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Recycling, recovering and preventing “food waste”: competing solutions for food systems sustainability in the United States and France

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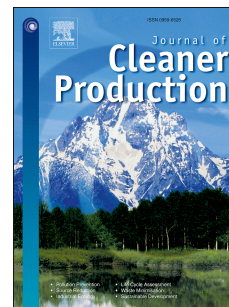
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4 **Recycling, recovering and preventing “food waste”: competing solutions for food**
5 **systems sustainability in the United States and France**

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9 Abstract

10 In recent years, a wide range of organizations in developed countries have embarked
11 on efforts to address the economic, environmental and social impacts of “food waste.”
12 Based on more than 120 interviews and complementary observations in the United
13 States and France, this paper examines how recent mobilizations impact the way
14 surplus food is actually managed with respect to sustainable production and
15 consumption. This analysis of multiple stakeholders’ interests and motives
16 complements a growing literature on food waste prevention and management focused
17 on technical evaluations of “solutions.” Recent frameworks on food surplus and waste
18 establish one hierarchy of preferable categories of solutions: first, prevention
19 (reducing surplus at the source), then recovery (reusing for human consumption) and
20 finally recycling (feeding animals, creating energy or compost). Fieldwork results
21 show that actors with different interests in food commodity chains actually develop
22 *competing* solutions, both within and between three hierarchies based on
23 environmental, social and economic goals. In the long term, the solutions they
24 promote may therefore not achieve “win-win-win” benefits for all actors and at all
25 scales. Drawing on a distinction between “weak” and “strong” sustainability, this
26 paper argues that “strong” prevention based on holistic changes in the food system is
27 the most sustainable solution to food surplus and waste. It suggests that academics
28 focus on strong food surplus prevention, but also that advocates encourage
29 government and corporate actors to differentiate between weak and strong actions to
30 diffuse strong sustainability across organizations and countries.

31
32 Keywords

33 Food waste

34 Food surplus

35 Waste prevention

36 Sustainability

37 Recycling

38 Re-use

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