

20 Years of Wiener Tafel: Good for our Climate. Good for Society. Wiener Tafel demands law reform for a simpler redistribution of food and governmental grants following international examples

Monday, 9/9/2019 – **On the occasion of Wiener Tafel’s 20th anniversary, Vienna’s food bank demands a political re-evaluation of social transfer work, legal reform reducing restrictions on the donation of food to charitable organizations, and an expansion of governmental grants so adequate storage facilities for food saved from going to waste can be created. Exactly 20 years ago, on 9/9/1999, Wiener Tafel was founded as a nongovernmental initiative by four students of Vienna’s Social Academy. By 2019, the organization has become an irreplaceable part of Vienna’s social relief landscape. Its work in the last few years has been shaped by international outreach and a continuing professionalization of food rescue. The United Nations work toward a reduction of global food waste by half by 2030.**

Getting on top of food waste in Europe with Wiener Tafel

“One third of all food produced worldwide ends up going to waste. This absurd waste of resources is unacceptable in the face of poverty in our societies and the climate crisis!”, Alexandra Gruber, CEO of Wiener Tafel and chairwoman of the Association of Austrian Food Banks says, adding, *“after 20 years of successful commitment against the vicious circle of waste we have reached a turning point. We need more support from stakeholders in all areas and along the entire value chain so we can take the top spot in European food rescue in five years’ time.”* Among the measures to be taken are participation in EU programs directed at large-scale food rescue following international examples, governmental grants, and the elimination of bureaucratic obstacles hindering food donations to charitable organizations. After all, food banks not only fill a valuable role in the reduction of food waste and poverty, but also that of CO₂ emissions. *“According to the current IPCC report, the avoidance of as little as 10% of food waste can reduce greenhouse emissions. For each CO₂ equivalent unit emitted by food banks, 27 units of CO₂ are saved. That is a ratio any enterprise might wish for!”*, Gruber emphasizes.

“Not passing down edible food borders on a criminal failure to render assistance!”

This provocative, yet compelling quote is how Andreas Schmölder, authorized expert on food hygiene and nutritionist, urges a *“relaxation of food donations to charitable organizations”* in a report commissioned by Wiener Tafel. The importance of passing down food must be re-evaluated by society and law. *“Donating food cannot be a more expensive course of action than throwing it out. Regulatory burdens hamper food donations. It is significantly easier and cheaper for companies to discard food than to donate it. Similarly, the misapplication of laws dampens the participation of private individuals and the incentive for charitable organizations to donate food. That, however, could be changed at very little cost or disadvantage”*, Schmölder is certain.

Broadening our horizons: Learning from other FEBA members

“I am pleased to bring the best wishes from Brussels for the 20th anniversary of Wiener Tafel and share this milestone with you today. We congratulate Wiener Tafel for their success story also on behalf of all the 421 Food Banks in 29 countries which daily share the same mission: recovering and redistributing food to prevent food waste and reducing food insecurity in Europe”, says Angela Frigo, Secretary General of FEBA (European Food Banks Federation) and stresses the call for action of Wiener Tafel towards politics as follows: *„From a European perspective we can only reinforce and strengthen the participation of Food Banks in European policies and programs, in order to increase food donation opportunities and support more people in need at a large scale in each country. Only working together at a European and national level we can successfully contribute to important objectives such as the SDG 2 and 12.3.”*

Jochen Brühl, chairman of Tafel Deutschland, the federation of over 900 local German food banks, adds, *“We too depend on governmental grants which we in Germany demand emphatically. From our point of view, financial support from the state is an indispensable aid for the rescue and redistribution of food.”*

The work of food banks must be included on the political agenda

With parliamentary elections on the horizon, the Austrian food banks have sent a list of questions to all parties up for reelection to the National Council, as well as the Green Party. Upon having submitted their replies, all parties agreed on the work of food banks playing an important part in a socially and ecologically just society, and that these efforts should receive more support in the future. *“We will certainly take the elected government at their word and remind them of this promise”,* Alexandra Gruber emphasizes.

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