



Updated version of Manual of Standard Operating
Procedures (SOPs) for the collection, sorting and distribution
of unusable fruits and vegetables



Executive Summary

This Updated Version of the Manual of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the collection, sorting and distribution of surplus fruits and vegetables has been prepared within the framework of the project LIFE-IP CEI-Greece “Circular Economy Implementation in Greece” (LIFE18 IPE/GR/000013).

The purpose of this manual is to document and evaluate the Circular Greece initiative implemented by the Central Market of Thessaloniki S.A. (CMT S.A.), which serves as an integrated circular food management model at the wholesale stage. The initiative promotes the recovery and redistribution of fruits and vegetables that do not meet commercial standards but remain perfectly suitable for human consumption.

The manual provides a comprehensive description of the system’s operational process — from collection and quality control to sorting, packaging and distribution of the products to social organizations, NGOs and municipalities that support vulnerable social groups. All procedures have been designed to ensure hygiene, food safety and full traceability, and are supported by advanced data management and quality assurance tools.

- The revised edition (October 2025) incorporates updated data up to the end of 2024, as well as new findings arising from the evaluation of the initiative through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including:
- Collection of primary data from the start of the initiative,
- Interviews and on-site observations involving key stakeholders (traders, volunteers and social service organizations),
- Indicator analysis using the Food Waste Prevention Calculator tool, and
- Comparison of performance against previous periods.

The evaluation results clearly demonstrate that the initiative of CMT S.A. has made a substantial contribution to reducing food waste within the wholesale market. Between 2019 and 2024, more than 2,100 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables were recovered and redistributed, with an annual average exceeding 450 tons. These quantities correspond to over 900,000 portions of food distributed through Social Grocery Stores, Solidarity Kitchens, Church Institutions and other welfare organizations.

The environmental impact of the initiative is equally noteworthy. Preventing the disposal of these quantities is estimated to have avoided the emission of approximately 1,200 tons of CO₂ equivalent per year, thereby significantly reducing the environmental footprint of the wholesale market. In parallel, the initiative has generated employment opportunities for long-term unemployed individuals, strengthened social cohesion, and enhanced awareness among traders and consumers regarding food waste reduction.

Beyond its measurable outcomes, Circular Greece stands as a model of effective collaboration between the public and private sectors, combining environmental responsibility, social solidarity and economic efficiency. The experience of CMT S.A. demonstrates that food waste prevention can create tangible benefits across three key dimensions – environmental, social and economic.

This initiative is recognized as a best practice for the implementation of the National Circular Economy Strategy and directly contributes to achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3, which aims to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030. Its success provides a well-documented and transferable circular economy model, ready to be adopted by other Central Markets and organizations at national and European level - serving as a concrete example of sustainable development in action.