

France to force big supermarkets to give unsold food to charities



According to official estimates, the average French person throws out 20kg-30kg of food a year – 7kg of which is still in its wrapping.

French supermarkets will be banned from throwing away or destroying unsold food and must instead donate it to charities or for animal feed, under a law set to crack down on food waste. The French national assembly voted unanimously to pass the legislation as France battles an epidemic of wasted food that has highlighted the divide between giant food firms and people who are struggling to eat.

As MPs united in a rare consensus, the centre-right deputy Yves Jégo told parliament: “There’s an absolute urgency – charities are desperate for food.” “It’s scandalous to see bleach* being poured into supermarket dustbins along with edible foods,” said the Socialist deputy Guillaume Garot who proposed the bill.

Supermarkets will be barred from deliberately spoiling unsold food so it cannot be eaten. They will have to sign contracts with charities by July next year or face penalties including fines of up to €75,000 or two years in jail.

In recent years, French media have highlighted how poor families, students, unemployed or homeless people forage in supermarket bins at night to feed themselves, able to survive on edible products which had been thrown out just as their best-before dates approached. The practice of foraging in supermarket bins is not without risk – some people have been stopped by police and faced criminal action for theft.

For pressure groups simply obliging supermarket giants to pass unsold food to charities could give a “false and dangerous idea of a magic solution” to food waste. They said it would create an illusion that supermarkets had done their bit when in fact they don’t address the problem of overproduction in the food industry as well as the wastage in food distribution chains.

* bleach : eau de Javel