] For example, we have a new apple variety that we have exclusively in our stores since last year together with three producers. And so our primary goal, of course, is that we sell practically all of the apples in our stores. And so thanks to you and new breeding techniques, almost 80 to 90 percent is perfectly suited to sales from our stores. But of course, there is depending on the harvest. There is still 10 to 20 percent that is not appropriate to sell in our stores because it's too small or it's swanky. And there we sat together with our suppliers and now we're going to make apple cake out of these wonky vegetables and we'll be in our stores in a few months. And after that, we're going to produce apple juice. And hopefully this way we will use 100 percent of the apples that has been produced for us.

[00:11:34] Who helps define what what is good looking in terms of food? Is it? Is it the fact that retailers have done their research and, you know, that consumers would buy ugly fruit and veg or actually. Is there a way that you think that, you know, we could present this to consumers in the right way and they would grow to love it in its. In all of its ugliness?

[00:11:57] Yes. In fact, it's it's the consumer who decides on what's appropriate for him or not. And know what he wants to buy or not. We really tell all of our stuff. Who works in in-store? We asked them if they would buy what they see on the shelf. And yet it's a bit particular because we say them. That's okay. If you see, for example, an apple with a brown spots and you you as a consumer, you don't want to buy it, just withdraw it from the shelf. And maybe this looks like creating foodways. But we've noticed throughout so many years of experience that we have in retail, that's if we leave the apple with the brown spots, people are reluctant to buy the underlying fruit, which is perfectly fine. So it's better to withdraw one apple. And to sell all the others. Then to keep the apple with a brown spots. And it's really here. Our our staff, our people who are working in the stores, who are consumers who are deciding on, okay, do I think it's okay? Would I buy it or not?

[00:13:09] Yeah. Okay. That's really interesting. So basically what we're saying is, is you you have to get rid of a tiny little bit of food in order to save much more food. So, yeah, that's that's quite fascinating. I wouldn't have thought about that.

[00:13:20] Just a little add on for the moment. We're not selling one key fruit because we're workin together with all our producers in a chain and it's an economic chain, too. So I think within the chain, of course, there is always some kind of food waste. But I think even the wonky produce already has a destination for the moments. It goes to the industry to make soups, all types of of products. You can create value and not create extra costs to get this wonky fruit in stores to give it to the consumers. I'm not sure that this is really adding value to the consumer or to to the chain at all.

[00:14:06] I hadn't actually realized that's quite interesting. So this is something that's very particular to collaborator is general practice across retail.

[00:14:14] It that's what we do where you really think about all these steps and we're a very rational player and we just don't want to get into a hype just because it sounds good and every consumer likes the thought of the wonky vegetable. We don't want to get into this. We really want to create extra value in another way.

[00:14:41] Can I just saw step out from this where I can just bring it back to something really basic. So why is it that people over buy food or, you know, is it that people don't value food anymore?

[00:14:54] I think it's in our DNA to want to have an overabundance of food. We mustn't forget that food is. Life source. Without it, we die. So it is very natural to want to hoard, to want to open a fridge and habits stocked full of food. No one wants to have a social occasion or throw a party and under cater. So we've got some really strong human instincts which says that we want to have lots of food. Having too much food isn't in and of itself a problem. The problem is that when too much food ends up being food in the bin and for 2 million years humans have been solving this problem by sharing their food in their local community. And that's what we're really doing with Odeo. A lot of people say to us. But isn't that weird? An app that connects strangers to share food. What we like says no. What's weird is that we're throwing away perfectly good food. Humans have been sharing food for two million years. It's only in the past 50 years that we've been throwing away our life source, quite literally.

[00:15:56] And why do you think we've done that? Why have we gone from this 2 million years of his great history sharing food in the last 50 years, just not doing that anymore?

[00:16:04] I think it's because we've had mass migration into cities. So people have moved away from the local communities, from their local families. A place of work is now somewhere different from where we live. We're increasingly living alone and then we've got the way food is packaged and sold to us. So if you live alone, it really, really, really hard to buy small quantities. You can't buy fruit veg loose anymore. We've also got the date system which has been introduced, which just quite frankly, confuses people. Can we talk about that? Date?

[00:16:37] Yeah, because I mean, I'd never thought I'd hear myself say this. I'm really interested to hear about labelling. But what's the difference between best before and used by? And is this just confusing all of us and adding to the problem?

[00:16:51] So without a doubt, the multiple dates are confusing people. All the data shows that the customers are confused to try and explain it. It's actually pretty simple. A used by date is a health and safety date. That is the date beyond which it is recommended that you do not eat the food because there is a health and safety risk. The best before date is literally just a date that had been applied by the manufacturer, which is the date that in their judgment, is the date before which the food is optimal for taste, for freshness, for Centex, for composition. Food is often very delicious and also safe to eat for weeks, months and sometimes even years after the best before date.

[00:17:36] Yeah, of course, these dates are important to guarantee food safety and food quality to the consumer. And so next to that, I believe that new technologies within packaging can have an edible date within a few years, maybe an edible date, which really

tells a consumer that product is, first of all, safe to consume. And next to that, okay, it's still safe to consume, but maybe you have some loss of quality and then the consumer can still decide whether he wants to buy other or not. But I really think that informing the consumer is crucial in this.

[00:18:19] So is that then about education? Education from a retailer perspective, explaining to people what the difference between best before and newsboy is and obviously many other things. You know, an education for consumers about the size of the food waste challenge. And maybe like the simple things that they can do.

[00:18:37] Well, I actually sort of back to what we were discussing around the importance of the different dates. I actually think there's a strong argument to be dramatically reducing the use of best before date and arguably even phasing them out because they are causing widespread confusion. The use by date, which is a health and safety date, is extremely important and that best before date. I think we really do need to examine them a lot more closely.

[00:19:01] And so are consumers then bought this food, whether they understand the best before or use by date? We don't know. But then when they get their food into the house, I mean, what what else can they be doing? I mean, there's other things that things that you would recommend in some tips that people can be doing to reduce waste.

[00:19:19] Absolutely. So a couple of things that I would always recommend. The first thing is to plan your meals for the week, which might sound incredibly boring, but actually it's surprisingly fun on a Sunday night. You can sit down and plan your meals for the week. Second thing then is to shop to your plan. The third thing is to learn some tips and tricks about how to store your food. There are some fantastic piece of information out there on the internet. Save, for example. Tomatoes should never be stored in the fridge. Potatoes and onions should not be stored together. You can wrap some beeswax, wrap or cling film over the top of bananas to make them last for longer. A slice of onion him with an avocado will stop it opened, avocado will stop it from Graham Brown. And I think that's one of my favourites. So. So there's an awful lot that you can do. Kind of in the home through just proper storage of your food. The next thing really is to get creative. So to experiment in the kitchen and to kind of cook with leftovers and use up what you've got. And then finally, obviously, you shameless pitch rodeo. But if all of the above hasn't worked, then clearly please share your food with a neighbour rather than toss it in the bin.

[00:20:31] What about you, verily? What are your top tips?

[00:20:34] Yeah, um, I think about the same thing. We have a lot of meal planning tools. Yeah, we have an e-commerce site where you can really plan your meals and I think we can really inspire our consumers and we can give good examples and ideas. But it remains also the responsibility, of course, of the consumer to act really.

[00:20:58] And that we cannot do in their place and die to you to say you've obviously taken this problem into your own hands, but to accelerate it. I mean, this is a role for government in policy to step in.

[00:21:09] Do you think? I think this is a problem that requires all parties to get involved. So absolutely, the government needs to step up. The first thing that I would like to see would be for food waste targets to actually be legislated for. Because what gets measured gets done and what gets legislated for. Definitely gets done. And at the moment here in

the UK, everything has been done on a purely voluntary basis. So that would be my sort of major ask of government along with reviewing the best before date. I think the retailers are incredibly powerful because they have an enormous route to market. Every single person in this country shops and gets their food or pretty much from a retailer. And to date, I don't think they have been bold enough in terms of using the in-store real estate, using the packaging of food, real estate to convey these really hard hitting messages about just how big a problem food waste is. How important. We as individuals are. And so I think they can do a lot more. And then ultimately there's lots of organisations such as ourselves who are in this space who are really trying to use social media and use platforms such as podcasts to try and spread the word, because we believe very, very passionately the curative impact of millions of small actions is absolutely transformative change.

[00:22:29] And if we can step all the way back to when we were creating the food system from scratch, and we've been now talking about how we can do something about food waste after it's happened. If you can start from the beginning, how would you go about preventing this from even being a problem?

[00:22:45] I'll just talk about the area that I know most about, which is food waste in the home. I think it's unrealistic in today's modern life, which is very busy, very hectic and very unpredictable to expect each person, especially when we often live in these small units, to be able to perfectly balance supply and demand of food, highly perishable product through their fridges. I just don't think that's possible. So to me, that's not a problem so long as we're cooking creatively or giving that food away to someone else who can use it.

[00:23:18] So our edible edible food waste of food, which is leftover. Is it's okay to have more of it as long as we can do something with it? Absolutely.

[00:23:27] Well, next to the consumer, I think there are still some possibilities to to to do something with with the food. But indeed, legislation is something that prohibits it sometimes. For example, we are able to donate food to the food banks, which is good, but at a certain point in time, we cannot give more than they can give away, of course. So they have their limits as an organisation and their supply chain. But we are not allowed to or we don't have the possibility to donate it to other organisations, for example. And that's something which we will want to do, but it needs to be made possible. To.

[00:24:12] Tessa, you wanted to jump in?

[00:24:14] Yeah, I did, because I think that the moment the retail sector is looking purely at the charitable sector to absorb its surplus at a store level, and we know that the charitable sector cannot absorb the sheer volume of food that is being generated at a store level by the retail sector. And what we're doing is saying that there is another solution which sits alongside the charitable solution and complements it, which is redistributing the food to the local community. And that can be incredibly powerful.

[00:24:46] And it gets nothing because we're in an age of technology and innovation and we're talking about perishable foods, I guess, taking a positive look at it. What are some exciting technologies that either one of you are seeing that's going to help? Buyers extend shelf lives or do something with perishable foods. That's going to allow us for to keep it longer.

[00:25:07] So anything exciting that you've seen or if you're hoping for the two that I've seen, I love the appeal sciences who apply a coat to avocados, for example, to

dramatically reduce the rate at which they ripen. And then there's MCA technologies here in the UK, which is smart, sort of bio reactive packaging that tells you biologically when that food is going off and not just applying sort of a one size fits all date on the basis of lab trials.

[00:25:36] So has that been changing change, that whole conversation about labelling, is that moving that whole labelling piece into the future?

[00:25:44] Yes. I mean, that technology is still fairly early on in terms of its evolution. So clearly we're gonna have to continue with all the other measures that we're trying to do to reduce food waste. But I think that smart packaging, Daphne, has an important role to play.

[00:25:57] Amazing. And I think we're almost out of time now. So, I mean, Tessa and voila. Thanks once again for your contributions to this debate. Where can people find out more about your work and what you do?

[00:26:09] Tessa So they can find the earlier app, which is free to download and use in the App Store and Google Play or even go to our website, which is w w w dot Odeo ex dot com. Thank you.

[00:26:21] And voila. Yeah. Also on our website for a group dot com. And if you're coming to Belgium, feel free to an amazing might take you up on that.

[00:26:31] Thanks. So I'd just like to say once again, a massive thank you to Villa and Tessa. This has been the food fight. And if you'd like to know more about eating food and everything we're doing in this space and all other spaces looking at food, please go to W W dot EBIT food dot EU.

[00:26:50] And you could also follow us on Twitter. We are at 80 feet and until next time to speak to them. Goodbye, everybody. Bye.