

The UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Zero Waste

RECOOPEREM: Food Sustainability Vallès Occidental



Zero waste good practice

Consell Comarcal del Vallès Occidental

Vallès Occidental Spain

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About

Synopsis

Collecting surplus and unmarketable but healthy food for consumption. Promoting zero food waste, social inclusion and equality in the Vallès Occidental region.

Implementation
period

2015 - now

Country

Spain

Location

**Vallès Occi-
dental**

Stakeholders and Partners: Driving force: Council of the Vallès Occidental region (Consell Comarcal del Vallès Occidental). Stakeholders and partners: Waste consortium, Local councils, Health Agency of Catalonia, Agència de residus de Catalunya (Waste Management Agency of Catalonia), other public administrations, social canteens, social entities, social agents, schools and training centres, catering companies, other private companies with catering services, regional wholesale market (Mercavallès), Hospital, technological and research Centres of the region etc.

Connection to Zero Waste

Since 2015, it has been leading the Re Cooperem project in schools, which consists of recovering surplus food from schools and other food production centres for redistribution to the public, especially among the most vulnerable groups. The project is developed with the involvement of different agents in each territory that guarantee the traceability, quality and healthiness of the food. The success of the project and its growth is remarkable. Between 2015 and 2023, more than 95,000 meals have been served, reaching more than 4,000 families and avoiding the generation of more than 37,000 kilos of waste. In addition, since 2021, a new food collection line has also been added to the project at the Mercavalles, the regional wholesale market, where in just 2 years more than 90,000 kg of fresh food (fruit and vegetables) have been used, avoiding this amount of food waste.

Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

The RECOOPEREM project was conceived in 2014 and implemented in 2015, before the SDGs were taken into account. In the years that followed, the project was found to fit with some of the SDGs, which the project has so far been aligned: contributing to poverty reduction by ensuring access to quality food for low-income people, thereby reducing socioeconomic inequality (G1, G2 and G10), redistributing healthy fresh and cooked food to improve the health of vulnerable groups (G3), promoting and implementing circular solutions to build more sustainable cities by helping producers and consumers to be more responsible and sustainable (G11 and G12), avoiding waste of resources and food-waste, and reducing environmental impact (G13), creating alliances between agents and entities from different social spheres to achieve the objectives (G17).



Background, Challenges and Objectives

“Our key challenges include preventing and reducing food waste and its economic, environmental, and social impacts. In Catalonia alone, an average of 35kg per inhabitant per year is lost, with up to 50% of fruit and vegetables produced lost in the supply chain.”

The RECOOPEREM project and its actions are based on European, national and regional regulations and recommendations such as the UN's 2030 Agenda, the “Farm to Fork” Strategy approved by the European Commission in 2020, the Law 3/2020, of 11 March, on the prevention of food losses and food wastage in Catalonia or also the Strategic food plan for Catalonia 2021-2026, which sets out the following challenges for the Catalan territory:

- To promote a socially sustainable food model that is accessible to all.
- To guarantee that the Catalan food system is a tool for mitigating the climate emergency.
- To guarantee the balance of the system through a fair and equitable distribution of value among all the agents in the food chain.
- To promote collaboration and cooperation between the actors in the food value chain in Catalonia.
- To ensure that the population maintains healthy eating habits.

The Consell Comarcal del Vallès Occidental is committed to working for the development of regional initiatives aimed at making the most of food and fighting food waste. It has therefore decided to promote this project together with the other local administrations of the territory and with the collaboration of citizens, social entities and public and private companies.

Our key challenges:

1. Preventing and reducing food waste and its economic, environmental and social impacts.

In Catalonia, 35 kg on average per inhabitant per year and 95 kg on average per inhabitant in Europe (2012) are lost at the last stage of the chain. FAO (2021) indicates that up to 50% of the fruit and vegetables produced are lost in the supply chain between harvest and consumption. In addition, there is the environmental cost of all this wasted food. Between 21 and 27% of total global greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to the food system, taking into account land use, agriculture, transport, packaging, processing, sale and consumption.

2. Dignifying the right to food and promote a healthy and wholesome diet.

In 2019, 18.8% of the catalan population was at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion, and has been growing to 21% in 2020 (Idescat, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has further worsened this situation and has placed the child poverty rate in Catalonia (age under 18) at 33.4% in 2021, confirming its upward trend. In 2019, 21.4% of people living in poverty had to ask family or friends for help with food, clothing and other basic goods, and 12.3% asked for help from entities and other non-profit organisations (AROPE Report, 2020). In terms of the type of food that is redistributed to citizens, it's worth noting the need to provide fresh, vegetable, cooked and healthy food. According to the Barcelona Provincial Council's report on Food Distribution Services (2019), the predominant model of donation of food parcels is not particularly beneficial either from the point of view of the social work of empowerment (the person loses autonomy to decide and stock up on food on their own), or proper nutrition (the parcels delivered have deficits in terms of fresh and healthy food).

The Recooperem project places special emphasis on guaranteeing rations of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and cooked meals in general to ensure that people in vulnerable situations have access to a complete and healthy diet. This initiative is focused on the territory of 1 million inhabitants.

Actions and Implementation

In the actions and implementation chapter, the steps taken to achieve sustainable waste management are outlined.

Chronology of the implementation of RECOOPEREM in Vallès Occidental:

2015 - Initial pilot test in a small municipality (Rellinars).

2015-2016 - incorporation of 4 new municipalities (Castellar, Sant Llorenç, Matadepera, Viladecavalls).

2017 - Incorporation of 2 new municipalities (Rubí and Terrassa).

2019 - Incorporation of 1 new municipality (Sant Cugat).

2020 - Incorporation of 1 new municipality (Palau).

2020 - Study of organic waste data on the market and planning of Circular Market actions. First contacts, information and awareness of market entrepreneurs.

2021 - Awareness-raising and information campaign for the wholesale market MERCIVALLES entrepreneurs and start of fruit and vegetable collection.

2021 - Incorporation of first private companies.

2022 – Incorporation of more municipalities.

2022-2023 - Pilot test of digitalisation and cycling in Castellar and Palau / Purchase of sustainable vehicles.

2023 - Contracting of CIPO Entity to carry out the tasks of collect and delivery of foodstuffs.

2023 - Incorporation of first hospital (Terrassa).

The different actions and phases of the project are 1) collection points, 2) logistics network, 3) distribution network, 4) Community and 5) crosscutting resources. The collection points are the set of spaces where the project's food surplus or waste originates and where the prevention and recovery of food waste is initiated. The collection points of cooked meals in this project are the food production centres where the project's food surplus or waste originates and where the prevention and recovery of food waste is initiated: currently the project is being developed in some canteens of schools in the region, canteens of private companies and the canteen of a hospital. The project continues to expand year after year with the participation of more schools, as well as companies with canteen services. The intention is to incorporate more hospitals, catering companies and others.

The way it works is as follows:

1. Surplus food that has not been handled or served and complies with the corresponding hygienic and nutritional conditions is packed in compostable recipients.
2. They are refrigerated, if necessary, and then frozen at the appropriate temperature and stored in the freezer.
3. All frozen foods are recorded in a database indicating name, facility reference, date of freezing and units.
4. The food is then collected from the production site and transported, maintaining the cold chain and following traceability protocols to the point of delivery.
5. Finally, they are delivered to the public for consumption.

The fresh food collection point set up at Mercavallès (the county's wholesale fresh food market). Its aim is to reduce food losses of fruit and vegetables in order to provide fresh, quality food to people in need of food support in the county.

It is divided into 3 phases:

Outcomes and Impact

Environmental, economic and social impact generated

- Contribution to the ecological transition:
- Less organic waste in the county and therefore reduced CO2 emissions, reduced recycling/composting costs, etc. Less food waste and smaller ecological footprint.
- More sustainable urban and interurban transport for the transport of recovered food.

Increased number of families with quality food support:

- Increase in families able to access quality fresh food (vegetables and fruits).
- More food resources for people in fuel poverty and other specific situations that make it difficult to access healthy food.
- Contribution to society:
- More companies working along the lines of preventing food waste and making loss plans.
- Increase in the number of school students and teachers who are aware of food waste and food recovery.
- Contribution to digital transformation
- Digitisation of distribution processes and traceability of recovered food.
- Links with other actors (public or private) and/or projects in the field of action.
- Networking and generation of synergies between the agents involved.

This project aims to respond to the main global and local challenges that the territory will have to face over the coming years in social, economic and environmental terms.

Recognitions of good practice and awards that have been granted to RECOOPEREM:

"Alimentem el Món" Award, for projects and initiatives that promote sustainable development in the agri-food sector (2023).

Recognition of Good Local Government Practice. By the Fundació Pi i Sunyer and the Federació de Municipis de Catalunya (2023).

"REZERO" Award, public administration category. For its contribution to zero waste (2021).

"Climate Action". Award by the Catalan Association of Municipalities (2021).

"ACCESIT", social category, by the Public Health Agency of Catalonia (2018).

Cumulative results since 2021 (Fresh food):
91,873 kg of fruit and vegetables recovered

Total families benefited: 4,316
Total Food Waste avoided: 129,046.41 kg

Cumulative results since 2015 (Cooked meals):

95,320 cooked meals recovered
37,173.41 kg recovered

Replicability and Scaleability

The characteristics of this project make it replicable to other territories, both at local level, as has already been demonstrated with the incorporation of new municipalities over the years, and at regional level.

The context that is needed is: that there is a waste of food, and food losses in the territory that can be consumed and has no commercial outlet and that there are agents working in a network to support groups with socio-economic and food needs, and at the same time incorporate a sustainable vision in their actions.

Its replication is highly recommended due to the positive numbers of this project in terms of the volume of waste avoided, the number of people in need benefited and the commitment to a circular initiative with social, economic and environmental impact, as a sustainable solution to address the challenges above mentioned.

Inclusion and Innovation

RECOOPEREM is indeed an inclusive and innovative practice for its commitment to sustainability since 2015, it is therefore a social and environmental initiative. It is included in the programme of fragile population and social inclusion carried out by the Regional Council with the aim of supporting the most vulnerable people to fight poverty and promote equal access to resources. At the same time, the project manages to reduce the number of foodstuffs in good condition that previously ended up in the rubbish bin because there had been no organised channel for their use.

It is a good practice of public-private collaboration given that it allows for collaboration at different levels and actions: catering companies, with food left over that they want to give; the local councils of the region that participate in the search for beneficiary families and the distribution of the food and the social entities that participate in the logistics of the project.

The distribution of food is carried out with the collaboration of public schools, catering companies operating canteen services, town councils and municipal food pantries.

Throughout the years of project development, the different agents and entities have been mobilized to jointly plan and implement the circuits necessary for the success of the project.

Accountability and Sustainability

The Regional Council of Vallès Occidental has different tools for planning and monitoring the development of social responsibility and sustainability policies which, based on the needs and characteristics of the territory, aim to respond to the territorial challenges in the short, medium and long term. The most relevant ones are summarized below:

- **Regional Action Program 2021-2024:** This is conceived as the roadmap for the regional institution for the coming years. It is articulated and ordered according to 4 axes that want to respond to four major areas of intervention and regional action: Governance, Inclusion and social cohesion, Economic recovery and Ecological transition. Within this last area, Program 4.22.3. Vallès circular food, which aims to promote the recycling of organic matter and the use of waste throughout the food value chain and the promotion of county initiatives for the use of food for social purposes.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility Plan:** an instrument to deepen the social, economic and environmental commitment of the institution and the territory as a whole and which includes a set of lines of work for the coming years in this area.

These two plans contemplate the alignment of the proposed lines and measures with the SDGs and their contribution. In this way, the needs and challenges linked to food sustainability policies are addressed from a cross-cutting perspective that seeks to integrate the five dimensions of the 2030 Agenda (People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnership).

The institution also has other instruments and commitments to climate action and sustainability:

- It is part of the Network of Cities and Towns towards Sustainability, which is an association of municipalities committed to the environment in order to move towards sustainable development.
- It is adhered to the commitments of Climate Action of the Generalitat de Catalunya which includes several initiatives that contribute to a faster, fairer and more efficient transition to a carbon neutral economy.
- It is part of the Network of Cities and Towns towards Sustainability, for a green and socially fair recovery, promoted by the Diputació de Barcelona.
- It is a member of the Food Charter of the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona, which is an instrument of strategic coordination for the development of local and metropolitan food policies.

Regarding the monitoring of the results, the results indicators of the activities carried out are collected annually and the corresponding reports are prepared. These results are analysed in coherence with the annual Priority Plan that accompanies the approved budget and contemplates the planning of the actions to be developed for each of the programs of the Regional Action Program 2021-2024.

Financial Data

Throughout the nine years of development of the project, from its inception (in 2015) to the present, the total budget of the various activities and phases of the project implemented by the Regional Council of Vallès Occidental has been approximately €470,000 (510,000 USD). This budget includes the corresponding expenses in human resources as well as the investments and hiring necessary for the development of the activities.

The financing has contemplated the contribution of the Regional Council's own resources for all the years, as well as the subsidy of the Agencia de Residus de Catalunya (waste management entity of the Regional Administration of Catalonia), with a contribution to the project of €87,626 (95,035.22 USD) throughout the years 2019-2024.

In recent years the project has incorporated a technical person dedicated to the development of project activities and with experience and knowledge in waste prevention. This knowledge and technical expertise has been complemented with the participation of external professionals and experts and with the collaboration with other entities in the territory or at regional level that also develop food wastage prevention policies.

In relation to IT resources, over the last two years we have worked to advance in the digitization of related processes, especially with the distribution and traceability of food with guarantees, incorporating both specific software and IT equipment.

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