



## Food Loss Definitions in Europe

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### Definitions

Part of WP1 of the FOLOU project was the collection of all available data on food loss in the European countries. Due to the lack of an established definition of food loss, a variety of interpretations are evident throughout the continent. Table 1 lists all the identified definitions of food loss and their data sources.

**Table 1: List of Food Loss definitions, their associated countries and their sources**

| # | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Countries | Source / URL                 |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Food waste: "any food, and the inedible parts of food, that are removed from the food supply chain to be recovered or disposed of (all including the following destinations: composting, unharvested food, anaerobic digestion, bioenergy production, co-generation, incineration, sewage, controlled landfill or disposal of fishing at sea)".                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Spain     | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 2 | The definitions referred in the official report are taken from the guide "Implementation of a food loss and waste prevention and reduction plan in agri-food companies: principles and guidelines, from 2019. The definitions are:<br>- Food wastage: edible parts of food that become food waste.<br>- Food Loss: edible parts of food that remain during harvesting itself, whether reincorporated into the soil or used for on-site composting.<br>In the diagnosis, we have entered a new term "Crop left in the field" to refer to the edible parts and inedible parts of the food that is left on the field, whether reincorporated into the soil or used for on-site composting.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Spain     | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 3 | Loss is considered the circumstance under which food suffers deterioration and is no longer fit for consumption. Losses occur throughout the entire food chain, occurring for various reasons such as climatic conditions, pests, storage of products, etc. In developed countries losses are more frequent at the beginning of the chain (production, post- production and transformation) and especially in the post-production phase (Bagherzadeh et al., 2014; Martindale and Schiebel, 2017). MAGRAMA (2014) considers that losses occur when organic products generated during the agrifood transformation process are rejected because they do not meet the required quality criteria. This means that losses are intrinsic to the production process (Bonadonna et al., 2019) and although while in some cases these are inevitable, they can sometimes be eliminated by solving existing deficiencies in infrastructure or by improving the management of the food process (Parfitt et al., 2010). | Spain     | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |



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| 4  | Food losses: Edible parts of animals that have reached the weight and maturity for slaughter, which were either slaughtered on the farm, died during transport to the slaughterhouse, or were withdrawn from the chain before being slaughtered at the slaughterhouse.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Spain                                                                                  | <a href="#">Governmental</a>       |
| 5  | "the decrease in the quantity or quality of food resulting from decisions and actions by food suppliers in the chain, excluding retailers, food service providers and consumers..." (FAO)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Italy                                                                                  | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 6  | The volumes of unsold indicate the quantities of primary and/or processed product that have been produced by the company but have not been sold. In addition to the volumes of unsold, it was requested to indicate the volumes of unsold product that is used for reuse or enhancement (different options possible). By subtracting from the volumes of unsold quantities for which there are options for reuse or valorisation, it was possible to arrive at the quantities of waste generated by the company.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Italy                                                                                  | Governmental*                      |
| 7  | In the BREADCRUMB project, the EC's definition of FW, which is considered broader and takes into all food supply chain (FSC) stages is adopted. Specifically, Directive 2008/98/EC3 defines FW as all food that has become waste.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Italy,<br>Belgium,<br>Netherlands,<br>Germany,<br>Portugal,<br>Slovenia,<br>Spain      | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 8  | (i) Food loss refers to food initially produced for human consumption but that was discarded or lost at any stage along the food supply chain.<br>(ii) Inedible parts of food, which by definition are not considered appropriate for human consumption, cannot be considered food loss (for example, fruit pits, inedible parts of the fifth quarter of animals, or by-products from first-stage plant processing).<br>(iii) Food discarded from human consumption that is recycled as feed for food-producing animals (animal feed), returning indirectly after conversion by food-producing animals into the food-system, is not considered food loss in this study; however, discarded food used for pet food is considered food loss                                     | France                                                                                 | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 9  | In the original model (Caldeira et al., 2019b), food waste was defined as: 'food and inedible parts of food removed from the food supply chain' to be recovered or disposed (including: composted, crops ploughed in/ not harvested, anaerobic digestion, bioenergy production, co- generation, incineration, disposal to sewer, landfill or discarded to sea) (FUSIONS, 2014). Instead, in the current model (version 1.0) the food waste definition has been aligned with the EU food waste definition (see Section 2.2), which does not include crops left in field or ploughed-in and the mortality of animals ready for slaughter in the accounting of food waste. These quantities are nevertheless estimated by the updated model, and are designated as "food losses" | France                                                                                 | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 10 | whereby losses are due to a deterioration or disappearance of the product mainly caused by the (mal)functioning of the food production and supply system which tend to affect lower income countries. Whereas, waste is the removal of food that is fit to consumption mainly due to economic or social behaviour, which is more characteristic of higher income countries with high consumption levels. In this regard, both losses and waste occur at every stage of a food chain and the distinction is not always clear. For a simplification in measurement, the amounts that leave the chain are counted at the point of removal, regardless of waste or loss and can be further assessed after the quantitative measures taken.                                        | Denmark,<br>Finland,<br>France,<br>Norway,<br>Sweden,<br>Switzerland,<br>Great Britain | <a href="#">NGO</a>                |
| 11 | The data were analysed and split into two categories:<br>1. food loss, i.e. a loss in potential food produced prior to the harvest of crops or animal products, including meat; and<br>2. food waste, i.e. the loss of harvested food before it can pass into the next stage of the supply chain.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Ireland                                                                                | <a href="#">Governmental</a>       |
| 12 | Food waste: Includes all usable parts of the crop produced for humans, but which have been discarded or taken out of the food chain for purposes other than human food from the time it is harvested.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Norway                                                                                 | <a href="#">Governmental</a>       |
| 13 | In order to get a holistic approach of primary production we have proposed the term side flow instead of food loss or food waste. We define side flow in primary production as:<br>- Primary products that were intended to be eaten by human.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Denmark,<br>Norway,<br>Sweden                                                          | <a href="#">Inter-governmental</a> |



|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                     |                              |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The parts of food that are expected to be consumed, thus inedible parts of food e.g. peels and bones are excluded.</li> <li>- Crops, fruit and berries that are mature for harvest, wild fruit and berries at the time of harvest, domesticated animals from birth, wild animals when they are caught or killed, milk that is drawn from animals, eggs which are laid, wild fish/shellfish when caught, farmed fish from hatching.</li> </ul> <p>Primary products that are removed from the food supply chain<sup>4</sup> before they enter the next step of the food supply chain (e.g. slaughter, retail, processing).</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                     |                              |
| 14 | <p>Within the scope of this study, two different types of field losses were considered contributing to the total on-site loss: Firstly, potatoes that are not collected by the harvester and therefore remain in the soil. This share is referred to as loss 1. Secondly, all potatoes that are automatically or manually sorted out during the harvesting process because of technical reasons or quality requirements (e.g., oversized or damaged). This share is referred to as loss 2.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Austria,<br>Germany | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 15 | <p>When food is consumed by people (FOOD CONSUMPTION), it has achieved its original purpose. If food is ultimately not consumed by people, we refer to this as FOOD LOSS. This is the Flemish concept and the definition that is used in the declaration of commitment and the Food supply chain roadmap. The term 'loss' merely indicates a loss of food for human consumption. It does not mean that this flow is not given a useful destination or valorisation. There is a loss of food for human consumption, but the material can still be given a useful, even high-quality valorisation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Belgium             | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 16 | <p>According to FAO 2014 (FAO, 2014. Definitional Framework of Food Loss. Working paper. Rome) food loss refers to any substance, whether processed, semi-processed or raw, which was initially intended for human consumption but was discarded or lost at any stage of the supply chain. It concerns to every non-food use, including discarded food that was originally produced for human consumption and then recycled into animal feed.</p> <p>Furthermore, the distinction between 'avoidable' and 'unavoidable' FL is done. Avoidable FL is the amount of food thrown away because it is no longer wanted or has been allowed to go past its 'best before' or 'expiration' date. This term refers to food parts considered edible by the vast majority of people. Unavoidable FL are food parts which are not and have not been edible under normal circumstances (e.g. egg shell, apple core, banana skin, and animal bones). This distinction can be subjective because what is considered edible depends on several factors such as culture, religion, social norms and personal preferences</p> | Spain               | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 17 | <p>As agricultural products can be used in different ways, it seems more realistic and more appropriate for this report if food losses at the production stage only refer to crops that are irretrievably lost from agricultural use (spoilage, total loss), i.e. that cannot be put to any alternative use. [...] "The quantities sold to industry and as animal feed do not count as food losses for the purposes of this study."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Germany             | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 18 | <p>Definition of food losses and system boundaries were chosen according to the methodology proposed by Franke et al. (2016), which was adapted to identify food losses in Nordic (Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden) agriculture. According to this methodology, food losses are food products intended for human consumption that have not reached the next stage of the food supply chain and have been used for other purposes (e.g. animal feed) or have been sent to waste treatment. The assessment of food losses starts when the crop products are grown and prepared for harvesting, the animals are born and the milk is milked, and is completed before these products enter wholesale or retail trade.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Lithuania           | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 19 | <p>Food loss in primary production is defined as follows: "The flows of primary products that were meant to be eaten by humans but never entered the next step in the food supply chain (e.g., [...] retail, processing), and instead were used for other purposes (e.g., feed) or sent for waste treatment.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Switzerland         | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 20 | <p>Food loss is the decrease in the quantity or quality of food resulting from decisions and actions by food suppliers in the chain, excluding retailers, food service providers and consumers (State of Food and Agriculture [SOFA], 2019). Empirically, the term refers to any food that is discarded, incinerated or otherwise disposed of along the food supply chain, which starts with harvest/slaughter/catch up to but excluding the retail level, and the food does not re-enter the supply chain for any other productive use, such as for feed or seed.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Spain               | <a href="#">NGO</a>          |
| 21 | <p>Food losses are defined as the quantity of products suitable for consumption that have reached a minimum size and are undamaged but (1) are disposed of because</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Germany             | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |



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|    | of noncompliance with governmental marketing standards or quality demands of the food retail sector, (2) are not harvested or sorted out during market preparation due to fluctuations in demand and price or (3) perish after harvest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |               |                              |
| 22 | Food losses originate from the stages of the food supply chain before the specified products become food, e.g., edible parts of plants prior to harvesting.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Poland        | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 23 | Food waste is any food, and inedible parts of food, removed from the food supply chain to be recovered or disposed, including the following destinations: composting, crops ploughed in/not harvested, anaerobic digestion, bio-energy production, co-generation, incineration, disposal to sewer, landfill or discarded to sea but not including food or inedible parts of food removed from the food supply chain to be sent to animal feed." //Any loss of food arising pre-farm gate is included. This includes any waste arising from harvest, grading, storage and processing when carried out on farm                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Great Britain | <a href="#">NGO</a>          |
| 24 | Food waste is defined in the Danish Waste Management Order §3 as food that has become waste (Retsinformation, 2021). In this definition, there are two concepts that require further explanation: a food and waste. The definition of a food is found in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council and reads: "any substance or product, whether unprocessed or wholly or partly processed, intended to be, or reasonably expected to be ingested by humans" (EUR-Lex, 2002). The definition does not include, among other things, feed and live animals, unless they are prepared for placing on the market for human consumption, or plants before harvesting. The definition of waste is found in Section 2 of the Danish Executive Order on Waste and reads: "any substance or object which the holder discards or intends or is required to discard".                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Denmark       | <a href="#">NGO</a>          |
| 25 | In general, food waste is defined as food that has become waste. Therefore, food waste can only arise once a food has been produced, as defined in Article 2 of the General Food Law. However, it is not food waste if the discarded materials are used, for example, for animal feed or the production of other products.<br>For the vegetable part of primary production, crops are defined as food from the time of harvest (in accordance with the Food Regulation). Thus, food waste can only arise once the crops have been harvested. Harvested crops are only defined as food if they are grown for human consumption. For the animal part of primary production, only food waste from the production of milk and eggs is included, as other animal products are not considered food until they are processed in the processing and manufacturing industry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Denmark       | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 26 | In order to homogenize criteria in the European Union and to facilitate the comparability of results, the aim of this study is to maintain these same criteria: Firstly, food waste does not include losses at stages of the food chain where certain products have not yet become food as defined in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002, such as edible plants that have not been harvested. Secondly, the Delegated Decision also does not consider as "food", by-products of food production that meet the criteria set out in Article 5(1) of Directive 2008/98/EC [22] (and as updated by Directive 2018/851 [23]), given that these by-products are not waste                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Spain         | <a href="#">Governmental</a> |
| 27 | the amount of food waste generated in primary production (including the estimated amount of edible food waste, or food waste) and the amount of production waste generated in the primary production by-product stream (food produced but for one reason or another diverted to the by-product stream) were estimated separately for the activities studied. In primary production, food waste was defined primarily as products subject to waste regulation (food treated as waste, including composted food). Various by-products generated (e.g. crops left in the field (unharvested) due to animal or bird feed, sewage or slurry, weather, labour problems, pests, diseases, etc., fish discards from fishing and products treated as animal by-products) were defined as production waste, but not as waste, based on the definition of food waste (see chapter on definitions). In this study, the residues generated were categorised as food waste and production waste on a case-by-case basis, based on the estimates of the businesses that responded to the questionnaire on what food waste and production waste was done with or used for. | Estonia       | <a href="#">Scientific</a>   |
| 28 | The scope of this study starts when a food crop or animal are ready for harvest or slaughter, and includes all waste that happens on farm, including any waste from grading, packing and washing if these processes happen on farm, customer rejections including rejections at arrival to slaughterhouse and dairy factory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Great Britain | <a href="#">NGO</a>          |

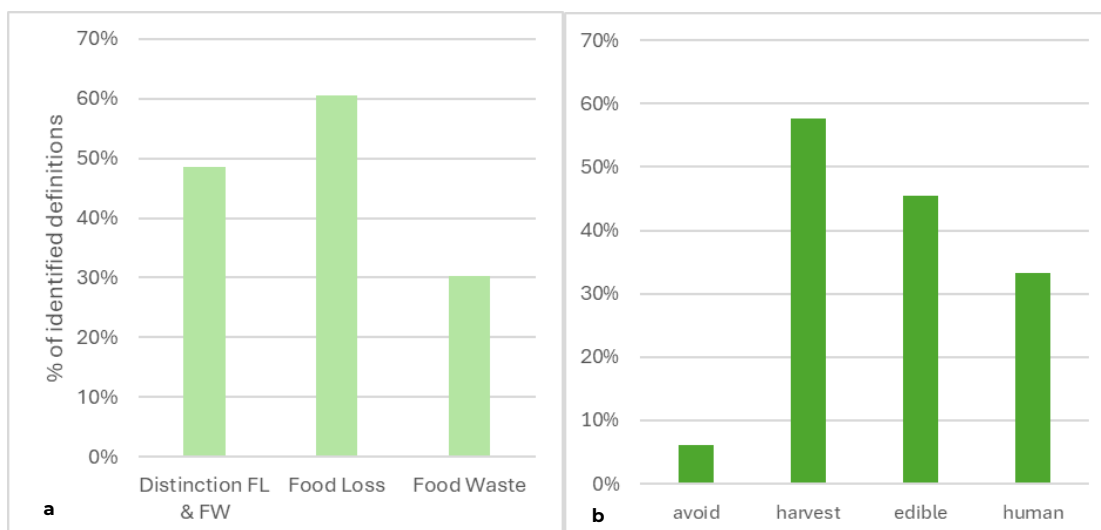


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| 29 | the term food loss and waste (FLW) was used to describe all different types of food loss and waste, regardless of their origin or their further usage. Furthermore, (vegetable) FLW was defined as discarded or unused plants or parts of plants that were originally intended for human consumption. This included both their edible and inedible parts (e.g. core, stalk), because they could not be distinguished at the farm level and during distribution, and unharvested plants and losses that occurred during harvesting. This also included all different sizes and shapes of vegetables that were left on the field or at the storage after harvesting or delivering, respectively, at the distribution point after the collection period was over and that were wasted at the household stage.                               | Germany          | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 30 | Totality of food intended for human consumption that is not consumed by humans. Thus, inedible parts and food that are used in other ways as raw materials or animal feed also count as food losses. Not included, however, are feed and organic raw materials that were not intended for human consumption from the outset.<br>In this report, with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, the focus is on avoidable losses. Therefore, in this study the term food losses is, for the sake of simplicity, used to refer to avoidable food losses. To avoid misunderstandings, unavoidable losses are explicitly referred to as unavoidable.                                                                                                                                                                                      | Switzerland      | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 31 | we have not committed to a specific definition of 'food waste' and consequently do not distinguish between food loss and food waste. We find that the collected data in this report can be used and be relevant independently of definition. This report will include data on products produced in large quantities in Denmark, according to Statistics Denmark. Therefore, Danish niche products and products produced in small amounts are included. The starting point is what FUSIONS define as the first step of the FSC, i.e. the moment that ? Crops are ready to harvest ? Eggs are laid ? Animals are slaughtered ? Milk has been drawn from the udder ? Fish have been caught in the net                                                                                                                                       | Denmark          | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 32 | Food waste from primary production mostly includes food waste from crops and animal production, hunting, fishing and aquaculture. Note that, according to the definition of food, waste from the primary production is not considered as food waste unless it occurs after the slaughtering of an animal, the harvest of a crop or, relevantly for the Icelandic setting, after the catching of fish.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Iceland          | <a href="#">Governmental</a>       |
| 33 | In the context of this study, the term food loss and waste (FLW) was used to describe all different types of food loss and waste, regardless of their origin or their further usage. Furthermore, (vegetable) FLW was defined as discarded or unused plants or parts of plants that were originally intended for human consumption. This included both their edible and inedible parts (e.g. core, stalk), because they could not be distinguished at the farm level and during distribution, and unharvested plants and losses that occurred during harvesting. This also included all different sizes and shapes of vegetables that were left on the field or at the storage after harvesting or delivering, respectively, at the distribution point after the collection period was over and that were wasted at the household stage. | Germany          | <a href="#">Scientific</a>         |
| 34 | According to Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC), article 3, point 4a, "food waste means all food as defined in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council that has become waste"; in simple words, food waste is any food and inedible parts of food, that has entered in the food supply chain, that then has been removed or discarded from the food supply chain or at the final consumption stage, that is finally destined to be processed as waste, either separately collected as food waste or collected in municipal waste; moreover, food waste is any food, and inedible parts of food, removed from the food supply chain to be recovered or disposed                                                                                                                        | All EU Countries | <a href="#">Inter-governmental</a> |

\*not publicly available at this point

In total, 34 interpretations of what is measured as food loss were identified with terminologies such as field losses, food waste or primary production waste. Many of them have overlapping text but are interestingly not identical. The EU and the FAO have different terminology on what they account for Food Waste, with the EU not having an official definition for Food Loss. Although definitions from the two big organisations are well known, only a small

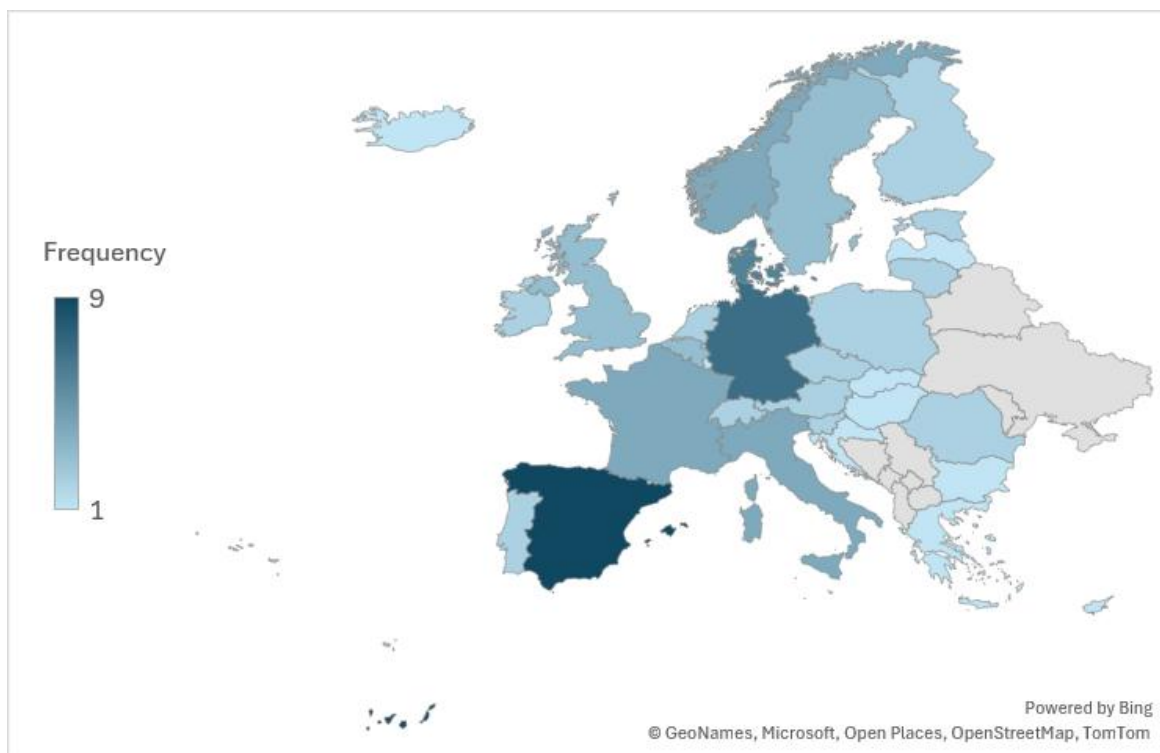
fraction of the sources adopt them (6 sources). Another 4 sources adopt the FUSIONS definition on Food Waste, which gives, among other things, specification on the destination of the food waste: “composting, unharvested food, anaerobic digestion, bioenergy production, co-generation, incineration, sewage, controlled landfill or disposal of fishing at sea”.



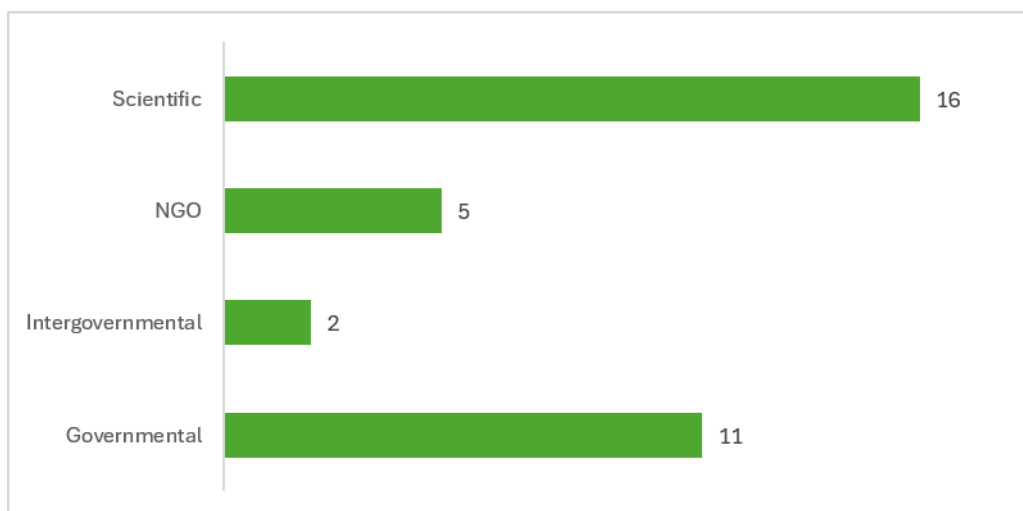
**Figure 1: a. The percentage of definitions using different terms (FL: Food Loss, FW: Food Waste), b. The percentage of definitions including different specifications**

One of the main challenges in unifying definitions lie in the different aspects they incorporate. Figure 1a shows that almost half of the definitions include a distinction between food loss and food waste and that 30% of the definitions use the term food waste while referring to loss in the primary production stage. Figure 1b shows the percentage of definitions giving information on topics related to the harvesting stage, the avoidability of food loss, whether it considers edible or inedible parts and the intention for human consumption.





**Figure 2: Number of definitions per country**



**Figure 3: Distribution of definitions per type of source**

As shown in Figures 2 and 3, almost all EU countries have at least one definition of Food Loss, either from an official source, such as the local or central government, or mostly from a scientific publication. Spain remains the pioneer in Food Loss policy with 8 definitions from Governmental, Inter-Governmental, NGO and Scientific sources, showing the proactiveness in the country on the topic. Denmark and Germany have each 7 and 6 definitions respectively, followed by France, Norway and Italy with 4 definitions. An

interesting case is Great Britain, where all the definitions come from a source published by an Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

## FOLOU Definitional Framework

One of FOLOU's main contributions is to establish a definitional framework for what should be considered food loss across Europe. This definition aims to further the current EU's definition of food and waste and propose a clear boundary system for losses at the primary production stage. Food loss must be a complementary concept to food waste, not overlapping its content nor leaving any stream unmeasured. Therefore, a thorough comprehension of food waste, and other streams such as animal feed and by-products is needed.

According to the EU, food and waste are defined as follows:

**Food:** any substance or product, whether processed, partially processed, or unprocessed, intended to be, or reasonably expected to be ingested by humans.

**Food waste:** all food as defined in Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council that has become waste.

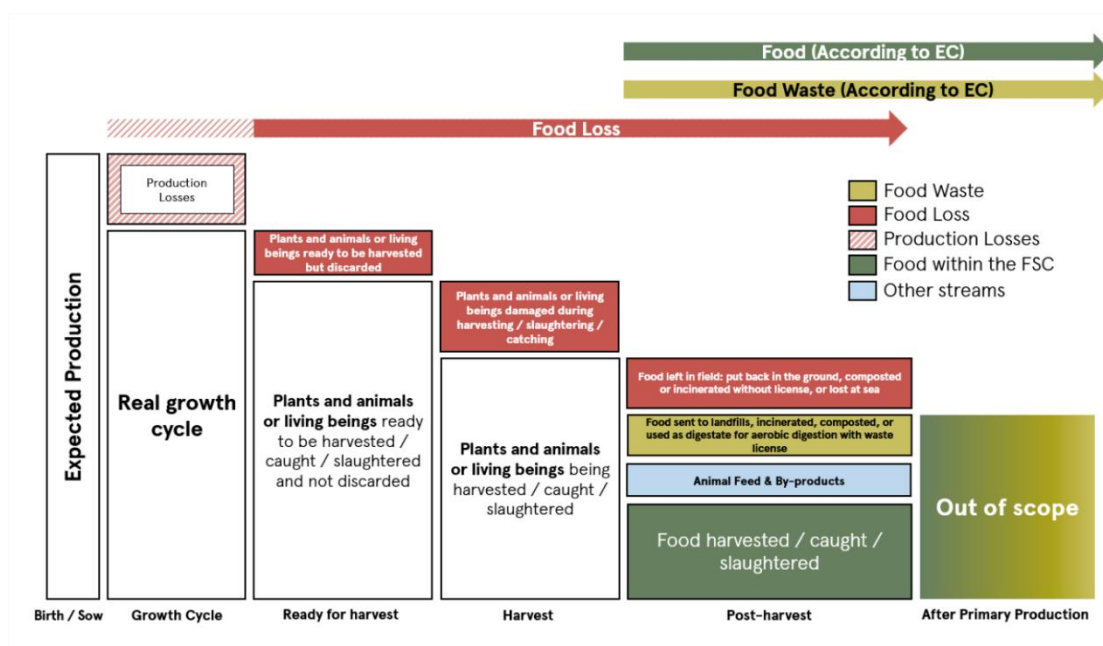


Figure 4: FOLOU definitional framework. FSC: Food Supply Chain<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> More information on the FOLOU Definitional Framework can be found in the associated deliverable: <https://www.folou.eu/document/#deliverables>





FOLOU proposes the following Food Loss definition:

*Food Loss is any harvest-mature plant, animal or living being that is not successfully harvested as well as food removed from the supply chain during post-harvest phase that does not become animal feed, by-product or food waste.*

Figure 4 shows the boundaries of the FOLOU definition and how it compliments the existing definitions of the European Commission.