

A02: Moving towards a food-waste free world: Combining different approaches to reduce food waste

Session Chair: Ilona de Hooge
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Reducing food waste of suboptimal products with authenticity and sustainability marketing strategies

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It is gradually becoming acknowledged that humans' use of natural resources exceeds the planet's possibilities (Steffen et al., 2015), making it essential to reduce our resource usage. The production of food requires extensive use of natural resources (FAO, 2013), and produces greenhouse gas emissions (Garnett, 2011). Yet, about one-third of all food produced is wasted (FAO, 2013; Parfitt et al., 2010), amounting to millions of tons of food being wasted yearly (Buzby & Hyman, 2012; Buzby et al., 2011). The reduction of food waste is therefore stated as one of the necessary world-wide actions for a more sustainable future.

One of the essential causes of food waste is supply chain actors' and consumers' unwillingness to sell, buy, or consume suboptimal products. These products diverge from the perfect standards on the basis of peripheral product aspects, such as appearance, but not on the basis of product quality or safety (De Hooge, 2021, De Hooge et al., 2017). Consumers appear unwilling to buy suboptimal products, which in turn motivates supply chain actors to remove suboptimal products from the production line. Therefore, motivating consumers to purchase suboptimal products would reduce food waste at all steps of the supply chain.

Yet, it is currently unclear how consumers can be motivated to purchase suboptimal products in ways that are also sustainable and financially viable for supply chain actors. Multiple studies have examined potential marketing strategies for suboptimal products, but they either have difficulties motivating consumers to purchase suboptimal products (e.g., Aschemann-Witzel, 2017, 2018), or difficulties motivating consumers in a way that supply chain actors would support (De Hooge, 2022; De Hooge et al., 2018; Raak et al., 2017).

The current research examines how consumers can be encouraged to purchase suboptimal products in viable ways for supply chain actors. We present two marketing strategies, namely sustainability and authenticity marketing strategies. The sustainability strategy provides consumers with information on sustainability aspects related to food waste of suboptimal products (e.g., "Embrace imperfection: Join the fight against food waste!"). The authenticity strategy highlights the product's genuineness, origin, or naturalness (e.g., "Naturally imperfect: Apples the way they actually look!"). In a series of three experiments, conducted in different European countries, we examined whether these two marketing strategies would affect consumers' quality perceptions of, and purchase intentions for suboptimal products. Compared to a situation without marketing strategies, both sustainability and authenticity strategies

appeared to increase consumers' purchase intentions for suboptimal products. In addition, the authenticity strategy increased consumers' quality perceptions of suboptimal products. Moreover, in two field experiments we examined whether the two strategies would increase suboptimal products sales. At both a local market and in a supermarket, sustainability and authenticity marketing strategies increased the sales of suboptimal products. Together, these findings reveal that sustainability and authenticity strategies can benefit suboptimal products, and can thus support the fight against food waste.