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Food waste management in grocery shops: Corporations and society side by side

Last month we talked about food waste management in our households. Hoping that since that article we've all taken it up a notch, let's take a look at how it's done in grocery stores this time.

The Supermarket Recovery Program (SRP), which is coordinated by the Banques Alimentaires du Québec (BAQ) recovers unsold food from grocery stores and makes it available in food banks. Everything edible is recovered and given to the food banks, who can distribute it to people in need. This program even keeps fresh food such as meat and dairy products, the management of which has long represented a conservation challenge for food banks. Only fresh products such as fish and seafood that have been thawed for sale are not recovered in addition to products where there are no ingredients listed. These unrecovered products are then composted by most grocery shops.

Moisson Montréal developed a pilot project in 2013 with very convincing results, which led, in 2017, to the extension of the programme to other regions of Quebec. The BAQ website states that the SRP is the first program of its kind in Canada and a major federated campaign is underway to support the program in all its logistical, social, environmental and economic aspects.

To roll out the SRP, regional BAQ members approach grocery stores to introduce the program, but sometimes the stores express interest first. The only condition



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that the BAQ requires from volunteer grocery shops is that they respect the hygiene and sanitation criteria of the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des pêches et de l'Animalerie du Québec (MAPAQ). The BAQ provides training on these criteria and on the SRP to grocery store employees before the actual start of the programme.

According to BAQ data, "in 2018-2019, 6.5 million kg of foodstuffs were recovered, including 2.5 million kg of meat". Through this recovery, the SRP avoided the production of more than 5,700 tons of CO₂ that would have contributed to global warming.

According to BAQ, as of June 30, 2021, 459 shops in Quebec are participating in the SRP. Those that are not participating are often already in a program with Food Bank Canada or have been giving to a charity for a long time. According to Sarah Tremblay, Director of Programs at BAQ, the challenges of the SRP are great "in terms of capacity for the organizations that collect the food. Issues of lack of storage space or transportation logistics. The lack of manpower in the organizations is also a challenge for the handling and sorting of foodstuffs, tasks that were previously often performed by volunteers".

This program is a great step in reducing food waste throughout the province. In the future we can hope that the selection of foods to be sold in grocery stores can also incorporate environmentally friendly, and human centred approaches to food waste.

References

<https://www.moissonmontreal.org/en/campaigns-programs/frps/>
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