The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that around 30% of food produced for human production is lost somewhere between the farm and the plate. A significant share of this waste happens around the point of consumption – related to consumer purchasing decisions, food storage, preparation and eating. But to gather reliable data on how and why this food waste is happening is inherently difficult, given its highly distributed nature and the complex mix of factors influencing consumer behaviour.

Given those constraints, citizen science has much to offer the study of food waste. For example, consumers can give unique insights into their behaviours and decision-making, in order to deepen our understanding of why food waste happens. And actively engaging citizens in food waste research can also be an effective way to build relationships and raise consumer awareness about food waste issues.

This project sought to kick start work using citizen science to try and fill the knowledge gaps. In particular, it aimed to establish a network bringing together citizen science and food waste research expertise.

According to the FAO, consumers in Europe and North America discard between 95 and 115 kg of food per capita every year © LUCENTIUS / GETTY
Benefitting from innovative research on food waste being done at SEI Tallinn with citizen science expertise at SEI York, the project focused on food waste generated in households and in catering institutions. Its main activities were:

- a literature review on work to date using citizen science to explore food waste issues
- identifying possible members of a citizen science-food waste network
- convening a workshop to explore possible research questions and collaborative projects.

The workshop took place in Geneva on 6 June, following the European Citizen Science Association (ECSA) annual conference. It gathered participants from research organizations and NGOs active in the field, both in person and online.

The network that was created during the project brings together researchers, experts and practitioners in the field of citizen science and food waste, in order to discuss opportunities for cooperation in projects and research. Several collaborative research proposals have already been developed between members of the network.