



Food waste household activation programme in Hungary

Overview

The need

In the EU, more food is wasted in households than in any other sector: processing, production, wholesale and retail, and food services [1]. According to estimates, the average Hungarian household wastes about 90 kg food annually [2], which equates to 10 % of total food purchases [3].

The solution

The Hungarian Food Bank Association created a simple and cheap e-mail-based programme to help consumers reduce food waste at home. The programme invited consumers to test different food waste reduction solutions. Following testing consumers were then asked to provide feedback on usefulness and the ease of implementation of each solution.

The benefit

The solution improved food waste knowledge and skills in 265 households all over Hungary.

Food waste activation programme improves food waste awareness and home practices for more than 1200 householders

The project has been managed by the Hungarian Food Bank Association (HFBA), the biggest food surplus redistribution organisation in Hungary, in cooperation with the Budapest Business School (BBS) and TESCO Hungary.

TESCO has been a strong partner of HFBA, both in food rescue activities, as well as in communication activities. The BBS Sustainability Centre regularly works with various partner organisations by allocating groups of students to help implement sustainability related projects. BBS approached HFBA and offered cooperation in a food waste related project involving their students.

Background

In 2016, REFRESH published a report highlighting qualitative and quantitative consumer research [2] on household food waste attitudes and practices in four EU countries: Germany, Spain, The Netherlands and Hungary. The report detailed valuable and up-to-date information on Hungarian consumers and provided insights for designing, testing and implementing a programme to activate consumers, to increase food waste reduction activities at home.

The HFBA has a background in consumer education activities, and in 2012 implemented a food waste information campaign in collaboration with TESCO. Within this campaign a website was launched which highlighted the issue of food waste and provided householders with a platform where they could share their own tips on how to reduce food waste at home. However, feedback on the usefulness of these tips was not collected.



What was the solution?

Following the 2012 food waste information campaign, the HFBA wanted to develop a project which would answer two questions:

1. How effective are different tips at reducing household food waste?
2. How easy is it to implement each tip?

The overarching aim of the project was to create a consumer activation programme which reduced household food waste. HFBA proposed to achieve this by developing a programme which:

- Uses the insights of the REFRESH consumer research, namely the “National, Qualitative insight on Household & Catering Food Waste” report [2]
- Is easy and relatively cheap to implement
- Brings measurable results (behaviour change)
- Motivates consumers to act
- And, is easily replicable in other countries

The BBS provided a group of students to help develop the programme plan and materials to be used in the project. The group of students were also responsible for conducting a small-scale pilot of the proposed methodology. In addition, TESCO offered the use of their communication channels for the project and also offered prizes to incentivise households to participate.

Implementation

Following programme design, households were recruited through multiple channels:

- Foodbank Facebook page, newsletter to 50,000 people
- Tesco Facebook page
- Tesco invited their employees to join, with separate motivational presents
- BBS newsletter
- PR activities, such as talking about the programme on the radio

“Food waste is in the core of sustainability issues. We are glad Budapest Business School could participate in the program and I am sure our students who were actively involved in the project have also benefited by taking home many practical learnings on how to save food in their everyday life”

— *Andrea Nagy - Head of the Budapest Business School Sustainability Centre*



Participants' feedback:

"We received good information and it reinforces good things by asking about them. I already was quite conscious in this field, but now I developed further."

"Indeed, I found expired or close to expiry food. Since I knew that we will not eat these in the near future, I gave a part of them away."

"I think this programme is a very good initiative. Especially the tips on how to lengthen the lifetime of food. Since this programme, I pay more attention to use close to expiry food."

Participants were first required to fill in an online questionnaire about their food waste attitudes, motivations and habits. For comparability, this project used the same questions that were used in the REFRESH consumer research [4]. The questionnaire (adapted slightly from the original by HFBA) would then be repeated after the programme to provide an indication of how the project had influenced consumer food waste behaviour.

Following completion of the initial survey, participants then had the option to choose between 3-4 different food waste reduction tips over three consecutive weeks which they could implement within their household. Participants were asked to choose at least one of the 3-4 tips to try in a given week.

Tips offered to participants:

- Screen the stock at home
- Plan their meals in advance
- Make a shopping list (and write on the back of it any additional items purchased)
- Use and eat close-to-expiry food at home
- Cook smaller quantities
- Prepare inventory of freezer content and add labels
- Freeze leftovers
- Cook with dried bakery products
- Cook with leftovers
- Learn the appropriate storage method of preferred fruits and vegetables

The participants were then required to provide feedback (on a weekly basis) on the tips they had implemented and their perceived effectiveness in reducing food waste. As an incentive for participation in the questionnaires, participants who completed all the questionnaires were entered into a prize draw. The prizes were donated by TESCO and included: a smoothie maker, for using leftover fruit and vegetables, and multiple high-quality food boxes, for storing and freezing leftovers.

Outcomes

In total, 523 people registered to take part in the programme, however the actual number of participants was 265 (85% women; 37% aged 35-49; 38% from Budapest; 44% in two person households). When factoring the number of



people in each household, it is expected that the programme reached over 1,200 people. Feedback from the participants was positive and the programme was well received (see testimonials on previous page). The project also seemed to have an impact on the food waste behaviour of participating households, showing an increase in the number of participants agreeing with positive food waste reduction statements (Figure 1).

The percentage increase in respondents who agreed with different food waste reduction statements (difference between final and initial questionnaire responses)



Figure 1 - Changes in self reported food waste behaviour following the project

The tips that most people chose to try were:

- Learn the appropriate storage method of your preferred fruits and vegetables
- Make an inventory of your freezer contents and add labels to items
- Use and eat food that is close to its expiry date

The tips that people subjectively considered more effective in reducing food waste (on a 1 to 5 scale) were:

- Cook with leftovers from previous meals
- Freeze leftovers
- Use and eat food that is close to its expiry date

The tips that people subjectively considered easier to implement (on a 1 to 5 scale) were:

- Screen the stock at home, consume the close-to-expiry items



- Freeze leftovers
- Make a shopping list (and write on the back of it the items purchased additionally)

As shown above, the tip which was considered one of the most effective and was also tested widely was “Use and eat food that is close to its expiry date”.

Thoughts for the future

The programme proved a useful tool for changing consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, participants gave a lot of valuable feedback and ideas for improvements. Areas for improvement included:

- Tailoring tips for specific groups e.g. under 30’s or households with children
- Techniques for convincing family members to reduce their food waste
- More information on certain topics
- More tips
- Involvement of famous people
- Dissemination of the programme via video

Additionally, it should be recognised that this program reached many people who were already quite open to the topic of food waste. As such, it’s important to search for solutions to reach and activate those individuals who are less open and know less about the topic.

Finally, based on the REFRESH research, organisations interested in running a similar project would benefit from:

- Adding a commitment line in the registration (recruitment) form with a compulsory tick box: “Yes, reducing food waste is an important issue for me. Therefore, I join this initiative and I pledge to pay attention to this in my home during the next couple of weeks.”
- Selecting the tips and tasks that prove most effective in reducing food waste
- Advertising that the program’s main message is about easing people’s guilt caused by throwing food out.

It is expected that these considerations were highly influential in the success of the project.

References

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