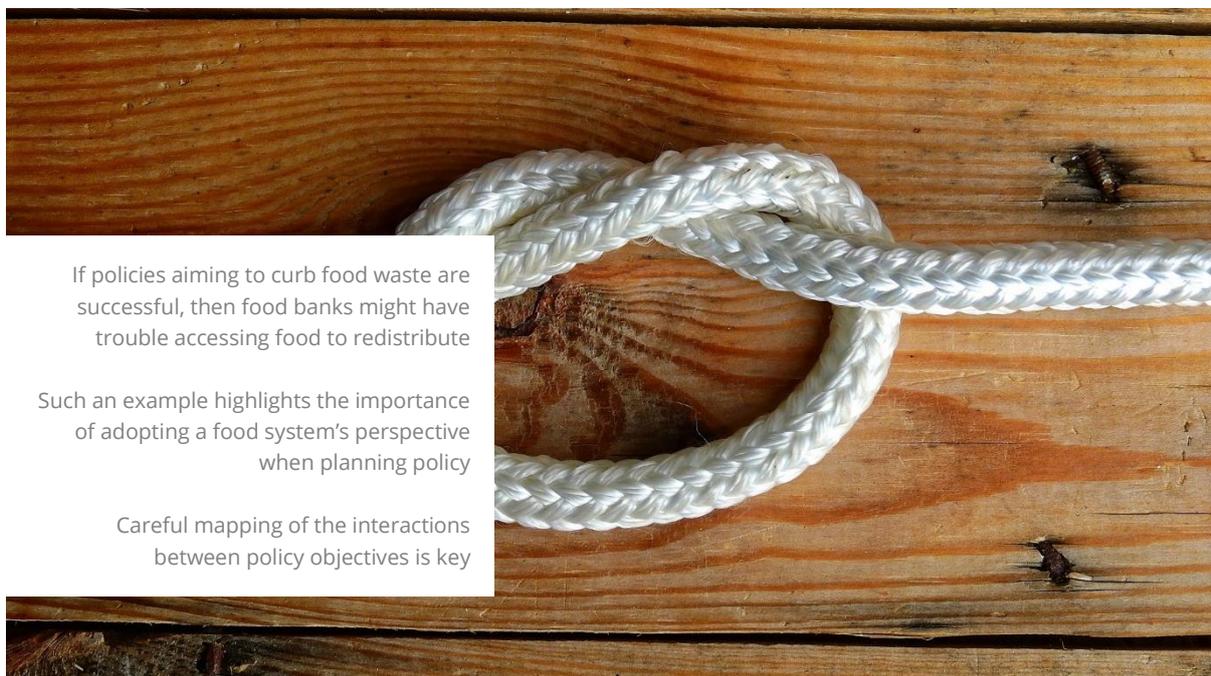


The unintended consequences of successful urban food policies



If policies aiming to curb food waste are successful, then food banks might have trouble accessing food to redistribute

Such an example highlights the importance of adopting a food system's perspective when planning policy

Careful mapping of the interactions between policy objectives is key

In our current food system, plagued by both food poverty and food waste, food poverty alleviation can take the form of surplus food redistribution. But what if, tomorrow, we manage to curb food surplus and waste? How should food aid organisations anticipate such a situation? And what can local authorities do to smoothen the transition? This issue is discussed in a recent paper from researchers from the Universities of Pisa and Macerata (Italy). Their research highlights the importance of adopting a food system approach to urban food policies.

Two objectives pointing to a trade-off

Alleviating food poverty and cutting down food waste are two valuable policy goals for any city embarking on a food policy journey. What is less tangible, though, is that these two food policy themes are closely interconnected. Indeed, nowadays, many food aid organisations retrieve surplus food and give it to people in need. Therefore, **food surplus recovery for food donation is at the crossroads between two different universes: on the one hand, food waste prevention, and, on the other, food poverty alleviation.**

However, even if these two policy goals are closely interwoven, the impact of achieving one (reducing food waste) on the other (alleviating urgent food needs) is rarely studied. This is all the more important as the European food waste hierarchy adopted in 2018 places food waste prevention above donation: food waste should first be avoided, and then, what remains should be given for human consumption (before animal feeding or recycling).

Albane GASPARD

October 2019

Urban Food Futures would like to thank [Francesca Galli](#) for her inputs and comments.

Source:

[Galli, F., Cavicchi, A. & Brunori, G., "Food waste reduction and food poverty alleviation: a system dynamics conceptual model". Agric Hum Values \(2019\) 36: 289](#)

Picture credits:

[Pixabay](#)

Icons:

[people](#), By [Wilson Joseph](#), In the [People icons group of men persons vector symbols Collection](#)
[Food Bank](#), By [Iconathon, US](#), In the [Food and Nutrition Collection](#)
[Abundance](#), By [Luis Prado, US](#)

You can find this article on the URL below:

<http://www.urbanfoodfutures.com/trade-offs>



What will happen if policies aiming to curb food waste are successful? Will food banks have trouble accessing food to redistribute?

The researchers took the time to map the relationships between these two policy themes, and they also studied a past situation during which food assistance organisations had to deal with a shortage, when changes were made to the European programme of food aid for the most deprived (FEAD) in the 2010's.

By looking more closely into how both policy silos work, they identify two main strategies that food aid organisations can adopt to anticipate such a transition.

Increasing the amount of food saved

A first strategy consists in increasing the amount of food saved. Indeed, there will always be some level of surplus in a healthy food system (even if the exact volume of it is difficult to gauge). Food surplus becomes food waste if it cannot be recovered for human consumption. Therefore, **one solution could be to improve the recoverability of food surplus**. If we increase the proportion of this unavoidable surplus that is recovered, then more food will be available for redistribution.

How can food recoverability be increased? It depends on the one hand, on the characteristics of food itself (shelf life, need for refrigeration...), and, on the other, on the amount of efforts needed to recover it (maintenance, preservation, enhancement...). Therefore, **any policy that lifts barriers to donations and alleviates efforts to recover food will be a step in the right direction**. According to the researchers, this includes tackling issues such as *“lack of knowledge by donors on foodstuff suitable for donation [or] insufficient logistical frameworks in place to facilitate large and small-scale donation”*.

Reinforcing food bank capacity

The second strategy is to reinforce food bank capacity, to help them to make the most of any recovered food. This can take several forms:

- **Ensuring adequate infrastructure and equipment** (such as warehouses, refrigeration or trucks). Here, cities can help food aid organisations finding space to operate.
- **Reinforcing human resources:** food aid organisations often rely on volunteers. This means they have to put extra effort into recruiting, managing and ensuring the long-term involvement of their workforce. They also need very specific project and planning skills. Any help on human resources management would alleviate them from time-consuming tasks and allow them to focus on their core activity.
- **Finding new ways to recover food that is not surplus food.** For instance, through food drives (events where citizens are encouraged to buy food and donate it) or by collecting monetary donations in order to buy food.

Cities should adopt a system's perspective

According to Francesca Galli, the article lead author, such an analysis highlights the importance of adopting a food system's perspective when planning urban food policy. Indeed, **food policy objectives can be**

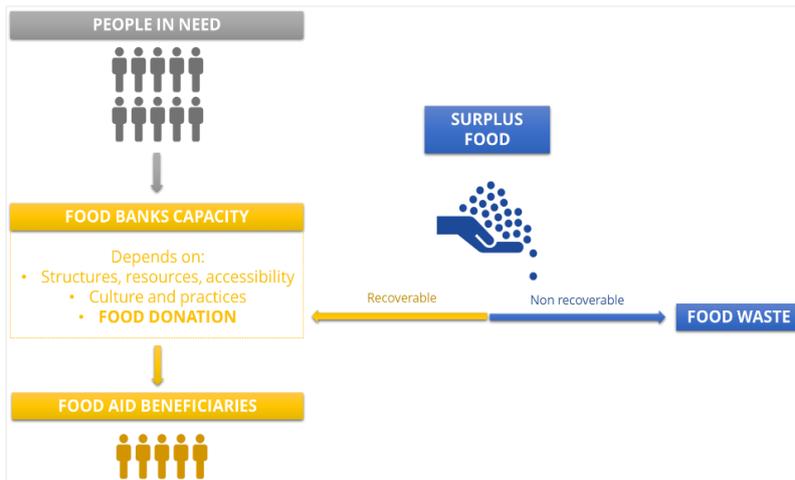
Sign up for our [bi-monthly Coffee Break newsletter](#).
Every other Friday, take your coffee with a shot of urban food science directly delivered to your inbox.

Your mission? Make the coffee.
Our mission? Deliver you an easy-to-read information to go with it!

[Sign up here](#)



interconnected in ways that are not easily perceived when policy makers work in their silos.



Source: *Urban Food Futures*, from Galli et al (2019)

This article is a good example of how a conceptual mapping of causes and consequences of policies can help identify trade-offs. The next step would be to quantify such relationships with a quantitative model. Indeed, policy makers, both at the national and local level, should help food aid organisations quantify the challenges ahead. This way, the transition to a more sustainable urban food system will be anticipated and organised.

Sign up for our [bi-monthly Coffee Break newsletter](#).
Every other Friday, take your coffee with a shot of urban food science directly delivered to your inbox.

Your mission? Make the coffee.
Our mission? Deliver you an easy-to-read information to go with it!

[Sign up here](#)

