



# CULTiVATE

## Operation Food Freedom Sustainability Impact Assessment 2025

Jennifer Lyons, Daisy Gallagher and Anna Davies\*

\*Note that data analysis in this document has been carried out by the SHARING SOLUTIONS team based on self-reported data provided by Operation Food Freedom.



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## Executive Summary

Food retailers are crucial actors in transitions to more sustainable food systems, influencing upstream suppliers in the food chain through procurement and shaping food choices for customers. Retailer practices directly influence the management of food and the occurrence of food surplus and waste. In 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reported that 12% of food waste occurs at the retail level. Sustainability reporting can help retailers document their environmental, social and governance (ESG) impacts and identify ways to reduce negative impacts, such as food waste, and expand positive ones in line with their goals. This report summarises the impacts reported by Operation Food Freedom (O.F.F.) and provides suggestions for enhancing sustainability reporting processes.

### Operation Food Freedom

Retail type:	Subscription
Hub location:	Overvecht, Utrecht
Area of operation:	8.5 km <sup>2</sup>
District population:	34,910
Food donations:	Yes
Collaboration(s) with FSIs:	Yes



Overvecht Hub location

## Sustainability Impact Assessment Highlights

O.F.F. creates dynamic and diverse impacts but has particularly strong impacts in two areas:

### Environmental



- Reducing food waste by using second grade produce and 100% of residual flows
- Reducing food miles with 90% of goods sourced locally
- Reducing fertilizer use and protecting biodiversity by selling around 30% organic produce

### Governance



- Collaborating with multiple stakeholders along the value chain
- Sharing knowledge on short food supply chains
- Advocating for sustainable food policy in public procurement

## Reporting Recommendations

O.F.F. is making a tangible contribution to sustainable food transitions as a cooperative supermarket promoting sustainable, socially responsible consumption. Aligning impact reporting with Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) impact categories and linking to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will ensure current impacts are fully captured and help guide future planning.



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# Introduction

Sustainability reporting for large food corporations is emerging in Europe through the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD, [European Commission 2024](#)), but contributions of other smaller scale food supply actors such as co-operatives, community support agriculture initiatives and other outlets are rarely reported. [Sharing Solutions](#) supports food supply actors to establish their sustainability impacts and enable a greater understanding of urban and peri-urban food system sustainability. The resulting SIA reports can be used to deepen understanding of and communicate impacts to key stakeholders including participants, investors, donors and regulators. This document provides an overview of the data submitted by **Operation Food Freedom (O.F.F)** highlighting the strengths and limitations of the current reporting as well as opportunities for improving reporting. Use this report to:

- Explore whether you are creating impacts to meet your organisational goals
- Identify additional data to collect to ensure all impacts are measured
- Monitor trends in impacts over time as part of annual reporting
- Demonstrate impact in funding or grant applications
- Communicate your impacts to participants and wider stakeholders

## Operation Food Freedom | Utrecht

O.F.F. is a vegetable box subscription business, promoting sustainable, socially responsible consumption. It has several locations in Utrecht and Amsterdam. The scheme operates through local volunteer-led collection points, known as “hubs”. It aims to make healthy, locally sourced produce accessible to everyone by connecting neighbourhoods and communities to fruit and vegetable suppliers from the region. The O.F.F. model involves volunteers setting up their own hub and connecting with the customers who come to pick up their weekly box.

**This report focuses on one of the Hubs based in Overvecht, Utrecht. O.F.F. will have larger sustainability impacts across its full operations.**



# SDG Contributions

Sharing Solutions maps reported impacts on to relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This analysis reveals O.F.F. makes contributions to 14 out of the 17 SDGs:



In particular O.F.F. makes significant contributions to three SDGs:



SDG 2 focuses on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. O.F.F. contributes here, especially in relation to Target 2.1 – ensuring access by all to safe, nutritious food; and Target 2.3 – doubling the productivity of small-scale food producers.



O.F.F. supports SDG 12 by sourcing from residual flows of food. As a result, it contributes directly to Target 12.3, which focusses on halving global food waste by 2030; and Target 12.5 which aims to substantially reduce waste generation.



SDG 17 calls for strengthening implementation through partnerships for sustainable development. O.F.F. is part of a network of initiatives with sustainability at their core, making an impact on Target 17.16 and 17.17 which promote effective multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainability.

# Sustainability Impact Analysis

## Food waste

In the Netherlands, two billion kilos of food are wasted throughout the chain, leading to around six billion kilos of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually. In the Netherlands, it is estimated that food retail accounts for around 8% of total food waste.<sup>1</sup> Alternative retail models such as O.F.F. can help to further decrease this. The O.F.F. model prevents surplus by design and has processes to ensure that any surplus from uncollected subscription boxes gets used. As a result, O.F.F. generates 89 times less waste than a typical large food retailer.

Key food waste impacts for the Overvecht hub are outlined below<sup>2</sup>:



O.F.F.'s Overvecht hub saved 1804kg of food from waste last year (2024), which is the equivalent of **1175 meals**, enough to **feed one person for 392 days**. This figure is also equivalent to the food waste generated by 11 people annually.

O.F.F. implements several strategies to minimise food waste. The business model is subscription based, so there is always a match in supply and demand.

Any remaining unsold fruit and vegetables from a missed collection are cooked and eaten by the hub organisers. The hubs also have an ecosystem of redistribution partners, including 2Good2Go.



Through its food sourcing and management approach the Overvecht hub saved **2,342.6 kg in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions**. This is the same as the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from a car driving **3,740 km**, or three trips from Utrecht to Dublin.



The estimated economic impact from avoided food production and distribution, and from avoided waste disposal is **€3,066**. Localizing supply chains in a low-income neighbourhood like Overvecht<sup>3</sup> not only improves local citizens' access to fresh fruit and vegetables but also fosters economic growth by keeping currency circulating within the community through the multiplier effect.

<sup>1</sup> See: [Food waste in Dutch supermarkets decreased - but much remains to be done](#)

<sup>2</sup> Calculated using [this](#) food waste prevention calculator

<sup>3</sup> For an [overview of social makeup](#) in Overvecht



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## Food sourcing

Retailers are uniquely positioned to drive positive change in the food system by promoting sustainability, influencing consumer choices, shortening supply chains, and creating value through responsible sourcing. O.F.F. contributes positive impacts in the following ways:<sup>4</sup>



O.F.F. prioritises short value chains **by partnering with farmers directly**, removing the need for intermediaries. Providing access to ethically sourced food and supporting local economies.

O.F.F. partners with farmers growing high quality and heritage vegetables on local family farms, reducing the complexity of the food chain.

When food boxes are uncollected the food is redirected to redistribution channels instead of going to waste.



The zero-waste model O.F.F. employs ensures that food hub managers, known as **Food Heroes**, have very little waste to manage.

Increasingly, any small residual surplus created is being used for community cooking, creating dual social and environmental impacts and a more circular food economy.



O.F.F. uses **90% locally sourced** food, reducing transportation emissions and supporting local agriculture.

The O.F.F. business model involves working with a wholesaler who sources from over 200 local suppliers who utilise excess, second grade, or residual food flows, which are distributed, and quality checked through their food rescue centre 35km away in Amsterdam.

In total, **30% of the food sourced is organic**, promoting the organic farming sector and improving environmental and human health by providing access to organic food at accessible prices.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> More information on company due diligence for enabling living income available [here](#)

<sup>5</sup> For more information on cost of living in Utrecht see [here](#)



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## Food procurement

The further along the supply-chain that food loss and waste occurs, the more carbon-intensive the loss becomes. For example, wasting tomato sauce means wasting the accumulated resources involved in processing, transport, retail and packaging, not to mention land and water use along the supply chain.<sup>6</sup> O.F.F. creates both environmental and economic benefits through its food procurement and management practices:



O.F.F. uses a wholesaler called **InStock market** who works with excess or residual food flows, accepting second grade produce that does not make strict supermarket standards. They are B-Corp certified, ensuring a high ethical standard along the supply chain.

This wholesale partner also supplies the wider catering market and two other O.F.F. hubs in Amsterdam. InStock Market donates approximately 20% of its products to charities such as the Dutch Food Banks.

The wholesale market redistributes over 70% of the produce. Any remaining surplus is sent to their biodigester.



InStock Market supports over **200 local suppliers and small businesses to rescue excess food.**

Businesses making products from waste foods are key offerings in their catalogue, such as snacks made from spent brewers' grain<sup>7</sup>. These efforts shorten the food supply chain, minimising the resources needed for warehousing, large-scale wholesale distribution, retail reception, packaging, and display that are key elements of the traditional large scale retail model.

<sup>6</sup>[See here for more information on the Carbon Footprint of Food Loss and Waste from FAO.](#)

<sup>7</sup><https://instockmarket.nl/brewlicious-bar-apple-cinnamon.html>





## Partnerships

For sustainable food transitions, retailers need to address environmental impact, social responsibility, and corporate governance collectively (ESG). Collaborative governance is seen as key for transitioning to more sustainable food systems. O.F.F. exemplifies the power of collaboration, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders to foster a sustainable and inclusive food system. At the heart of O.F.F.'s work is a commitment to fostering partnerships that align with SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, recognizing that achieving sustainability requires collective action across sectors. In particular, O.F.F. fosters connections, shares expertise, and creates a sustainable future through collective efforts:



O.F.F. uses **civic engagement** to support policy change and food system transformation for sustainability by creating support and involvement among administrators, social organizations, entrepreneurs and citizens with initiatives like [Utrecht Food Freedom](#) and [Amped.nl](#). The overarching mission of these collaborations, as outlined in the Utrecht Food Freedom [manifesto](#), is to promote healthy and sustainable food consumption, raise awareness about the importance of a thriving environment, and encourage citizen participation. They seek to preserve and enhance the green landscape surrounding Utrecht, ensuring it remains a resource for recreation and sustainable agriculture.



O.F.F. engages Utrecht University students as **volunteers** in its 20-year-old Groentetas vegetable box scheme, offering affordable food in exchange for their time. Motivated by connections to local farmers, community contribution, and shared knowledge, this model fosters **economic and social resilience** while advancing community-led food system change.



O.F.F. demonstrates strong **internal governance** through its commitment to responsible sourcing and sustainability. The company partners with a **B-Corp certified supplier**, to ensure that its food meets high ethical standards. While the company faces administrative barriers that prevent it from accessing tax breaks for its surplus food donations, it remains focused on its sustainability goal of improving access to fresh, healthy food by connecting neighbourhoods to local food sources. O.F.F. manages its progress through financial records, and sales data. Although not yet reporting Scope 1, Scope 2, or Scope 3 emissions data, it remains transparent in its communication, using its website, social media, and collaborations to share its sustainability mission with stakeholders and the public.



In terms of **external governance**, O.F.F. actively seeks to shape **policy on public procurement** through their university kitchen initiative. It also supports short food supply chains<sup>8</sup> through involvement with [EU4Advice](#). These elements not only support its sustainability goals but also ensure that it operates with integrity, inclusivity, and responsiveness to its stakeholders.

<sup>8</sup> [See here for O.F.F. contribution to novel business ecosystem transition model](#)



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## Conclusion

O.F.F. is already deeply involved in supporting sustainability practices, particularly in terms of expanding access to nutritious, local food, as well as in terms of the box scheme business model and the residual food redistribution processes which makes a clear impact on reducing food waste. Strong relationships with local farmers and food rescue partners support these innovative ways to reduce surplus. The volunteer model means O.F.F. creates significant social impact in the local community. However, there are ongoing challenges related to fluctuating demand, recruitment of volunteers to establish new hubs, and the precarious tenure of existing hubs. Communication efforts and external backing, such as municipal support and continued involvement in sustainability networks, are essential for the future sustainability of O.F.F. Expanding sustainability impact reporting will help to monitor and track impacts over time and in relation to goals. The following recommendations can help O.F.F. optimise its sustainability reporting.

## Recommendations

O.F.F. is clearly contributing to a more sustainable food system. Further data collection and regular reporting would ensure all impacts are being identified and monitored. We recommend aligning impact reporting with the categories outlined in the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD):

- Under the Environmental category this would involve considering: Scope 1-3 emissions, climate risk assessment and mitigation strategies; pollution of air, water and soil; water usage and management; impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems; and energy efficiency and waste management.
- Under the Social category, it is essential to report on working conditions and ethical practices throughout the supply chain. This includes transparent reporting on the prices paid to farmers and producers to ensure fair compensation and economic justice. In addition, details on wages, contracts, diversity and inclusion, and working hours should be tracked, alongside ethical sourcing practices, marketing ethics, and data privacy. Contributions made to local communities and social initiatives, such as the community kitchen, should also be recorded. Finally, recording volunteer numbers and hours is recommended to capture the full scope of community engagement.
- Under the Governance category this would mean setting up systems for transparency, including matters relating to Board diversity, risk management, and stakeholder engagement.

## Next steps

1. Identify any skills or supports you need to report accurately on impacts
2. Embed SIA reporting into your organisational workflow
3. Collect data consistently and report this data annually
4. Expand your data collection points to ensure all your impacts are being captured
5. Consider additional impact reporting activities such as [Social Return on Investment](#)
6. Identify other FSIs in your area by contacting [Sharing Solutions](#)
7. Understand policy and governance challenges. For example, see CULTIVATE's [policy brief](#)
8. Expand citizen engagement. See: [CULTIVATE's webinar on communicating with your audience](#)

**If you need any further support to understand, expand or embed sustainability reporting in your organisation, contact Sharing Solutions: [info@sharingsolutions.eu](mailto:info@sharingsolutions.eu)**



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