

CHORIZO: Changing practices and Habits through Open, Responsible, and social Innovation towards ZerO food

Aligning values and actions: Understanding Corporate Food Donation choices in Hungary

What is preventing companies from donating food surplus, although this is socially desirable? To find answers to this question, within the CHORIZO project it was explored which behaviours are influencing food surplus donation in the corporate sector in Hungary and which of these are the most significant ones in shaping decisions.

Background to the study?

Over 1.8 million tons of food is thrown away annually in Hungary, while thousands of people are starving. If the production of food surplus cannot be prevented, the best solution is to redistribute this food for human consumption.

Donating food also reduces the amount of energy, water, and other resources that are used to grow, transport, and process food, so it contributes to environmental protection.

Assuming that any company (including retailers, food processors, restaurants, hotels) involved in the food industry likely has some degree of food surplus that could be donated, the study aimed to identify the barriers that prevent companies from participating in this socially valuable practice.



Methodology used

To gather data on the corporate donor environment and the influence of social norms on food donations, the study utilized qualitative research methods, focusing on semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders from different sectors. In total, five interviews were conducted with food retailers, five with hospitality companies, ten with food processors, and ten with charities and NGOs. This method provided researchers with detailed insights into the decision-making processes within these companies

Findings of the study and reflections

1) Unjustified fear of potential negative consequences of food donations

The most significant finding of the study was the paramount importance of food safety concerns in the decision processes to donate food or not.

Companies expressed reluctance to donate surplus food due to their unjustified fear of potential legal consequences or negative public perception if the donated food did not meet safety standards.

What can be done? In order to reduce their concerns HFBA should strengthen its communication about the food safety activities approved by National Food Chain Safety Office and applied by HFBA and the involved charitable organisations.

Charitable organizations should establish and communicate clear guidelines for effective storage and handling practices that reassure companies about the safety of their donated food.

These socio-economic benefits highlight the multifaceted advantages of addressing food waste through technological innovation and strategic interventions across the food supply chain.



2) Prioritisation of immediate financial benefits of discounting surplus

The study also revealed that companies often prioritize the immediate financial benefits of discounting surplus products over the longer-term, intangible advantages of donating the food, such as improved social image of the company.

While food donations could enhance the company's social image and help achieve corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives, the direct economic gains from selling surplus food at a discount are easier to quantify and measure, making this option more appealing from a business standpoint. their way of thinking.

What can be done? If HFBA raised awareness among companies about the ultimate destination of their donations, how these donations help people in need, and the long-term social benefits of such actions then they would better understand **the social impact and importance of food donation and its effect on the corporate image**, and it would help them changing



3) Crucial role of personal commitments and values

The study confirmed that personal commitment of company managers to social causes, such as reducing food waste and supporting those in need, plays a crucial role in influencing whether their companies chose to donate surplus food.

Managers with a strong sense of social responsibility were more likely to champion food donations, even in cases where the economic justification was less convincing.

Their personal values often led them to push for donation initiatives, demonstrating that individual beliefs could sometimes outweigh purely financial considerations in shaping corporate practices.

What can be done? "Internal champions" — individuals within companies who are passionate about social causes — should be identified and directly engaged through various networks. They could be the seed of newly imposed social norms around food donating.



Summary of how to work with social norms in the field of corporate food donation

In conclusion, addressing food companies' concerns related to food safety is crucial. This can help alleviate legal fears and encourage more companies to participate in food donation. By highlighting the long-term benefits of socially responsible practices, companies can be encouraged to adopt more sustainable and socially impactful approaches to managing food surplus.

"Internal champions" — individuals within companies who are passionate about social causes — should be identified and directly engaged through various networks.

These individuals can not only influence immediate decisions but also play a key role in shaping the company's long-term strategies, as well as shaping new social norms around food waste donation, thereby fostering a more socially responsible and impactful approach to surplus food management.

The research was conducted in Hungary, and barriers to donation can be different other countries; therefore, further studies would be beneficial to explore cross-country differences in corporate food donation practices and the factors influencing them.

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