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ACCOUNTING FOR WASTE

Managing food waste has become increasingly pertinent to the industry. An expert roundtable at INTERNORGA 2017 sought to address the challenges and identify opportunities

According to the European Union's 2016 Fusions report, approximately 88 million tonnes of food are wasted annually in the EU, with associated costs estimated at €143bn. With food commodity prices continuing to rise, the issue of food waste has become more compelling to foodservice operators than ever before.

On Monday 20 March 2017 at the INTERNORGA show in Hamburg, Germany, *Foodservice Consultant* hosted a roundtable, featuring a panel of consultants and industry experts, to debate the progress regarding food waste across Europe.

Michael Jones (MJ): Please tell me about your company and explain why food waste is a compelling issue for you.

Frank Wagner (FW): My consultancy company is K3 [K'Drei]. I work for major hotel companies all over the world and we came across the food waste theme through British consultant colleagues. It's a big issue for them and they always ask for food waste concepts for hotels to deal with garbage. In Germany, we are changing. We had fully automated garbage collection systems and fermenters 20 years ago; 15 years ago we demolished them because they were a hygiene risk. Now they are coming back again. Food waste is now a resource in Germany - we are using it to produce diesel and electricity. We are also giving more attention to avoiding food waste.

Peter Wiedeking (PW): Too Good to Go is a Danish start-up app business, formed in 2015. We started in Germany last year and now have over 2,000 restaurants, bakeries and hotels as partners across Europe. Food waste is a huge topic. Our partners are really curious about what to do with it. For example, I spoke a couple of weeks ago with a large hotel in Cologne, which offers a huge breakfast until 10:30am. One minute after that, the

kitchen personnel throw away everything. That is really a pity, so they want to partner with us to reduce that waste. We just go from one partner to the next and speak with them.

Teresa Sophie Rath (TSR): I am also from Too Good to Go and am new to the team. I mainly accompany Peter and work on the partnerships.

Hildegard Dorn-Petersen (HDP): I came from the hotel business and I've worked as a consultant for hotels and restaurants for 25 years. About 20 years ago I specialised in spa and wellness resorts in German-speaking countries. Food and sustainability are very important topics for wellness resorts.

Nicole Klaski (NK): I am a founder of The Good Food, a small supermarket that only sells food that otherwise would have been thrown out. We go out to the farms around Cologne and collect all the leftover vegetables: potatoes that are small or too big or crooked carrots - all the vegetables that a supermarket wouldn't take. We also have products that are out of date. We have co-operation from big food companies who send us pallets full of out-of-date

food and we sell them in our shop. Everyone can pay whatever they want for them.

Bettina von Massenbach (BvM): I've been in the restaurant industry for almost 20 years. I am just starting a new restaurant business that is focused very much on sustainability and health. Food wastage is one of the biggest issues and has to be avoided as much as possible, as well as over-production, which needs to be handled. I also want to use so-called ugly vegetables. It's going to be quite a lean menu, even though I am going to change the menu according to accessibility. What is in the fields is what's going to be in my basket.

Fritz Schneider (FS): Bio Trans is one of the oldest companies in the industry for food waste disposal systems. We have 370 installations in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Denmark, which is a very strong market. We see a huge wave coming of much stricter hygiene rules in catering, which obliges organisations to find new ways to dispose of food waste. Good hygiene practice, which is being propagated very heavily in Austria and Switzerland, is actually changing the rules and logistics of food waste, and we are part of that. Automated >





ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS:

Michael Jones
Editor, *Foodservice Consultant*
(chair)

Hildegard Dorn-Petersen FCSI
Founder, Hotec (host)

Frank Wagner FCSI
Partner, K3 (K'Drei)

Peter Wiedeking
Germany manager, Too Good To Go

Teresa Sophie Rath
PR & partnerships manager,
Too Good To Go

Nicole Klaski
Owner, The Good Food

Fritz Schneider
Director, Bio Trans AG

Bettina von Massenbach FCSI
Owner, Oyster Hospitality
Management

a very interesting concept where waste is sustainable from the very beginning and can be used for different ends. It is considered as a resource, going into the production of materials or feedstock.

MJ: Is enough being done to tackle food waste in commercial kitchens in 2017?

FS: It's a question of regulation and awareness. If I talk about food waste I mean individual food waste, while organic waste is from food production in a professional kitchen. The rules are there. We have to be realistic – there will always be food waste. The question is what you do with it to have a tradable product that you can work with and make something from.

HDP: In Germany, the topic has been neglected over the past 20 years. The government is starting to move, and it is doing many things now to encourage individual people and restaurants. It's really at a starting point now, but it's on the right road.

NK: The German government has a campaign called Too Good for the Bin, which is good and creating awareness, but I don't feel that's enough. The government said last year it was trying to get rid of use-by dates on some products, but what happened after that? Nothing. It should be easier for companies to give out the food they don't need anymore. Instead, it's very complicated. They might have to

“The German government is starting to move and it is doing many things now to encourage individuals and restaurants”

pay taxes on them. So those regulations should be eased up.

PW: Many companies don't even know if they are allowed to give away food. I talked to so many restaurants and stores and they don't want to join Too Good to Go because they are not sure about the law.

FW: Change in the law is unnecessary. HACCP has nothing to do with expiry dates. If you feed people expired food, you are taking the risk that if somebody gets hurt, they can sue you. Big companies don't want to take that risk, that's all. There is no law that says 'you are not allowed to eat yoghurt that is too old'. It's just you who has to decide.

PW: Too Good to Go sells surplus food within normal opening hours to be definitely on the safe side. We also sell warm food or prepared food, like buffet or sushi. With all the canteens, buffets or bakeries, Too Good to Go works perfectly because we're sending the customers to them, they take the food in the regular hours, so they have no regulations they really have to think about. That's our approach.

TSR: The process within Too Good to Go is very easy for customers and partners. If you have a kitchen, you always have food waste and you need to have bins especially for this kind.

BvM: It has to do with managing the expectation of clients. If I go into a shop and there is a whole range of products it takes me time to decide what I want to eat. Customers are absolutely aware that it makes it much easier for preparation in the kitchen and the whole process to have a more limited range of products

on the menu. Don't have three different soups each day, for example, because one is enough.

FW: The breakfast at a major hotel probably costs €30, so they have to offer a wide range of breakfast [to justify the amount]. Plus, they have to pay the staff. If they only offer a limited buffet and take €15 they cannot even pay for the staff.

PW: If you have à la carte or a pre-ordered breakfast, then you do not have food waste.

HDP: A couple of years ago we were given the 'gift' of tax reduction for hotels in Germany. Many hotels don't charge €30/€40 for breakfast anymore but offer a 'business package' including free parking and Wi-Fi while breakfast is only €18. The customer is happy because he pays less, but there is also a lower expectation, meaning hotels don't have to serve a full range of food. My clients are mostly privately-owned, smaller hotel

“It is to do with managing the expectation of clients. They are aware it makes it easier for the kitchen to have a limited menu”

properties. They are interested in avoiding food waste and each has its own solution, ranging from fresh cooking or only providing three menus in the evening. I have one customer on the Baltic Sea and they do a huge breakfast buffet that is served until 11am. But from 11am until 1pm, this buffet is also lunch for the staff. It's perfect.

BvM: Customers increasingly realise that a huge range of buffet is overkill.

FW: I started 25 years ago with the rule “if you want to do a buffet, people will only eat 80% of it”. That was the old rule. I think they are still following that in the States. It wasn't bad 20 years ago, but now it is.

MJ: Nicole, how scalable is your concept?

NK: Cologne is perfect to start, but I think other big cities, such as Hamburg and Berlin, would also work. My shop is in a nice suburb where there is a lot of cultural diversity. But those cities are all over the world, so it would be very scalable.

MJ: Fritz, for your company to sell products to another country, such as the UK, does the biomass infrastructure have to be in place?

FS: Yes, and the digestion plant, the collecting services and the trucks. The UK has that. For individual food waste, Germany has a huge infrastructure of biogas and anaerobic digestion plants, as does Denmark, Austria and Switzerland. Other countries like France and Italy are also coming up now. If there is organic waste, you need to do something sensible with it. Composting or just throwing it into bags for incineration plants is not a sustainable concept. A concept >



like sustainable waste management makes what we produce in our systems valuable. Waste should have a value, and that creates a huge dynamic. I see that developments in Denmark with pure biomass that has a very low contaminant are actually getting value.

FW: Food waste is different in every country. Every culture uses a different product. In the Middle East they use packed soil composting, selling it in bags in shops such as Ikea. Asians work with genetically modified organisms to have high-speed composting, but you don't want those bacteria in the kitchen.

NK: Food waste in India is completely different. There is a really different culture about food. Having lots of food indicates "I am rich and I can afford for food to be wasted". I spoke with a lot of organisations that are open towards the [food waste] theme, but at a big Indian wedding, guests will not touch food left at the end, even if it is very high quality. Because the Indian economy is growing it will get to a stage where food waste will also happen in supermarkets because people want to live like we do here. So now is the point to get in there and tell them "please, do better than us".

FW: My daughter was in Argentina for a long time and she would always eat vegetables with spots on them. She came back, and after three months, she was picking the ones without spots again. If the people know that vegetables have got spots on them and you can still eat them, they will buy them. But if we always try to make them perfect...

BvM: It's still a cultural thing and a question of marketing. It is a lot to do with educating people, making them



"Eradication of waste is utopian, but I see lots of energy flowing into waste reduction and lots of innovation"

aware of what kind of value has been produced by human beings for really good food – 40% is being thrown away. It's unbelievable.

NK: It's such a shame the farmers have to waste every second potato here in Germany. On some farms 40% to 50% of their harvest is going to waste, and it's due to the regulation of the supermarkets. It's a loss for the farmer. He doesn't want to waste it – it's that he can't sell it.

BvM: And that impacts on price, of course, because for the 'good' goods, they have to sell them over-priced to make up the difference. We need support from government. We can't work against them.

FS: Eradication of waste is utopian, but I see lots of energy flowing into waste reduction and management and lots of innovation. It's become a topic in restaurants. No caterer wants to waste money. This is a business concept that brings ecological value. You cannot force people by law to do something they don't believe in. But if the energy is there, things will move.

NK: We have to move away from only concentrating on the end consumer. There is food waste in each household, but there is more wastage happening with supermarkets and producers. A lot still has to be done.

FW: I feel positive about this. We are being confronted with the need for food waste concepts everywhere.

PW: I am also positive for the future, but a lot still needs to be done. Five years ago nobody thought about food waste. Now they have. We need more conversations and more start-ups in this business.

HDP: For me, the future is a new conscience about food, especially from the young. They ask: "Where does my food come from? What's its quality?" Young people like to share experiences and talk about food, so there is a big chance for restaurants to tell stories about their food.

TSR: I am a strong believer in the power of consumers. Initiatives like ours bring different players to the table. You have consumers who are aware of the problem and who feel good about themselves by doing something about it. Now businesses are taking action. So everyone is acting together. That's a good thing. The blame game is a big problem, but with initiatives like this you don't have that, because everyone is working together. ■