

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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### Summary:

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One major problem in our society is the enormous amount of wasted groceries. Little attention has been concentrated on the general stores that are responsible for part of this waste. I suggest labeling of stores with a low waste amount. The idea is that this label should work as a competitive advantage for the stores thereby stimulating them to meet the requirements. This label would also make the customers aware of the problem and thereby urge to a more restrictive approach towards waste in a wider sense. To achieve a really energy effective society all parts need to be included.

### Essay:

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#### **Faced with today's food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?**

To answer the above question this essay will focus on the massive spoilage that takes place in our general stores. Though it has been a debate about the households and their responsibility to minimize the waste disposal, this has not been the case about the stores. According to an estimate<sup>1</sup>, in Sweden alone the amount of meat that is discarded each year in the general stores corresponds to 30,000 cows or 100,000 pigs. Now remember that this is a country with a humble number of citizens, approximately nine million. So, imagine the total number of discarded products in this part of the chain and the energy needed to produce them in the entire world. Even if we come up with new techniques and solutions on how to produce food and energy we have accomplished nothing when we waste it. The WWF recently reported that the consumption rate in our society exceeds the capacity of production of our planet with 30%<sup>2</sup>. With this in mind it is important to see that we must develop our way of life into something more efficient with less leakage in every step of the chain. As long as the general stores have a significant spoilage this can never be the case.

Which approach should then be taken to lower this waste? To begin this discussion we must understand that the solution must lie in the common interest of the customers and the merchants. The merchants of course want to sell as much products as possible to maximize the profit. Several tactics are used and I will focus on two. The first is the eager to *always* keep the shelves loaded with products. The second is the will to have a broad supply of products. Both these tactics aim at keeping the store as inviting as possible thereby making the

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Vicktor Olsson. FAKTA Slöseriet med kött. *TT*.  
<http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article3520888.ab> (20090112).

<sup>2</sup>WWF, Living planet report 2008.

customers buying more and also be more willing to visit the store again. Both these tactics leads to a direct elevated amount of waste in the stores. For example, if we consider an article as bananas. A well-filled banana tray will sell more bananas than the corresponding not so well-filled banana tray at the same time point. This of course the merchants must take advantage of. But there is no need to always work after this principle because it is less or more true at different times during the day. If you fill up the banana tray late in the evening it would only result in minute additional selling compared to the not so well-filled banana tray. This is simply an effect of that the numbers of customers decreases in the store at the evening. The waste on the other hand will rise rapidly since the bananas are first exposed to the customers and then lies in the store over night. So if elevated selling does not always arguments for shelves that are well-filled what about the impression on the customer? This positive impression is only positive as long as the customers value an enjoyable store more than a store that limits its impression on our resources. The same goes for the broad supply of products. The merchants of general stores do not profit from sales of narrow products directly but rather from the impression they make on the customer. In order to lower the amount of waste coming from the general stores we need to make the merchants start working with additional competitive advantages than the above mentioned. Since the customers plays a key role they need to be involved and informed. My suggestion is a labeling of the stores based on their amount of wastes. To gain this label a store must limit its amount of waste. The maximum waste allowed for a certain store to obtain the label should be relative to the size of the store. With a label, the customers will become more aware of this problem and at the same time they are able to put pressure on the merchants to work towards a label. This means that the merchants from their perspective have the ability to gain a competitive advantage. The national food administration or preferably an organ within the EU should establish the exact demands that have to be achieved to earn the label. The label could be issued, as a suggestion by the counties or the national food administration, on a yearly basis with a pertaining control. The control should not be a problem since the waste companies' charges by amount.