



# **The consumption of discounted close-to-date foods in the contexts of food provisioning and waste**

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# The consumption of discounted close-to-date foods in the contexts of food provisioning and waste

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**Keywords:** food practices, everyday life, consumption, food waste, food provisioning, Sweden

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the consumption of food approaching its best before or use-by date marking that is purchased at a discount, (discounted close-to-date foods). The study relates to the implementation of price promotions as a food waste reduction measure at the retail level. The expansion of this phenomenon in recent years is problematised in terms of the lack of knowledge surrounding its impacts on food waste at the household level. Using a practice theoretical approach that recognises six distinct moments of consumption, the thesis used interviews to focus on the consumer experience of this phenomenon, elucidating how a group of 15 individuals living in Sweden fit these products into their everyday food provisioning practices.

The findings demonstrate that motivations of thrift encouraged the interviewees' consumption of discounted close-to-date foods and that flexibility permeated food provisioning, (e.g., planning, shopping, cooking, eating) with these items. In association with knowledge and skills related to date marking and risk, this allowed the interviewees to include discounted close-to-date foods in their everyday lives. In relation to the impacts of this consumption on household food waste, the findings depict three different scenarios in which discounted close-to-date foods are: completely used; partially used; or completely wasted.

The case is made for further research to investigate and evaluate this relatively young phenomenon. The implementation of such interventions must be supported by evidence that they reduce food waste at a food system level, not merely shift food waste to actors up- or downstream the food supply chain. This thesis illustrates the intricacies and interconnectedness of food provisioning practices, the contexts surrounding them and their role within societal issues of food waste. It contributes to research concerned with the links between retail level interventions and household level consumption whilst highlighting some of the complexities that challenge efforts to reduce food waste at these levels. Finally, the study concludes that this intervention at the retail level is reinforcing existing consumer beliefs around date markings and food quality and safety, and questions the role of retailers in contributing to systemic waste reduction.

*Keywords:* food practices, everyday life, food waste, food provisioning, Sweden

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# Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Background .....	7
1.1.1 Problems with food waste.....	8
1.1.2 Food waste and discounting close-to-date foods .....	8
1.2 Aim and research question .....	9
<b>2. Literature review .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Food provisioning practices and household food waste .....	12
2.1.1 Price involvement and food waste .....	12
2.1.2 Planning .....	13
2.1.3 Storage and leftovers.....	14
2.1.4 Risk, safety and date markings.....	15
2.1.5 Sociological approaches consider contexts.....	15
2.2 The discounting of close-to-date foods and food provisioning practices .....	16
2.2.1 Price involvement & shopping .....	16
2.2.2 Consumer acceptance .....	17
2.3 Literature review conclusion .....	18
<b>3. Theory .....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Practice theories .....	19
3.1.1 Practical food provisioning .....	20
3.2 Consumption and practices .....	21
<b>4. Method .....</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1 Research approach.....	23
4.2 Recruitment of interviewees.....	23
4.3 Interviews .....	24
4.3.1 Ethical considerations.....	26
4.4 Analysis .....	26
4.4.1 Transcription .....	26
4.4.2 Coding.....	26
<b>5. Findings .....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 Consumption of close-to-date foods at the supermarket.....	28
5.1.1 Planning .....	28
5.1.2 The supermarket.....	30
5.1.3 Purchase decisions.....	32
5.1.4 In-store performances and meaning in relation to food waste mitigation .....	35
5.2 Close-to-date foods at home.....	36
5.2.1 Storage and deciding what to eat .....	37

5.2.2	Cooking and eating .....	39
5.2.3	Disposal .....	41
5.2.4	At home performances in relation to food waste mitigation.....	43
5.3	The integration of food provisioning practices through the interviewees' performances .....	43
<b>6.</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>46</b>
6.1	Price involvement.....	46
6.2	Assessing edibility and storage.....	48
6.3	Discounted close-to-date foods and waste .....	48
6.4	Motivations of thrift.....	49
6.5	Limitations .....	51
6.5.1	Methodological limitations.....	51
6.5.2	Theoretical limitations .....	52
<b>7.</b>	<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>53</b>
7.1	Implications .....	54
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>55</b>
	<b>Popular science summary.....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>Appendix 1 – Recruitment flyer .....</b>	<b>62</b>
	<b>Appendix 2 – Interview guide.....</b>	<b>63</b>

# 1. Introduction

*Close-to-date foods* refers to foods approaching their best before or use-by date marking, or foods without such markings with deteriorating quality due to, for example, bruising or wilting. Moreover, in grocery retail, close-to-date implies such foods offered for a discounted price due to the seemingly small window of consumption these foods offer. This thesis studies such discounted close-to-date food offers (close-to-date foods or offers, henceforth). Such offers are a recently popularised phenomenon adopted by grocery retailers to reduce both food waste and the work required to sort food waste from its packaging. However, due to the recently increasing use of this practice, its impacts on food waste at the food systems level remain understudied. This raises questions about how close-to-date foods are fitted into everyday food consumption practices and whether they do contribute to food waste reduction, or alternatively, shift waste from retailer to households or provoke overconsumption. Focusing on the use and management of close-to-date products in household food shopping, cooking and eating, this thesis contributes to filling this knowledge gap.

To introduce this study, I provide a concise background in food waste as a global issue and an overview of the status of retail and consumer level food waste more locally to the study's geography, Sweden. The phenomenon of discounting foods nearing their best before and use-by dates is then presented. The current nature of the adoption of this phenomenon as a societal food waste reduction measure is then problematised, giving grounds to the study's aim and research question.

## 1.1 Background

The issue of food waste at the final stages of the food supply chain (FSC) has gained much academic and societal attention in recent years. Associated with this is the adoption of Agenda 2030, ten years ago, which includes resolutions to halve per capita food waste at the retail and consumer levels (UN 2015). Despite its burgeoning notoriety and the introduction of ambitious reduction targets (Reynolds et al. 2019), the latest figures show that high levels of food waste continue (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024b; UNEP 2024).

Across the FSC, households are responsible for the largest share of food waste. Globally, in 2022, almost one-fifth of the total amount of food available for human consumption was wasted (UNEP 2024; *FAOSTAT* n.d.a). 60% of this waste was attributed to the household level, whilst the retail sector was responsible for 12% (UNEP 2024). In Sweden, 49% of food waste is generated from households, whilst waste at the retail level amounts to 6.5% of the total (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024b). Techniques for measuring food waste in Sweden allow

for some nuance in this picture, showing that avoidable food waste accounts for 27% of household food waste; other fractions include waste considered as inedible, such as bones, peelings and coffee grounds (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024a).

### 1.1.1 Problems with food waste

Food waste is widely regarded as problematic. Some surplus production can be argued as necessary to safeguard against unexpected FSC disruptions (Papargyropoulou et al. 2014). However, food waste at current levels demonstrates remarkably inefficient use of natural resources (Garnett 2011; Bernstad Saraiva Schott & Andersson 2015; Crippa et al. 2021). Food production and distribution exert significant pressures on planetary systems. The global food system generates substantial greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC 2019; Rosenzweig et al. 2020, 2021; Crippa et al. 2021). In addition, agricultural activity is also a significant source of environmental change, causing degradation to soil, freshwater and ocean systems as well as to biodiversity (Foley et al. 2011; Alexander et al. 2017; Willett et al. 2019; Richardson et al. 2023). Simultaneously, in light of the lack of progress being made in eradicating hunger (UN 2024), the existence of so much superfluous food highlights the ethically questionable aspect of food waste. Climate change and geopolitical instability, including the recent economic downturn, are impacting levels of hunger across the globe (UN 2024). This includes Europe, where levels of moderate and severe food insecurity have been rising in recent years (FAOSTAT n.d.b).

### 1.1.2 Food waste and discounting close-to-date foods

Framed as a measure to reduce financial losses for retailers forced to adapt to the rising popularity of perishable goods, discounting close-to-date foods has long been recognised as sound business practice (Tsiros & Heilman 2005). Against the backdrop of growing exposure of food waste issues in academia and media, and in light of findings that confusion over date markings is closely tied to significant volumes of food waste at the retail level, discounting close-to-date foods has more recently been acknowledged as a food waste reduction strategy at the retail level (Parfitt et al. 2010; Halloran et al. 2014; Priefer et al. 2016; Swedish Food Agency et al. 2018). In addition, despite traditionally lacking acceptance in supermarket settings, consumer interest in so-called suboptimal foods (SOFs), including close-to-date foods, can be recovered by a reduction in price (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017a; de Hooze et al. 2017).

Associated interventions have helped the practice gain popularity amongst retailers. In Sweden, the introduction of legal obligations to separate unused food from its packaging upon disposal, in the name of resource recovery, has encouraged more widespread discounting of close-to-date foods (Swedish Food Agency et al.



2025). The lower commitment required by the retailer in discounting close-to-date food compared to separating it from its packaging is a probable driver of increased implementation in grocery stores (Garrone et al. 2014).

Waste reduction measures at one level of FSC must not merely shift food waste to up- or downstream actors (Swedish Food Agency et al. 2018). The discounting of close-to-date foods by retailers must therefore not exacerbate consumer food waste patterns. This poses difficulties as food waste by product group is similar at retail and consumer levels, where perishable fresh foods dominate waste contents. It follows that many foods suitable for discounting in this manner are naturally at high risk of waste at the consumer level.

Food discarded in the household is often due to overprovisioning in shopping and cooking, and improper storage. These factors lead to not using food ‘in time’, which is also associated with misunderstandings of food safety and date markings (Parfitt et al. 2010; WRAP 2023; Hultén et al. 2024; Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024a). Framed as price promotions aimed at making foods with short shelf-lives more attractive to consumers who systematically buy and cook more than they have time to eat, these factors paint a problematic picture.

Interventions tackling food waste appear to be giving mixed results. A recent survey by the Swedish Food Agency (2025) showed that consumer knowledge of simple waste mitigation tactics is improving. However, avoidable food waste generated by Swedish households has remained stable over the last few years, during which a clear downward turn has been achieved by the retail sector (physical shops) (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024b). This implies that somewhere within these latter FSC stages, something in food waste reduction measures is going awry.

To summarise, recent data shows that food waste at the retail and household levels remains problematically high, despite ambitious reduction targets (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2024a). FSC actors must act responsibly in adopting measures so that mitigation actions at one stage of the value chain do not merely direct food waste up- or downstream (Swedish Food Agency et al. 2018). Despite this, consumer level data concerning discounted close-to-date foods are widely lacking from available empirics, especially in the form of qualitative data. This highlights the possibility that retailers are shifting food waste downstream to consumers, violating their due diligence as FSC actors.

## 1.2 Aim and research question

This study addresses the gap in extant research regarding whether and how close-to-date foods can reduce retail food waste without increasing household food waste. To that end, this study aims to investigate consumers’ reasoning with and handling of (discounted) close-to-date foods. By realising this aim, the study contributes new

insights regarding the potential effects of the discounting of close-to-date foods on food waste both at the individual and food systems levels.

In light of the widespread implementation of discounting close-to-date foods as a food waste reduction measure at the retail stage, the following research question is posed: How do consumers' everyday food provisioning practices allow for the consumption of close-to-date offers?

To answer this question, I first review the extant literature related to the phenomenon of discounting close-to-date foods. I then establish a practice theoretical basis, around which a qualitative research design is built to direct primary data collection in the form of interviews with consumers, studying their experience of close-to-date food consumption in both retail as well as household settings. Finally, the insights gathered are thematically analysed in relation to the conceptual framework and the existing literature.

## 2. Literature review

The following chapter reviews the extant academic literature in the research field. Literature pertaining specifically to close-to-date offers analysed largely quantitative data. These studies used surveys and choice experiments to investigate consumer perceptions of and preferences for suboptimal foods, including close-to-date items (de Hooge et al. 2017; Aschemann-Witzel 2018; Cicatiello et al. 2019; Chang et al. 2024; Tait et al. 2024) and price involvement and suitable discounting (Tsalis 2020; Amr Yassin & Soares 2021; Tait et al. 2024). Related studies reviewed that also explored quantitative data examined potential links between price promotions and household food waste (Giordano et al. 2019; Van Lin et al. 2023; Tsalis et al. 2024), associations between EU-date marking and consumers' valuation of foods (D'Amato et al. 2023) and drivers of food waste in the context of food provisioning (Stancu et al. 2016; Setti et al. 2018).

Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017b) performed the only mixed methods study specifically on close-to-date offers used in this review, using accompanied shopping interviews and an online survey in the exploration of household food waste associated with close-to-date offers. Meanwhile, Farr-Wharton et al. (2014) used a mixed methods approach to explore the main drivers encouraging food waste at the household level.

Only one study was found that explored discounted close-to-date foods with purely qualitative data. Bech-Larsen et al. (2019) performed a multiple methods study with observations, interviews and qualitative content analysis to assess different practices that promoted or redistributed close-to-date foods. Related studies explored qualitative data that was collected in interviews and observations, including deeper ethnographic techniques. These studies examined the contexts surrounding food provisioning practices and waste (Bava et al. 2008; Evans 2011a, 2012a; b, 2018; Hebrok & Boks 2017; Holmes 2018; Dobernig & Schanes 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019).

Those taking a critical approach to studying consumption and food waste perceive that economic angles focus too heavily on the individual, leading to a narrative that loads responsibility at the consumer level. Evans (2011a), for example, condemns this and the implications it has for the effectiveness of public policy. Individualistic, economic approaches study attitudes, knowledge and skills, which are not main food waste drivers (Shove 2010; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). This is well illustrated in recurring accounts of study participants acknowledging their negative attitudes towards wasting food and intentions not to do so, but failing to put a stop to it, i.e., the attitude-behaviour gap (Evans 2011a, 2012a; Stancu et al. 2016; Hebrok & Boks 2017; Falasconi et al. 2019). Based on these approaches, subsequent development of interventions aimed at consumptive behavioural change

are then based widely on intention and choice, failing to consider, or considering too slightly, the individual in relation to their context.

## 2.1 Food provisioning practices and household food waste

In the academic literature, much effort has been spent defining the factors contributing to and mitigating avoidable household food waste. Contributing actions include lack of household planning, buying and cooking too much food, and not using up leftovers (Evans 2011a; Stancu et al. 2016; Hebrok & Boks 2017; Falasconi et al. 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019; Ananda et al. 2022; Tsalis et al. 2024). Associated factors relating to knowledge and skills include uncertainty about how to store food, misunderstanding the implications of date markings and lacking capabilities to deal with leftovers. In turn, these factors are subject to social, material and structural contexts such as busy lives, packaging and storage infrastructure in the home like cupboard and fridge space (Bava et al. 2008; Evans 2011a, 2012b; Hebrok & Boks 2017; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019).

Not using food that has already been purchased is perceived as both a waste of money and ethically wrong. Although, in this respect, consumers can appear more concerned with the negative financial prospects related to discarding bought food rather than environmental and social issues (Stancu et al. 2016; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; Falasconi et al. 2019).

### 2.1.1 Price involvement and food waste

Offers on foods, e.g., buy-one-get-one free or other “volume” offers, or other so-called “special offers” have garnered criticism for provoking consumers to over-purchase and are widely blamed for generating consumer food waste. A 2021 literature review focusing on these assumptions revealed that aggregated results are ambiguous (Tsalis et al. 2021). Some positive links between price promotions and household food waste were established whilst other findings associated users of price promotions with average or lower than average levels of food waste. In Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2022) found two simultaneously existing, and somewhat contradictory, narratives surrounding questions of responsibility in this relationship between consumer and retailer. On the one hand, a consumer governed relationship in which retailers are essentially stripped of agency and responsibility. On the other, a joint responsibility is shared by consumers and upstream FSC actors, in which the retailer is seen as tempting the consumer into overprovisioning.

Indeed, several accounts questioning the ability of special offers to provoke over-consumption have surfaced in recent years. Van Lin et al. (2023) studied volume-deals finding no evidence of a relationship between food waste and single or multi-unit promotions. Nor could the attention to and purchase of discounted

foods be shown to relate to household food waste by Giordano et al. (2019) and Falasconi et al. (2019). Furthermore, Tsalis et al. (2024) discovered a significant negative association between household food waste and the amount of food purchased at discounts. Additionally, discarding foods bought at discount was shown to be significantly associated with generally higher levels of food waste than average (Giordano et al. 2019).

In fact, deal-searching, price-consciousness and use of discounts have been seen to relate to more awareness of and efforts to reduce food wasted at home. A study by Tsalis et al. (2024) illustrated that consumers who consciously utilise discounts are better at using up their purchases. Moreover, Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017b) demonstrated that the probability of a discounted close-to-date item being made use of at home was integral to the purchase decision, so that money would not be wasted. Amr Yassin and Soares (2021) add weight to this argument by failing to expose any link between discounted close-to-date foods and impulse buying.

These revelations strike a chord with Evans' (2011b) and Holmes' (2018) studies on consciously restrained spending in terms of thrift and frugality. In relation to sustainable consumption<sup>1</sup>, Evans (2011b) proposes a distinction between thrift and frugality. Thrift describes the saving of money in general spending so as to enable further consumption. Frugality, in contrast, is expressed in the prudent use of money and cautious, restrictive consumption. Frugality, therefore, "unlike thrift, it is at odds with normative expectations of consumer cultures" (Evans 2011b:552). Holmes (2018), on the other hand, makes no distinction but describes thrift in terms of the motivation behind restraint in spending – financial necessity, moral conscience and enjoyment. From this understanding, thrift motivated by financial necessity and environmental conscience can be likened to Evans' frugality, as they lead to more sustainable consumption. Holmes' (2018) work highlights that motivations for thrift are not limited to decisions on how to spend money, but rather that they colour how consumers understand and exploit the value of items consumed. This ties in neatly with findings highlighted above that reveal links between prudent spending and using up purchases (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; Tsalis et al. 2024). Consequently, stating that discounts trigger food waste is too simplified a picture of actual circumstances (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; Tsalis et al. 2021).

### 2.1.2 Planning

Composing meal plans in advance and using shopping lists has been shown to influence household food waste. Busy lifestyles that demand the juggling of many commitments can create barriers to structured food provisioning (Hebrok & Boks 2017). Farr-Wharton et al. (2014) describe two ends of a planning spectrum where

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable consumption as consuming less and consuming goods and services with lower impact (Evans 2011b).

planners tend to avoid buying too much food as their provisioning is more grounded in the status of household stocks, compared to improvisers, whose provisioning is more spontaneous and instinctive. A study of food waste behaviour in Denmark revealed that extensive planning is not only challenging but is perceived to limit flexibility (TÆNK Forbrugerrådet et al. 2012). As an associate of overbuying, stocking up to establish preparedness in case of various eventualities has been understood as a driver of food waste as it can lead to the quality and safety of foods deteriorating before consumers get around to thinking to eat them (Graham-Rowe et al. 2014). Although by stocking up on foods with a longer shelf life, like preserves or frozen food, consumers can insure against disruptions whilst avoiding waste (Comber et al. 2013).

### 2.1.3 Storage and leftovers

Storage practices have evolved drastically over the last few generations, allowing for refrigeration methods to both mitigate and facilitate food waste. Despite its vast societal contributions to food safety and convenience (Marshall 2023), fridge and freezer technology represents an important conduit of food waste (Evans 2012b; a; Dobernig & Schanes 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). This applies in particular to leftovers, a result of over-providing, which can be routinely placed in the fridge or freezer after cooking. This can act to obscure the fresh and safe foods that enter the fridge, allowing for their decay and loss of value to occur in containment. This means that the fridge or freezer becomes a holdover placement during which the discomfort associated with wasting the food is lessened by a deterioration which occurs in obscurity.

The production of leftovers is not merely a symptom of a lack of skill or knowledge concerning portion sizes. Evans (2011a, 2012a; b) concludes that living up to societal norms governing family care that expect plentiful meals to be provided is a root cause of leftovers. Leftovers are then subject to further contextual factors that lead to their wastage. For instance, their volume is unsuitable for another portion(s), leftovers that do not *go together*, aspects of prestige and a perceived expectation of variety (Bava et al. 2008; Evans 2012b).

In studying leftovers and food waste, following the food and tracking its perceived value is a central notion in understanding consumers' reasoning. In studying the successful use of leftovers as thrifty behaviour, Cappellini and Parsons (2012) discovered that the collective sacrifice made in preparing and eating meals from leftovers could strengthen feelings of familial belonging. They also found that the production of leftovers could spark the planning of another meal and that this required the skills to understand how its residual value could be released. This aligns with Hebrok and Heidenstrøm's (2019) findings that the perceived value of food is understood in terms of its perceived utilisation.

#### 2.1.4 Risk, safety and date markings

Avoidable household food waste is also caused by uncertainty in determining the safety of food and the misunderstanding of date labelling. In studying household food waste generation, Hebrok and Heidenstrøm (2019) concluded that assessing the edibility of foods was a decisive moment in the cause or mitigation of waste. When consumers are unsure that food is safe, they will discard it rather than risk the health of themselves or their family (Evans 2011a; Farr-Wharton et al. 2014; Graham-Rowe et al. 2014). Priefer et al. (2016) identified best before and use-by date markings as a promising target for intervention as the confusion surrounding them is a main driver of waste at the household level. Lack of knowledge on this topic could also compound other causes of food waste in the household, like buying too much food and uncertainty in how to store it (Ananda et al. 2022). D'Amato (2023) found that misinterpreting date labels leads to consumers' over- or underestimating a product's value, whilst Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017b) illustrated that it leads to decisions not to purchase. The latter study also demonstrated however, that reasoning about date labelling alongside other factors at the household level differs to pre-purchase reasoning. In addition, de Hooge et al. (2017) propose that familiarity with SOF products is likely to offer knowledge development when it comes to interpreting date labelling and the use of the senses to evaluate a food's continued edibility.

#### 2.1.5 Sociological approaches consider contexts

A sociological approach recognises that material, temporal and social contexts of consumers' everyday lives form and reform the way they handle food (Evans 2011a, 2012; Holmes 2018; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). Holmes (2018) relates this to the study of thrift, explaining that thrift merely in term of consumption disregards its importance in, and relevance to, other aspects of daily living.

A number of everyday contexts were identified by both Bava (2008) and Evans (2011a, 2012a). These included routinised provisioning where unemptied packages and leftovers did not conform to the pattern and a lack of synchrony between the material and the temporal. For example, packaging portions unsuited to single-person households led to the spoiling of remainders before they were desired again, and that normalised perceptions of 'proper'<sup>2</sup> meals and healthy diets rationalised overprovisioning such as to cooking too much and buying too much fresh fruit and vegetables. As seen in the normative use of 'proper', Bava et al. (2008) highlighted the dichotomous use of 'good' and 'bad' in reference to providing good and healthy food. Food provisioning governed in part by notions of good, bad and proper, for

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<sup>2</sup> The term proper in this respect is widely used in colloquial English. It generally means wholesome and decent, in the very least meeting the needs of the eater. Note however that the term is subjective (Evans 2011a).

example, are described by Holmes (2018) in terms of thrift motivated by conscience.

Hebrok and Heidenström (2019) exhibited how decisive moments at the individual level are interlinked to more structural contexts of daily life, infrastructure and meaning. That food waste is governed in no small part by factors outside the direct control of the consumer implies that, in addition to awareness and knowledge building, policy and interventions ought to also target these associated contexts. Hebrok and Boks (2017) also underscore the importance of capitalising on the deeper understandings of consumer behaviour afforded by qualitative methods.

## 2.2 The discounting of close-to-date foods and food provisioning practices

Several of the studies focused on consumer behaviour with discounted close-to-date foods merely in relation to its commercial implications and to reducing food waste at the retail level (Aschemann-Witzel 2018; Bech-Larsen et al. 2019; Cicatiello et al. 2019; Amr Yassin & Soares 2021; D'Amato et al. 2023; Chang et al. 2024; Tait et al. 2024). Whilst this thesis is interested in the consumer perspective, it is helpful to understand the research-base for the retail sector's marketing of discounted close-to-date foods as this also reflects and affects the consumers' food provisioning practices, especially those occurring at the supermarket.

### 2.2.1 Price involvement & shopping

Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017b) propose that selling cut-price SOFs targets price-focused consumers, a group that may waste less due to their in-store considerations. For commercialisation, Bech-Larsen et al. (2019) reason that close-to-date reductions should be distinguished as promotional. Tsalis (2020) demonstrated that certain types of price involvement, including deal-proneness and value consciousness, (not necessarily focused on low prices *per se*), generated increased purchase interest for SOFs, price consciousness, (dedication to low prices), however, did not. This aligns with findings by Aschemann-Witzel (2018). Chang et al. (2024) showed that consumers with deep concerns over prices present positive perceptions of SOFs that maintain acceptable quality.

Aschemann-Witzel (2018) and Chang et al. (2024) investigated the effects of varying the way in which close-to-date discounts are communicated. Chang et al. (2024) illustrated that discounted items with high original prices are more attractive to Taiwanese consumers when the discount is communicated in terms of money saved whereas discounts on items with low original prices are more attractive to consumers when communicated in terms of percent. Aschemann-Witzel (2018)



found no significant variation in Danish consumers' purchase likelihood when stickers on discounted close-to-date foods items communicated the price in combination with a variety of other cues - *fight food waste, save money, and organic*.

Slightly at odds with Aschemann-Witzel (2018), above, social and environmental credence values such as organic production have elsewhere been found to positively affect consumer perceptions of SOFs (Tait et al. 2024). Discounted close-to-date foods seem to be perceived by consumers as quite distinct from other reduced price foods (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; de Hooge et al. 2017; Tsalis 2020). For example, various types of suboptimality are valued differently by consumers (de Hooge et al. 2017), potentially influenced by the potential safety aspect posed by close-to-date foods (Tsalis 2020). This implies that discounted close-to-date foods items ought to be studied as a discrete group.

A number of articles conclude that consumer perceptions of discounts vary across specific types of products and their discounts. As mentioned above, the valuation of a discounted item was shown to depend on its original price, indicating that original price is used by the consumer as a proxy for quality (Chang et al. 2024). Comparable multiple- and single-unit promotions are perceived differently (Van Lin et al. 2023), and consumer attitudes towards "normal" discounts are different from those towards SOFs (Cicatiello et al. 2019). Consumer perceptions are not only important in relation to price communication, but also to the communication of SOF promotions in general.

### 2.2.2 Consumer acceptance

Some studies have challenged the perception that promoting the sale of SOFs can be damaging to store and brand images. In 2017(b), Aschemann-Witzel et al. met with accounts of discounted close-to-date foods reflecting well on retailers. Bech-Larsen et al. (2019) exposed that the phenomenon was witnessing increased acceptance across socio-economic strata in some European countries. A sentiment also mirrored by Aschemann-Witzel (2018) in Denmark. This study suggested that the visibility of the food waste debate in media led to favourable perceptions by inducing consumers to test the practice. Hence, upon meeting with good experiences of SOFs and building familiarity, favourable attitudes were generated, increasing the likelihood of SOF purchases. This is mirrored in a later study by Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2022) which, in questions of consumer and retailer responsibility, concluded that both retailer and consumers have taken to assuming more responsibility for food waste issues in light of a continuous societal discourse on the matter (de Hooge et al. 2017). These findings imply that the recent reframing of this measure, from mitigating financial losses (Tsiros & Heilman 2005) to mitigating food waste, has helped to increase its acceptance with consumers.

Consumer familiarity with these items has even been evidenced to increase the likelihood of their purchase. Chang et al. (2024) found familiarity to be both a moderating and a direct factor in consumer attitude and intention to purchase suboptimal foods. De Hooge et al. (2017) commented that more experience with SOF probably generates increased willingness to consume close-to-date items. Similarly, both Aschemann-Witzel (2018) and Tsalis (2020) found that an existing tendency for SOF purchase positively affected intention for future SOF purchase and were able to link this with price-involvement.

## 2.3 Literature review conclusion

Taken together, the literature indicates that dimensions of price involvement and thrift are intricately linked to consumer perceptions of value. This implies that consumer motivations for purchasing close-to-date offers are associated with subsequent behaviour in the household that acts to minimise waste in general. The literature also highlights the myriad contexts of everyday life that influence waste throughout consumers' food provisioning practices, regardless of the consumers' motivations. While each activity that revolves around households' food provision is subject to its own food waste factors, these factors often impact across multiple food provisioning practices. This creates an interconnectedness through food provisioning which reflects that seen in perceptions of value that link purchase motivations, through activities in the household, and hence to food waste.

This chapter has revealed a lack of research on close-to-date foods independently from other SOFs. In addition, generation of food waste in the household is contextually dependent. However, whilst qualitative data is essential in the exploration of contexts, data pertaining specifically to close-to-date offers is largely quantitative. Going forward, this highlights the need for qualitative data that provides insights into how consumers reason with and manage their consumption of close-to-date offers in relation to everyday contexts in order to understand possible associations with food waste.

### 3. Theory

To answer how consumers' everyday food provisioning practices allow for the consumption of close-to-date offers, I require a theory that can explain how reasoning and everyday practical management of close-to-date foods interrelate, from administering retail purchases to household use. To this end, I use practice theory because, by encouraging that the elements of each food related activity be accounted for, it allows for common elements between activities to be identified, clarifying the interrelatedness of food related activities. Further, to operationalise practice theory for the empirical investigation of close-to-date foods, the use of such offers is regarded as a specific type of consumption within food provisioning.

This chapter opens with an initial look at practice theories to provide a basis for the practical approach to understanding food provisioning. Finally, the role of consumption within practices presented.

#### 3.1 Practice theories

Practice theories propose a way to understand the construction of the social world, a world in which practices are its fundamental building blocks (Schatzki 2001). A practice is:

“[...] a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.”(Reckwitz 2002:249)

A practice therefore, is an established way of performing a physical and/or cognitive activity in a routinised manner. Practices such as composing a shopping list, grocery shopping, or cooking are performed when the carrier – the individual carrying out the practice – coordinate and connect the relevant elements (Reckwitz 2002).

To aid empirical study, the elements of a practice can be categorised as materials (things), competences (knowledge and skills) and meanings (feelings and motivation) (Shove et al. 2012). Simply interpreted, I understand these elements as the *Whats*, *Hows* and *Whys* of performing a practice. In the performance, the carrier coordinates the elements and thereby performs the practice. To indicate how one can conceptualise what people do in terms of practices and their materials, competences and meanings, I speculate how a consumer might perform a food provisioning practice, shopping, in order to purchase a close-to-date offer:

*What* things does the practice necessitate? – Discounted close-to-date food, a retailer, money, communication of the discount.

*How* are these things used? *How* was this knowledge and skill learned? – The communication of the discount might be used in a basic cost-benefit analysis of the potential purchase, this might involve knowledge in e.g., how to use the food, taste, nutrition, how long it will keep etc. In turn, this could demand cooking skills and other knowledge learned from parents, recipe books or life-experience, for example.

*Why* is the practice performed? – The discount could allow saving money on a planned purchase giving good value for money, one could also be motivated to buy the close-to-date offer because it feels good to rescue food that might be thrown away.

A practice is neither static nor existing in a vacuum. Practices share common Whats, Hows and Whys which link them (Shove et al. 2012), and they are affected by changes to their environs. That is to say that practices and their performances are characteristic of their temporal, spatial and social contexts (Warde 2005). Thus, in reciprocation with developments and disruptions to these contexts, the way practices are performed can change.

### 3.1.1 Practical food provisioning

Food provisioning practices encompass those directed towards and stemming from the obtaining and eating of food (Bava et al. 2008; Schubert 2008). These practices are strongly connected and interdependent often sharing materials, competences and meanings.

The more widespread implementation of discounting close-to-date foods by grocery retailers seen recently represents a new dimension in the food provisioning environment. On the surface, the intervention affects the grocery store context, likely impacting practices performed there. However, the interdependent nature of food provisioning practices imply that it will also impact practices performed in the household context. The entire array of food provisioning practices may therefore be required to evolve in order to inhabit this new dimension and allow for the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods (Schatzki 2013).

By understanding food provisioning in this manner, practice theory provides a tool by which I may analyse the effects of consumption of discounted close-to-date foods on the routinised activities that can be considered under the umbrella of food provisioning practices, and *vice versa*. That is to say, how the materials, competences and meanings of food provisioning practices might have evolved to accommodate the innovation of discounting close-to-date foods, and how everyday food provisioning shapes how close-to-date foods are used.

## 3.2 Consumption and practices

Collectively, practice theories have been emphasised as a fitting tool for sociologists to employ in the analysis of consumption (Schatzki 2001; Warde 2005, 2014; Halkier & Jensen 2011; Warde et al. 2017). This is underscored by Corsini et al. (2019) who detail the rise of operationalising social practice theories in the study of sustainable consumption.

Consumption of discounted close-to-date foods is driven by the performance of certain food provisioning practices. Warde (2005) conceives that the conventions of a given practice dictate what is obtained and used in order to perform it, that practice instigates consumption. Hence, consumption is not a practice in itself but rather a prerequisite for practices. Of interest to the current study therefore, is to understand which aspects of food provisioning performance by the consumers of close-to-date offers dictate that these foods are suitable.

Facilitating the analysis of the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods, I utilise a framework that conceptualises distinguishable moments of consumption. Warde (2005, 2014) proposes three such moments:

- *Acquisition* deals with how the consumers access and obtain discounted close-to-date foods.
- *Appropriation* involves what the consumers do with their discounted close-to-date foods, how they are incorporated into their lives and ascribed with meaning.
- *Appreciation* is concerned with how consumption of discounted close-to-date foods gratifies and pleases the consumers.

These three As reveal that the ways in which close-to-date foods are obtained, used and enjoyed are keys to understanding how they are integrated into everyday life. However, the application of these three As to the focus of this study, close-to-date foods, their discounted purchase and their subsequent fate highlights a shortcoming in relation to the broader context of this study: What if the fate of the discounted close-to-date item is the rubbish bin? Issues of waste highlight subsequent moments in consumption, relating to the reversal of Warde's (2005, 2014) three As. Evans (2019) proposes a counterpart "D" to each of the three As:

- *Devaluation* represents the reversal of appreciation, how the discounted close-to-date food's value, its capacity to provide satisfaction to the consumers, decreases with time.
- *Divestment* represents the reversal of appropriation, how attachments to discounted close-to-date foods are negated and meaning diminished.

- *Disposal* represents the reversal of acquisition, the factors contributing to the discounted close-to-date food ending up in the compost bin.

The three Ds illuminate that the value of close-to-date acquisitions is subject to the temporal context. This is consequently reflected in changes to how close-to date foods are related to and the eventual undoing of acquisition.

In identifying how these consumption moments are enacted with close-to-date offers, I may understand and explain how these foods are accommodated by the elements of food provisioning practices and hence how they are considered as befitting their performance.

## 4. Method

The following chapter gives an account of the data collection and analysis processes and provides support for the methodological choices I made in research design. All preparation, data collection and analysis were carried out by me.

This study took place in Sweden and data collection was carried out in March and April of 2025.

### 4.1 Research approach

This study investigates the consumers' own practices for purchasing and using discounted close-to-date foods, in relation to their own lives and employs practice theory as a lens through which to understand consumption (and waste). Practice theory recognises the origin of practices in social constructions (Warde 2005). Thus, the study requires a social constructivist epistemology to ensure appropriate method design, data collection and analysis.

The constructivist approach is interested in the individuals' own interpretations and experiences of reality (Robson & McCartan 2016). The interviews offered a flexible data collection method via which I could personally interact with the interviewees in real time to gain insights into how they understood their own consumption of discounted close-to-date foods in their performances of food provisioning practices. Using semi-structured interviews, I was able to actively adapt the interview's structure, in an organic and reflexive manner, depending on the responses delivered (Robson & McCartan 2016; Bååth 2022).

### 4.2 Recruitment of interviewees

I designed a simple flyer for public display and distribution to attract potential interviewees (see Appendix I). The flyer included a QR-code and URL to an online form where interested individuals could leave their contact details and any questions, they were also asked to state where they saw the flyer. A university email address was also provided in as a second line of contact. The flyer and study description supplied to potential participants intentionally excluded any reference to food waste. This deviation from the ALLEA-codex (2023) was taken to minimise the risk that interviewee responses would be affected by this topic which has been widely moralised in societal discussion in recent years.

The flyers were distributed in a variety of manners to reach a range of consumers of discounted close-to-date foods. Initially, physical copies were pinned to public noticeboards and dropped into 60 letterboxes of detached and semi-detached houses around a few suburbs of southwest Stockholm. Several supermarkets were approached for permission to display the flyer alongside their close-to-date items.

However, only one smaller supermarket accepted. Referral sampling was also employed, whereby interviewees identified other individuals eligible for participation (Robson & McCartan 2016). Interviewees were kindly asked to suggest and contact potential interviewees they knew or suspected, bought close-to-date items. They were also provided with a digital copy of the flyer. Additionally, in reaction to low response levels, digital copies of flyers were also sent to social and professional contacts with the request of spreading them among their own contacts.

A total of 20 individuals responded to the various recruitment methods (see Table 1), active steps were taken to enrol male interviewees since earlier respondents were overwhelmingly female.

*Table 1. Overview of the interviewees by gender, recruitment method and age group. For recruitment method and age group, division of gender is given in brackets with female first.*

<i>Interviewees (n=15)</i>	
<i>Gender</i>	
<i>Female</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Male</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Interviewees per recruitment method (female/male)</i>	
<i>Supermarket poster</i>	<i>3 (0/3)</i>
<i>Noticeboard poster</i>	<i>2 (2/0)</i>
<i>Letterbox</i>	<i>2 (1/1)</i>
<i>Referral</i>	<i>7 (7/0)</i>
<i>Direct associate</i>	<i>1 (1/0)</i>
<i>Age group (female/male)</i>	
<i>30-39</i>	<i>3 (1/2)</i>
<i>40-49</i>	<i>7 (6/1)</i>
<i>50-59</i>	<i>3 (2/1)</i>
<i>60-69</i>	<i>2 (2/0)</i>

Table 1 gives an overview of the interviewees. 11 females and 4 males were interviewed, representing a broad variation of age and income. No interviewees came from the same household and they were all interviewed separately.

### 4.3 Interviews

The interviewees were offered a choice of interview medium: in person; a digital meeting; or a telephone call. Reasons behind this were on the one hand pragmatic. Digital and telephone options were considered as allowing convenience for individuals who might otherwise have considered the process too time consuming. On the other hand, participant choice of interview medium was also reasoned to work in favour of a social constructivist epistemology as the interviewee was able



communicate and give context to what was relevant and important to them, in this instance in terms of meeting environment (Holstein & Gubrium 1995).

14 interviews were conducted in Swedish and one in English. I, the researcher am a native English speaker and speak Swedish fluently as a second language. The interview conducted in English was with another native English speaker.

The approach to interview design, conduct and analysis was influenced by perspectives of the Active interview (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). This *modus* acknowledges interviews as sites of co-construction of meaning and emphasises their interpretative nature. This approach was particularly useful in the application of the interview guide in a semi-structured manner. I became a facilitator to the dialogues, allowing the interviewees to express their interpretations whilst lightly guiding in terms of thematic direction, providing relevance in the meaning created.

An interview guide was formulated that encouraged the collaborative process described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) (see Appendix II). Based around three stages, interviews expanded on the perspective of food on journeys, i.e., the interviewees' path of food provisioning practices (Bava et al. 2008; Evans 2011a, 2018; Tsalis et al. 2021). This highlights the connectedness of the practices and links the moments of consumption - from household food planning and purchasing through storage, to eventual use or disposal. Seen as a journey, planning around food could be seen as the first step, perhaps more conceptual and cognitive than physical food shopping or cooking. A household's degree of planning for meals and food shopping is often studied in relation to actual purchasing and/or food waste (e.g.: Evans 2011; Stancu et al. 2016; Cicatiello et al. 2019; Giordano et al. 2019).

Further, each stage of the food journey highlighted in the interview guide was itself approached with a three-step framework that helped to operationalise the constructivist epistemology and practice theoretical perspective. Adapted from Granot (2012), the first step is concerned with how the interviewee came to find themselves in the current situation, this was adapted to the practice theoretical perspective by enquiring as to how the respondent's food provisioning practices with discounted close-to-date foods were learned (Sahakian & Wilhite 2014). Granot's (2012) second step looks into the interviewee's accounts of their own experiences. Encouraging recollection rather than accounting for opinions, e.g. asking the interviewee to think of a specific close-to-date item they had recently bought, offered an effectual tool to procure interpretations of their lived experiences (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). Lastly, the interviewees were asked what the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods meant to them (Granot et al. 2012). Encouraging reflection on the embeddedness of this consumption within their food provisioning in this manner was the culmination of the collaborative meaning-making (Holstein & Gubrium 1995).

Two pilot interviews were conducted to test the guide, these interviewees were previously known to the interviewer. These pilots provided valuable insights and

were included in the analysis. A sound recording was made of each interview for later transcription and some notes were taken during the interview. These notes were mostly for use later during the interview, e.g., family names and children's ages, follow-up questions (Robson & McCartan 2016). Upon ending an interview, my general impressions about the interviewee's consumption of discounted close-to-date foods were jotted down. In addition, analytic memos were written to record an account of my reflections on the process and any patterns I recognised could be emerging (Saldaña 2013).

#### 4.3.1 Ethical considerations

Prior to their participation, interviewees were required to read and sign information and consent form (see Appendix III). The form detailed their right to withdrawal, what personal data would be collected and how it would be processed and stored. Due care was taken to safeguard anonymity of respondents from third parties, except in cases of referral sampling where participation depended on this overstep.

### 4.4 Analysis

#### 4.4.1 Transcription

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed by hand which provided further depth to my familiarisation with the material, an important preparation for subsequent coding (Robson & McCartan 2016). A degree of active selection was employed; for example, dialogue going off on irrelevant tangents was excluded and rambling monologues were paraphrased to highlight their point. This gave better flow to the transcripts, facilitating further analysis. Paraphrases were written in italics between asterisks to denote the selectivity, often with a timestamp to allow for easy retrieval if required at a later stage. In addition, the manuscripts were largely naturalised e.g., a comma added for a pause, an exclamation mark or capital letters used upon an outburst or particularly strong emphasis. Whilst naturalised text in manuscript is a positivist trait, it was felt to add usefulness, providing clarity and readability in the resulting text (Bucholtz 2000; Davidson 2009).

#### 4.4.2 Coding

After transcription of the recorded interviews, I analysed the data in three rounds of coding. Firstly, I used descriptive and structural codes to sort and reduce the data which allowed me to build a practical foundation that supported the rest of the coding process (Gibbs 2012; Saldaña 2013; Robson & McCartan 2016). The data extracted included dialogue about food provisioning practices and other relevant topics lifted by the literature review, both in terms of discounted close-to-date foods and foods in general, e.g., planning, price involvement, date markings, waste. As the code names transpired, they were recorded in a codebook alongside a

description and in some cases exclusion criteria. The codebook was then used as a point of reference to facilitate consistent coding throughout process (Gibbs 2012; Saldaña 2013).

In the second round of coding, I categorised the data extracts from the first round in terms of the elements of practices and in terms of consumption moments. Excerpts pertaining to materials, competences and/or meanings related to discounted close-to-date foods were distinguished from practices with foods in general. In the same vein excerpts pertaining to consumption moments with discounted close-to-date foods were distinguished from those with foods in general. The concept driven steps in both rounds one and two enabled me to identify particular nuances in the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods that contribute to their suitability for the interviewees' everyday food provisioning performances (Gibbs 2012).

Finally, the categories were coded once more to highlight thematic similarities between the excerpts, enabling me to group together extracts on the same theme. This allowed me to build a theme-by-theme understanding of the interviewees' accounts and identify key features underlying their consumption of discounted close-to-date foods. These are presented in the following chapter.

## 5. Findings

This section presents the findings from the data collection and coding analysis. To give structure, the presentation will follow the journey of close-to-date foods through the various food provisioning practices. These are primarily divided into two sections. Firstly, practices and consumption moments which play out in the grocery store, followed by those carried out in the home.

### 5.1 Consumption of close-to-date foods at the supermarket

For most interviewees, shopping trips are preceded by some level of planning. Planning can be appreciated as initiating acquisition and also as the point of departure for the food journey. The interviewees demonstrated, however, that planning is a practice that is neither limited to the time before the shopping trip is made, nor even necessary in all cases. The grocery store provides the material infrastructure for the performance of grocery shopping, of course, but is also the site of much planning; together, these practices demand a host of competences and interrelate to practices performed later in provisioning.

#### 5.1.1 Planning

The level of detail and structure the interviewees applied to meal planning and list-making prior to a supermarket visit ranged along a scale. At the most thorough extreme, some interviewees constructed a list for up to a week's worth of detailed meal planning. Interviewee 2's children lived with him every other week, for these weeks, he scheduled a meal plan for weekday dinners that went as far as considering the children's school lunch menu:

2: For weekdays I often check through the schedule for school lunches and try to plan around that and do a meal plan on a Sunday for the week, for dinners... so they don't get fish and potatoes for dinner if they've had it for lunch. And so they get more hearty food on the days... they sometimes get soup at school and then I think that they can have something more carbohydrate and protein-rich, like spaghetti Bolognese or something heavier.

More open approaches included interviewee 12's process, a mix of structured meal planning in advance and semi-structured lists with types of foods, e.g., meat, fish, vegetables etc. She would then shop depending on what fitting items were on offer or discounted upon her visit to the store. Interestingly, in light of the quote above, interviewee 2 also exhibited loose planning, applicable to child-free weeks:

2: Maybe I don't plan at all, I can plan on the way home from work, in my head, I know pretty much what I've got at home and if I might need to shop. At the weekend it could

be that I just go to the shop and have a look, what's there? What am I in the mood for?  
So it can be very spontaneous like that, that can be fun.

Some interviewees arrived at the grocery store with a vague objective to *Shop for dinner*, allowing for interest to be piqued by seeing what was available. At the other extreme, interviewees exhibited a total lack of planning and would go into the store because they happened to be walking by.

Once at the supermarket, an interviewee would very occasionally stumble across a discounted close-to-date item that fit neatly into their planning without the need for any reorganisation. However, the interviewees' thought processes regarding potential purchases of discounted close-to-date products, especially for dinners, usually varied between three patterns, each demanding various competences. Firstly, purchases of discounted close-to-date items could be made in the name of opportunistically stocking up. In this instance, interviewees capitalised on a good price without a specific meal plan in mind but with the knowledge that the items would fit into the rhythm of the household. This even facilitated future, more structured planning around what was already at home.

12: I know which products we like. I've cooked food my whole life and I know that there's a lot you can do with a piece of meat or fish. So [upon seeing a discounted close-to-date food] it's not at all that I think -Then I'll make that recipe- , not really, I just know that this is good meat, I can use it for *something*.

This everyday usefulness was sometimes due to the perceived adaptability of the discounted close-to-date item itself and was reliant on cooking knowledge and skills, as interviewee 11 remarked when we discussed how she intuitively understood that discounted close-to-date cream could easily be integrated into a dinner:

11: So it's pretty easy for me to think, -Right, I've got squash, I've got this cream that's going to go off and maybe onion and pasta-, I can make something with that but I don't need to look up a recipe. [...] I'd never bake without a recipe but I know how to experiment with the food I cook. [...]

Interviewer: So it's kind of along the lines of, you have a good understanding for how to use these items and also that you, for the most part, buy discounted close-to-date items that will work in the day-to-day?

11: Yes

Interviewer: ... that there aren't any outliers...

11: No... I buy discounted close-to-date stuff that are ingredients, I'd be surprised I came home with some kind of. pancake mix for example, something that has a specified use. I can do lots of different things with a squash, I can use cream in lots of different things, but with pancake mix...

Interviewer: You get pancakes...

11: You get pancakes!

When not stocking up, interviewees spontaneously formulated meal plans based on the discounted close-to-date offers available. The planning of a particular meal around the close-to-date item initiated its appropriation. The interviewee would imagine how they would prepare the item, what would accompany it, who would eat it and, often based on the date marking, when this would occur. These mental steps instigated the food's incorporation into the interviewees' day-to-day. For improvisors, this could solve the question *What's for dinner?* where the close-to-date item represented the point of departure for the evening's dinner. In doing so, these close-to-date foods offered a convenience, reducing the cognitive effort required by providing dinner. Alternatively, for structured administrators, the dinner plan featuring the discounted close-to-date item would be cognitively woven into an existing meal plan that the interviewee was shopping for. The latter instance demanded the competence to exercise flexibility in their planning, often whilst also recalling the status of items already present in the household. Interviewee 15 described how she reasons:

15: Yes, we did cod with potatoes and egg-sauce, there's always some dinner that's not so planned – this filled in.

Interviewer: In that case, what happened with your plan?

15: The plan remained. We often have four dinners planned and there's always one you can put off until next week if you find an discounted close-to-date item instead, and then I've got a dinner over for next week. It's usually something that will keep, if we're going to eat spinach soup, that's frozen so it can get used the week after instead.

### 5.1.2 The supermarket

The interviewees reported on different methods of display and communication used by retailers selling discounted close-to-date foods. The most common display methods discussed were a dedicated fridge, just for discounted close-to-date foods with mixed product groups, and displaying close-to-date items alongside identical items with a longer shelf-life. The interviewees showed mixed preferences concerning the different approaches. Once they had found dedicated close-to-date fridges in their frequented stores, the interviewees most often or always visited them when they were there. This suited some interviewees, but others found it interrupted their trip. It was uncommon for the interviewees to alter their store route to visit the dedicated fridge first, so they would pick up items along their regular route and visit the dedicated fridge when they were nearer it. This could sometimes be a bit impractical, resulting in them finding discounted close-to-date items that were comparable to items they had already picked up. As a consequence, the interviewees who wished to replace the item with the longer shelf-life with the one from the discounted close-to-date fridge were forced to double back on themselves. This meant that they preferred the other display method, where foods were in the same place regardless of their shelf-life.

Some interviewees commented explicitly that they thought that the dedicated fridge should be more conspicuously presented, rather than disguised with opaque doors for example, as this had prevented them from finding it in the first place. In addition, these fridges should be more prominently located, instead of halfway around or at the back of the store. Interviewee 3 related her feelings on the matter:

3: I think the supermarket, first and foremost, they want to sell products at full price and sometimes you see that they put, at ICA for example, they put that fridge in a corner, they should put these close-to-date right at the front, somewhere where everyone can see, then you can buy it, you have more chance of seeing that the close-to-date items exist. But of course they primarily want to sell their goods at full price. But there are people who only want to buy things with a long shelf-life. But for many, people with poor finances, this close-to-date discounting means a lot so I think they should have more products in a place where everyone can see.

Retailer communication regarding these products was discussed with regard to two topics. Interviewees 7 and 9 declared that the way the discount was communicated was important in their ultimate purchase decision. Interviewee 11 commented on the way the phenomenon as a whole was presented by the retailer:

11: I remember the first time I saw them marked up with like “Eat Soon” or whatever it usually says, and I thought it was really good to highlight that for the customer, “We don’t want to chuck this product, you can buy it a bit cheaper.” [...]

Interviewer: And you thought that was a good way to communicate, these soon to expire items need to be eaten soon, and the message was, “....so we don’t throw it away”?

11: That’s what I thought in any case.

Naturally, as self-identified users of discounted close-to-date foods, all the interviewees expressed positivity towards the phenomenon, although this was not totally without a downside. Whilst the interviewees felt positively about the retailer discounting close-to-date foods, they expressed mixed opinions about retailer/industry responsibility in food waste questions. Some interviewees expressed a kind of dutiful responsibility as a consumer, one which they felt, to some degree, was forced on them, the consumer, by the implementation of discounting close-to-date foods. This quote, also from interviewee 11, illustrates a level of complexity in her thoughts and actions towards discounted close-to-date foods, one which was mirrored by other interviewees:

Interviewer: ... although you have actually expressed some feelings of responsibility, but you don’t feel like it’s your responsibility to buy these items so that the supermarkets don’t need to throw them away?

11: Yeah there’s absolutely that kind of process in me, but I also need to check myself so I’m not doing their job too!

Interviewer: So you have felt some pressure that some of this [responsibility] lies with you?

11: Absolutely.

Whilst it was uncommon for the interviewees to change their store route to accommodate a dedicated fridge for close-to-date foods, some did change their entire shopping routine to prioritise potentially finding close-to-date foods. Interviewee 12 lives rurally, seven kilometres from her local supermarkets, a journey which necessitates driving:

12: I shop at this ICA where they're bad at [discounting close-to-date foods]. There aren't a lot of supermarkets here, I can't drive tens of kilometres to get to a better one. But then I discovered that the little COOP was better at it, so I go there and buy [discounted close-to-date foods] and then I go and do the rest of the shopping at ICA. And then I'm out and about quite a lot locally so I've learned which shops are good at [discounting close-to-date foods] so I can go in and buy it.

In a similar vein but a markedly different geographical context, interviewee 5 lives less than a five-minute walk from his local supermarket, which uses a dedicated fridge to display its discounted close-to-date foods. Interviewee 5's consumption of discounted close-to-date foods has fundamentally changed the way he shops. For his basics, coffee and bread for example, he will drive to a larger shopping centre further out of town to stock up. On an almost daily basis, encouraged by his proximity to the shop and facilitated by the irregular hours of his work, he now visits the local shop in the morning, when he knows that staff mark-up and move close-to-date items to the dedicated fridge, and when the shop is not so busy. He is open-minded and curious in his shopping and lets the discounted close-to-date items dictate what he will eat for the day.

### 5.1.3 Purchase decisions

Many of the interviewees expressed specifically buying discounted close-to-date foods that were the same as, or similar to, foods already in regular circulation in the household. In this respect, discounted close-to-date breakfast products, like yoghurt and sandwich toppings, could however vary compared to what might have been a household's preferred choice, as exemplified by interviewee 1:

1: And it doesn't matter what kind it is, it can be different – when I eat breakfast at home it's a lot of fil<sup>3</sup> - A-fil or kefir or onaka [...]

Interviewer: So you're not so picky? You don't need to see that it's a specific fil, just some kind of fil for your breakfast, it'll work?

1: Yes, it's very opportunistic, my hunt for discounted close-to-date items.

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<sup>3</sup> A soured milk product, most similar in use and taste to yoghurt, common at breakfast in Sweden.



This illustrated the competence to be flexible in this respect, i.e., they were not bound to brand or flavour. The recognition of this competence is strengthened by the contrast offered by interviewee 12 with the same kind of foods:

12: It's partly to do with the fact that yoghurt, it's a very particular kind. We never buy those fruit yoghurts. And you want the sourness that you're used to, in that we're rather... we don't want kefir and fil and such except we want a particular kind and I don't see them selling it off [discounted close-to-date] actually.

Breakfast foods in general were often highlighted as suitable for discounted close-to-date purchases as the tendency to routinely eat very similar breakfasts every day resulted in a relatively high and predictable turnover. Such turnover was particularly associated with dairy products, such as milk and yoghurt, making them attractive offers despite their fast-approaching best before date. The interviewees interpreted the date markings on these products precisely as intended, as best before but often acceptable after. They articulated the knowledge that these products often maintain their quality long after best before date, another competence.

The protein part of the weekday dinners was also a prominent product group in the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods. Most prevalent were meat products (e.g., minced, cuts, whole chickens, processed), and cuts of fish. Some prefabricated vegetarian items also came up in discussion (e.g., vegetable fritters, vegetarian sausages, pancakes). For interviewee 12, the discounting of close-to-date meat and fish meant that her budget could accommodate better quality. The interviewees often expressed that, while to a lesser degree than breakfast, evening meals during the week are also routinised, often cycling through a kind of recipe bank every one to two weeks.

Whilst the majority of discounted close-to-date products the interviewees brought up were par for the course of their regular food provisioning, some items could be categorised as disrupting regular food provisioning practices. The purchase of these foods was justified by the discount and/or the rescuing aspect linked to these offers. These disruptive foods often represented small luxuries and, in some cases, enabled them to make a longed-for meal that otherwise would have been deemed too expensive or otherwise out of character. Incidentally, both interviewees 7 and 9 discussed making pizzas in this light:

9: I usually say -Now I want us to make one of those gorgonzola pizzas-... We only do that when gorgonzola is on offer, close-to-date, hahaha!

And interviewee 7:

7: Last time it was little tomatoes, and we made a pizza with them, which is really good with little tomato halves on. So [dinner] was pizza one day when we hadn't thought to eat pizza but I'd been longing for one of those pizzas with little tomatoes on.

In another case, interviewee 10, who lives alone, treated herself to a potato gratin with good quality cheese, prettily and practically constructed in a muffin form for a single serving. The item was a luxury both in terms of original price and in terms of its rich ingredients, something that interviewee 10 usually steered well clear of.

7: I found a potato gratin with Västerbotten cheese and it was like a little pastry in a muffin case. It was very good, but I would never buy something like that at full price, potato gratin isn't, it's got too much fat and all sorts in it but it was good.

The final example of discounted close-to-date foods disrupting regular food provisioning covers a theme that, during analysis, I called *Meat for vegetarians*. Two interviewees who, as a rule, do not eat meat, disliked the thought that a meat product would go to waste so much that they sometimes bought discounted close-to-date meat. They had not given up eating meat because they didn't like it, but for environmental and climate-related reasons. For them, close-to-date meat represented a loophole:

9: I feel like I'm tricking the system a bit. Me, who's not actually allowed to buy meat. But when I buy discounted close-to-date meat then I'm doing a good deed. So I can almost think that it's a bit of a luxury to get to eat a Bolognese sauce made with beef mince instead of vegan mince like we always do otherwise, and it's not really as good. I think it's damn good with beef mince so... I think I'm exploiting a loophole there.

And interviewee 11, commenting on the nature of discounts piquing one's interest:

11: I said we never cook meat at home and, in principle, we don't eat meat but it has happened that I've come home with sandwich meat, hahaha, which I think is, like smoked ham... No, it was salami, which I think is REALLY good, but that I normally speaking don't eat. So I saw it on discount and just -I'm going to jump at this opportunity!- I got a motivation so now I can eat a little salami because otherwise it'll be chucked and it's better that I eat it up than that it's chucked.

In an additional example of *Meat for vegetarians*, interviewee 14 does not want to eat meat at all for animal welfare reasons. She does buy meat regularly because her husband and three children are meat eaters, however, she tries to serve as little meat at home as she can. Her compassion for animals is triggered by the sight of discounted close-to-date meat products, leading to her buying them and even eating them herself to save them from going to waste. She has even lowered her standards in this respect, purchasing discounted close-to-date non-organic chicken when she would normally buy organic. She reasoned that she knows that their standard of living is awful, so she feels even more sorry for them and buys them to that some meaning on their existence is imparted.

*Meat for vegetarians* intersects both competence and meaning as it illustrates how interviewees 9, 11 and 14 can flip their everyday vegetarian stance to a stance which encourages meat-eating (competence) because rescuing it from waste aligns with their moral obligations (meaning). The following section builds more on the

meanings identified in the planning and shopping performances by the interviewees.

#### 5.1.4 In-store performances and meaning in relation to food waste mitigation

The interviewees' positive purchase decisions of discounted close-to-date foods were driven by a range of motivations. For many interviewees, close-to-date offers meant that they could capitalise on the opportunity to save money on a product they would usually buy, obtaining the same value for less money. For some, it meant that they were able to afford *levelling up* the foods in their day-to-day, obtaining more value for the same money. Whilst these two patterns expose value consciousness, these offers were also attractive to interviewees shopping on constrained budgets, exhibiting a more general price consciousness. In explaining her reasoning with close-to-date offers, interviewee 12 highlighted the difference between value and price consciousness: Her planning and shopping routines were developed in order to align with her strict frugality, although this was the manifestation of a deeply rooted view of how one *should* spend money rather than a financial necessity.

12: It's not because we're short on money *really*, because we've got enough to get by, absolutely. It's that it sits so deep in my soul that I can't go about it in another way. But I must state that we have very variable and nutritious and good food above all. I can't be doing with food that isn't good. We don't suffer, it's almost more of a sport, almost a sport actually, to do it cheaply I mean.

Interviewee 12's focus was on living up to both demands – good food, cheaply procured. The likeness to sport she proposed was made by several interviewees who incidentally also performed acquisition practices with value consciousness. These economic motivations seemed to be based in quite standard cost-benefit analysis reasoning, often in precisely the same manner as the interviewees would reason when making other purchases.

In contrast to the above, several interviewees remarked that saving money was often not really a factor for them. Some concluded that, whilst attractive, the discounts probably did not lead to any real savings as they did not account for a great volume of their total grocery shopping. In another example, despite an earlier statement that her family's consumption of close-to-date offers was motivated by saving money, interviewee 9, a self-professed vegetarian, declared that she did not reflect on the price when she bought discounted close-to-date mincemeat. Along with the above quotation from interviewee 12, this instance suggests complex meshes of interdependent meanings conspiring to direct interviewees' consumption of close-to-date offers.

Adjusting plans and purchasing close-to-date offers was also an expression of the interviewees' ethical concerns. At some level, all of the interviewees were demonstrably aware of the environmental and climate-related impacts of food production and distribution. They could link this directly to a societal need to reduce food waste and subsequently to the phenomenon of discounting close-to-date foods. As well as environmental and climate issues, the interviewees would often highlight the human resources exploited in the name of food production. These matters were primary or prominent motivations in their purchasing these products ahead of similar products with a longer shelf-life. In addition, global disparities of food poverty and hunger were also lifted by some interviewees as forming a part of their understanding of the issues of food waste, although less explicit in their motives with close-to-date foods.

A prevalent comment amongst the interviewees, regardless of their planning or lack thereof, was that a positive purchase decision concerning a discounted close-to-date item was ultimately steered by a certainty that it would get used. Buying food that might not get eaten would open for the possibility of it wasting in person, at the household level. For the interviewees, this was clearly undesirable as it would be in stark contrast to many of their reasons for purchasing it in the first place: Financially, throwing away food was perceived as throwing away money; and ethically, throwing away food was a waste of natural and human resources as well as unsympathetic to broader issues of hunger.

All interviewees mentioned a combination of financial and ethical motivations that led to their acquisition of discounted close-to-date foods. Including these foods in their planning and purchasing provided them the ability to save money or strike a bargain whilst acting in line with their environmental and social values and being good, responsible citizens, all the while acquiring food that they found to be of value. Taken together, this would imply that in the case of these interviewees, the implementation of discounting close-to-date foods should be a suitable measure by which retail level food waste is reduced without negatively impacting their own household waste.

To address this implication and assess the outcomes of the interviewees' consumption of discounted close-to-date in terms of mitigating food waste, the food journey now continues to food provisioning practices in the home.

## 5.2 Close-to-date foods at home

The planning and flexibility therein exhibited by the interviewees during the acquisition continued to play important roles once discounted close-to-date items had arrived at the interviewees' homes. The interviewees declared that the mealtime plans spontaneously devised at the supermarket were usually kept to, although plans could be disturbed by *Something coming up*. The interviewees were then forced to display flexible planning competences, as they had at the supermarket, rearranging

plans once more. This competence is also called upon for other foods of course, however, discounted close-to-date items seemed to take precedence when the interviewees were forced to accommodate the unforeseen hinders. I will return to this topic later on.

### 5.2.1 Storage and deciding what to eat

If appropriation of discounted close-to-date items began at the supermarket, with some kind of plan, then it was most often put on pause in the home through storage. For instance, many of the discounted close-to-date items acquired in the name of stocking up went directly into the freezer once at home. A set of competences widely called upon in the interviewees' accounts of their consumption of discounted close-to-date foods was related to storage and their understanding or interpretation of best before and use-by dates. This included their knowledge of which foods maintained quality and safety after the date marking, their knowledge of how to store foods to halt or minimise deterioration and their ability to determine the safety of certain foods.

All interviewees expressed knowledge and skills about determining the status of dairy products like milk and yoghurt. With these foods, the interviewees used date markings to prioritise the order of opening and as an indication for whether to assess edibility by checking the contents' appearance, smell and taste before going ahead and using them. The interviewees often noted that they were not worried about dairy products making them ill and that it was easy to judge their edibility. In tandem with their high turnover, this literal understanding of *best before* date markings, i.e., not necessarily inedible after, indicates one reason for breakfast foods being such popular close-to-date purchases for these individuals.

Contrasting dairy products, far fewer interviewees felt as confident in judging the status of fresh meat, especially chicken, and fish. This was due to their heightened concern that these foods can cause very unpleasant sicknesses. This contrast in competences regarding risk and best before date for dairy products versus fresh meat and fish is nicely exemplified by a snippet from my dialogue with interviewee 14:

14: I can get a bit stressed about chicken that expires the same day, I can feel a bit like, -Is it really ok to eat this?-, I can be like that sometimes.

Interviewer: Ah, and raw chicken has a use-by date not a best before date...

14: Yeah, sure, but in any case I get a bit wary, -Is it though...?-, you wonder a bit, -Is it worth getting sick?-

Interviewer: Do you feel sure that you could determine, if you opened a pack of chicken, that you could make a judgement about if it was ok to eat?

14: I think that's interesting. Usually, when you get a packet of milk out, essentially you just need to smell it, so I'm like [*gestures holding milk packet up to nose*] -Sniff, sniff, no, yuck...-, as such I've got better I think, you can just taste it. [...] I wouldn't risk it

with chicken if it was out of date but with milk I can just pour it in my coffee and see. It's to do with salmonella, that you can get so awfully sick if you eat bad chicken. [...] I wouldn't [trust my senses] with meat and fish, if it's out of date it's out of date.

Interviewee number 9 supposed that the difference between her skills and certainty with determining the edibility of dairy versus meat products might have something to do with her long-term default status as a vegetarian, meaning that even though she buys discounted close-to-date meat, she is not always confident in using it.

Date markings on meat products were used to signal their order of use, just as with dairy products. However, those interviewees unsure of their ability to determine the safety of a meat product, like interviewee 14, abided strictly by date markings for the items' use. In these cases, discounted close-to-date purchases would be used by the best before or use-by date, frozen to prolong their longevity or cooked and then chilled or frozen for later use.

Juxtaposing the uncertainty regarding determining meat or fish's safety illustrated above, a few of the interviewees felt very confident in eating meat that had passed its date marking. Even use-by dates could be interpreted as *best before*, *often acceptable after*. Interviewee 2 described his reasoning and learning:

2: You have to be careful with, for example chicken, that's what you have to be careful with, fresh meat... fish smells bad if it gets old. It's a bit of a diminishing scale for how dangerous it is to eat. What I've read on this, and trust, is that food tastes bad when it's old, and then after that it can get dangerous. So, essentially, just because it tastes bad it's not certain you'll get ill from it, that takes even longer. So if it doesn't taste bad then you won't get ill from it. So I'm not afraid of getting sick or ill from old food, it's mostly that, if it doesn't taste good then you don't want to eat it either. That's my take on it and my experience too, I don't think I've ever been food poisoned.

The habitual checking of date markings in foods in the home to prioritise order of use was one practice that revealed that once discounted close-to-date products were brought home, the interviewees treated them as comparable to other food purchases. Although that is not to say that close-to-date purchases were not distinguished from other purchases. The interviewees disclosed that the discounting of close-to-date foods by the retailer raised their awareness of the products' time sensitivity, instigating the need for *active* choice when purchasing and *active* use in the household. For some, the discounting of close-to-date foods also highlighted the rescuing aspect of these transactions. These factors led to a heightened awareness of discounted close-to-date items' presence in the household and the impending need to use them up.

Interviewees 8 and 13 described their recognition of discounted close-to-date purchases as active, demanding more attention than non-discounted close-to-date foods in the household. These sentiments were echoed by several other interviewees. Considering any potential differences he saw between these types of purchases, interviewee 8 reasoned along the following lines:

8: No, everything's just food. Although I try to think that discounted close-to-date - that's reduced because the date's about to expire so I usually try to think, -I really need to do something with *that* item.- [...] I made an active choice to buy that, something in its spontaneity...

Interviewer: Oh, like you're more aware?

8: Exactly! More aware!

Interviewee 13 depicted a similar thought process:

Interviewer: How do you reason about what you're going to eat? Can it be that kind of, -I'm hungry for that, I'm going to have that-?

13: No, in that case I'd say that expiry dates steer more, if there's something [discounted close-to-date], to use that. [...] They're prioritised, we're active in using them.

Indeed, some discounted close-to-date purchases represented the interviewees' affording themselves a small luxury, enabling them to make a longed-for meal that otherwise would have been deemed too expensive. Along with the previous quotes from interviewees 8 and 13 about their reasoning between discounted close-to-date purchases and other food purchases, these accounts illustrate how the interviewees garnered greater attachments to discounted close-to-date items compared to other foods.

These examples illustrate that deciding what to eat was often governed by the date marking, as this denoted what to eat up or what to open next. As we will see in the following section, the competences linking deciding what to eat with assessing edibility also dictated *how* certain foods were eaten.

### 5.2.2 Cooking and eating

Following on from deciding what to eat, the appropriation of discounted close-to-date products often appeared to be much the same as for other foods. The mundane nature of a great deal of the discounted close-to-date items acquired by the interviewees meant that these foods often slotted into the routinised breakfast and dinner patterns observed by the interviewees without the need for competences more specific to cooking and eating discounted close-to-date foods. This consequently led to everyday appropriation and appreciation, as interviewee 4 exemplified when we discussed her appropriation of discounted close-to-date bags of salad:

Interviewer: Ok, you were going to have salad with white cabbage but you postpone that or?

4: Exactly, or if it's one of those bags of salad, you can eat salad with any dinner really, so regardless which meal we've planned, salad...you can eat salad with it.

Some appropriation of discounted close-to-date items, however, required a little more effort. In the following examples, more flexibility-laden and knowledge and skills-competences are highlighted. In one example, interviewee 6 had bought a discounted close-to-date cut of meat that she was unfamiliar with and searched online to learn how to use it. As previously highlighted, interviewee 11 had discounted close-to-date cream in the fridge and threw together a dinner that included it, relying on cooking knowledge and skills, rather than turning to a recipe, to intuitively make something she knew would work. In another instance, interviewee 8 spontaneously bought two kilos of mincemeat on the use-by date. At the supermarket, he understood the discounted mincemeat as an opportunity and seized it without knowing precisely how he would put it to use. It was a food he considered as flexible, a potential ingredient of many dishes the family could eat. The mincemeat went into two recipes already within interviewee 8's repertoire - a Bolognese sauce for an upcoming evening meal and a batch of meatballs that went into the freezer, a handy back-up for a family with three young children. The discounted close-to-date mincemeat represents both the point of departure for several meals and stocking up, it also illustrates interviewee 8's flexibility, knowledge and skills in the kitchen.

As seen above with date markings, just as saving food from going to waste motivated the interviewees to purchase discounted close-to-date foods, their own personal efforts to avoid food waste motivated them to gain and utilise specific competences with foods that others may have given up on. This also extended to finding new ways in which to appropriate foods that could be considered as well into the devaluation and divestment moments of consumption. The following examples on this theme were lifted from dialogue that was not restricted to discounted close-to-date foods. I do argue however, that because close-to-date offers are already devalued at the moment of acquisition, they are highly relevant examples nonetheless. Noteworthy however, is that the devaluation belongs to the retailer rather than the consumer. The discounting is a literal economic devaluation that reflects the retailer's understanding of the decreased value that consumers recognise in close-to-date foods.

Regardless of one's competences with date markings, fresh meat and fish products were only discussed in dichotomic terms of still edible or too risky, the latter classification leading directly to disposal. Concerning some other foods however, a clearer timeline accounting for devaluation and divestment was identified, during which milk, vegetables and roast chicken evolved from desirable to functional. Appropriation and appreciation continued, although appropriation became limited, and appreciation was more nuanced.

Interviewee 2 recounted that he used milk that had soured for pancakes and baking, as did interviewee 8 who also affirmed a small hierarchy of uses for a roast chicken. Interviewee 10 described how she would roast carrots that had become



hairy, and other root vegetables, a cooking technique that imparted great flavour and made for excellent soups. Appreciation was subsequently positively impacted by the interviewees' cunning in really exhausting the value from their materials.

Specifically related to eating practices, in interviewee 9's household, her husband, affectionately named 'household piggy', could happily throw together disparate leftovers on one plate, without caring much whether or not the meal components *went together*. Interviewee 9 understood this as an important factor in mitigating the family's food waste. Interviewee 8 also did this quite often and, in addition, would sometimes coordinate a so-called 'five course meal' for his family. This entailed feeding the family of two adults and three children whilst making sure to use up all the leftovers from the fridge, a challenge that often resulted in five quite different plates. The impetus for this was partly their limited fridge space in association with an unwillingness to dispose of the leftovers.

The examples illustrate how the moments of devaluation and divestment can express themselves when it comes to appropriation and appreciation relevant to close-to-date foods. Plausibly, in the instances of pancakes, roast chicken and roast vegetable soup, devaluation can be framed as *revaluation*, as appreciation was by no means diminished and in some cases was enhanced. This level of skill also gave the performances meaning, stemming from a certain satisfaction provided by a competence in using a food with objectively less economic value to deliver perfectly appreciable food whilst at the same time avoiding waste and earning a pat on the back.

### 5.2.3 Disposal

Many of the competences already highlighted in this section were exercised in practices occurring precisely to avoid disposal. Indeed, the discounted close-to-date item's initial acquisition may have taken place in order to rescue it from waste. In tandem, these factors illustrate an entire food journey which, as far as the interviewee was concerned, was focused on avoiding disposal. That being said, some interviewees did admit to discarding some discounted close-to-date purchases.

Interviewees 8 and 15 purchased discounted boxes of suboptimal vegetables from time to time. Loose vegetables can perhaps not be classed as close-to-date as they are not date marked. Several interviewees concluded however, that they perceived suboptimal fruit and vegetables, on the grounds of being blemished for example, in the same light as close-to-date as this leads to their quality diminishing more rapidly. These boxes are sealed in the supermarket, so the interviewees were not able to assess the contents until coming home. Both interviewee 8 and 15 disclosed that there was always some item that would head straight for the food waste bin. This was regrettable in the sense that throwing away food always is, but

the interviewees were not really bothered by it due to the extremely hefty discounting and the fact that the item's deterioration was not their fault.

Most interviewees remarked that eventual disposal of discounted close-to-date items was neither a lighter experience nor one which occurred to a greater extent compared to the disposal of other foods. For some interviewees, the higher regard ascribed to these products due to the active nature of their acquisition, followed them through to disposal. This could subsequently give rise to greater frustration compared to the disposal of other food products. Interviewee 2 remarked that this probably minimised the likelihood of discounted close-to-date items being wasted.

At odds with the increased annoyance mentioned above, some interviewees acknowledged a process of inner renegotiation during divestment and devaluation, breaking attachments with discounted close-to-date items. This process would manifest itself after the partial use of a discounted close-to-date item, following which a further use-occasion had not been planned for and nor did one materialise. This inner renegotiation justified allowing for the deterioration of the discounted close-to-date food and ameliorated the dissonance caused by its disposal. Interestingly, both interviewees 8 and 13, who proffered the *active choice-active* use terminology, expressed this pattern of reasoning:

13: I think [...] in that you feel that you've given it a chance to be eaten up, that does something, -Here's a product on offer, close-to-date, I'm saving it from going to waste- and then it ends up at mine, and so I use it up in most cases but there can be some waste [...] but I think that I'm somehow, I don't have a bad conscience about it, rather it's more like... I've in any case refined it, used some and then...like that, so I think that's not something I actively think about but that the bad conscience is not there, that *something* goes to waste, because I've in any case used as much as possible.

And interviewee 8, reasoning about the differences between wasting unopened vs partially used discounted close-to-date foods:

8: I'd feel stupid because in that I had an idea about that I would rescue this product, and then I didn't after all, I could have just as well not bought it, or let someone else buy it. Whilst if I throw out, no it's rare that we throw food away because it's gone bad because we have such a high turnover. We had a little, apropos that whole chicken. [...] We'd taken maybe 60-70% of it but there was more left to take, we forgot it but well well, it's ok because we got out enough, we thought.

In another display of waste, uncharacteristic of other accounts in this study, interviewee 9 divulged that she routinely wasted the bit of gorgonzola leftover that was not required by her special pizza:

9: It's unfortunately one thing we never eat up, we have the pizza and then there's a little bit left and then... it still feels a bit tough to chuck it but it feels better when you bought it at [discounted close-to-date] and tried to save as much as possible and there's that little bit left and then you throw it. But then you've saved it one step further at least.

Interviewee 9 also remarked upon this in relation to her feeling a lack of flexibility in her own skills and in the cheese, both of which I have touched on previously. She likened it to the devaluation and divestment of tubs of crème fraîche opened and partially used for a specific recipe and then left wanting for another use-occasion, despite its nagging presence in the fridge.

#### 5.2.4 At home performances in relation to food waste mitigation

This section highlights the home, the site of disposal. In doing so it allows me to relate the findings to the potential for the discounting of close-to-date foods to negatively impact waste generation in the household. The findings reveal three scenarios that represent links between the intervention and food waste at the household level. Firstly, instances of active performances with close-to-date foods, where awareness motivates prompt appropriation, align with the notion that this measure reduces overall waste. In contrast, the acquisition of close-to-date vegetable boxes always led to the direct disposal of some of the contents, plainly illustrating a situation in which the retailer directs waste to the consumer. Lastly, in justifying the partial use and partial wastage of close-to-date offers, the interviewees have revealed a complex scenario in which the division of responsibility for waste generation is less clear.

So far, this chapter has presented the interviewees' food provisioning practices performed in the supermarket discretely from those performed in the home. In practice, consumption of close-to-date foods traverses provisioning in the store and in the home. Therefore, to address the research question, the elements connecting these practices must be analysed.

### 5.3 The integration of food provisioning practices through the interviewees' performances

This section will bring together the commonalities and dependencies between food provisioning practices, highlighting that the key aspects of their connections lie in the integrative nature of the elements, the Whats, Hows and Whys, of practice.

The interviewees were motivated to consume discounted close-to-date items to spend cautiously and enact their moral values. The findings show that for the (residual) value in these items to be appreciated, the interviewees employed a whole host of competences to avoid food waste and in doing so, actualise the meaning behind their motivations.

Semi-structured or flexible planning allowed for the interviewees to capitalise on good close-to-date deals in the name of stocking up. This relied on a deep understanding of the dynamics of food provisioning in the home including patterns

of cooking and eating as well as an awareness of how much space was available in the fridge or freezer. Similarly, exercising flexibility with the scheduling of a meal plan to squeeze in a discounted close-to-date item could demand that the interviewee was able to recall the status of foods already at home, so as not to risk something else becoming waste due to the purchase of a discounted close-to-date item. Another flexibility expressed itself in an openness towards variations on a food product, for example interviewee 1 and his breakfast yoghurt of unspecified brand or flavour, and interviewee 12's shopping lists being comprised merely of categories "meat, fish...". This type of flexibility opened up for potential discounted close-to-date purchases.

In addition to the use of 'flexible' to describe the competences directly above, I have also used it to describe the intersection of material and competence in the recognition of suitable foods. Identifying the material flexibility of discounted close-to-date cream on offer at the supermarket demonstrated interviewee 11's flexibility as a cook, a skill she has learned through being experimental in the kitchen. Shopping for this type of flexibility in foods was also important in interviewee 12's food provisioning. Like interviewee 11, interviewee 12's knowledge and skills from her cooking practice were also indispensable in her planning practice which used very rudimentary lists and involved stocking up opportunistically when suitable discounted close-to-date foods presented themselves.

Currently, typical retailer practice is for date markings to also indicate the last selling date of foods by grocery stores. This is regardless of whether the marking is best before or use-by and is not related to any regulation. The discount applied to a close-to-date food represents a formal devaluation (by the retailer) in relation to the date marking. The interviewees, however, exhibited an understanding that devaluation for them, especially in the case of dairy products, would probably start later. This was often underscored by their knowledge that best before and in some cases use-by, were set within "good margins" (interviewee 5). The discount implemented by the retailer set in motion knowledge that the interviewees had learnt from jobs, family members, media and school classes. This knowledge allowed them to purchase the close-to-date food at a price they considered to represent value for money. Additionally, perhaps most fundamentally to the consumption of discounted close-to-date foods, this knowledge also allowed them to determine for themselves when the item was no longer fit for use, as they did not rely solely on the date marking at home. This highlights that the explicit devaluation by the retailer is the impetus for the consumers' consumption moments. It follows therefore, that after acquisition, the interviewee's own understandings will dictate a new process of devaluation.

In relation to the competences lifted in this section, a general facilitator to performing in line with motivations was treating food provisioning as sport. For

instance, in the store this took the guise of finding solutions that satisfied sometimes conflicting demands (e.g., good food vs cheap food). At home, this manifested in making challenges out of balancing their provisioning practices. For example, the challenge met by interviewee 8 in the using up leftovers in a ‘five-course meal’. This was eloquently described by interviewee 7:

Interviewer: You’ve mentioned a bit about special offers, is that something you utilise as well, not just close-to-date but other deals like 3 for 2, is that something that tempts you?

7: Yes, it’s like a sport!

Interviewer: You’re not the first to express that it’s like a sport. Do you mean that finding these close-to-date offers is also like a sport? That all offers and deals belong under the same umbrella?

7: Yes. Also eating up things at home, that’s also a sport.

Interviewer: You’re competing against your own values?

7: Yeah, that it will get used up and be enough. During January-February we had -Now we’ve got to empty our freezer and drawers so we can get in some new things-.

Finally, the implementation of discounting the close-to-date foods by the retailer led to a consciousness in acquisition which was distinct from the subconscious *modus operandi* of running on autopilot associated with conventional shopping. An active discounted close-to-date purchase consequently became a nagging presence once in the home, decreasing the likelihood that it would be wasted. This conscious acquisition was therefore linked to all subsequent moments of consumption, even disposal, in which frustration was often exacerbated by this deeper attachment.

So far, by employing practice theory and the moments of consumption, as described in chapter 3, to analyse my dialogues with the interviewees, I have come some way in explaining the how the consumption of close-to-date foods fits into the interviewees’ food provisioning practices. To enhance these findings further, it remains to discuss them in light of the extant literature.

## 6. Discussion

This thesis posed the research question, how do consumers' everyday food provisioning practices allow for consumption of discounted close-to-date foods? In short, the interviewees' exhibited a great deal of thrift in their food provisioning. This paved the way for discounted close-to-date foods in the supermarket to be interpreted as opportunities to make financially prudent acquisitions, a common objective for planning and shopping in general. In subsequent provisioning practices, thrift was not restricted to close-to-date offers. Rather, close-to-date offers, for the most part, fit into the routinised performances of these thrifty individuals.

The literature review highlighted a complex combination of factors driving and moderating household food waste. In terms of food provisioning, practices important in determining levels of food waste were identified as planning, storage, cooking and the use of leftovers, in association with performances that exhibit uncertainty about storage and date markings and a perceived lack of skills with leftovers (Evans 2011a; Stancu et al. 2016; Falasconi et al. 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019; Ananda et al. 2022; Tsalis et al. 2024). Studying close-to-date foods as a means of waste reduction, this thesis aims to understand how the performance of food provisioning practices by a group of 15 individuals allowed for their consumption of discounted close-to-date food purchase. In this section, I begin by discussing the findings in the previous chapter in relation to the existing literature. This is followed by a description of the study's perceived limitations.

### 6.1 Price involvement

Perhaps unsurprisingly, all interviewees exhibited financial considerations in their acquisition of discounted close-to-date foods, in line with much of the extant research (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; Bech-Larsen et al. 2019; Tsalis 2020; Chang et al. 2024). Value for money was a prevalent theme in the interviewees' purchase decisions, as shown by Tsalis (2020), who also found that deal-prone consumers showed increased purchase interest for SOFs. This may well hold true, although my findings reveal that the interviewees' capacity to capitalise on deals was mediated by material contexts relating to the household. For instance, a deal would be shunned if the interviewee was uncertain that it would be eaten, potentially leading to waste, aligning with Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017b) who found that consumers consider the potential use of foods prior to purchasing. This could depend on the current amounts of food already at home, which in turn, was related to household storage infrastructure, dictating how much it was plausible to buy. This reflects to the important role of domestic technologies in food shopping routines (Dobernig & Schanes 2019; Marshall 2023).

The display and communication of discounted close-to-date items was commented on by a few of the interviewees. The display of discounted close-to-date items in either a dedicated shelf or fridge or in the same place as usual, was reported by Bech-Larsen et al. (2019), although not in relation to consumer preferences. Some interviewees remarked that more should be done to promote these items by the retailer. Communication of prices was important to two interviewees, who thought it was important that it was made clear how much the discount was. Although they did not state a preference to see this as a percentage or a sum of money, it was important in gauging value for money, hence indicating its use in a price-quality schema whereby the original price was understood as a proxy for quality (Tsalis 2020; Chang et al. 2024). Where Tait (2024) found positive effects of environmental credence cues on consumer perceptions of SOFs, Aschemann-Witzel (2018), looking specifically at discounted close-to-date foods, found none. The picture from my findings was slightly more nuanced: Retailer communication that purchasing discounted close-to-date foods was an opportunity to reduce food waste was positively received by the interviewees. This was not however, unquestioned, as some interviewees acknowledged that the intervention allowed the retailer's role and responsibility in the overprovisioning of products to be diminished.

Questions of responsibility between consumers and retailers in the context of food waste and food prices were lifted by Aschemann-Witzel (2022). Two simultaneously existing narratives relating to the responsabilisation of food waste at supermarkets are described. One in which the retailer is unburdened and one in which responsibility is shared. This study's findings express the same sentiments. Several interviewees proffered the first narrative, aligning with neo-liberal ideas, in which the consumers' actions create the demand that retailers react to, hence stripping the retailer of both agency and responsibility. Further, the interviewees also articulated that responsibility is shared among food supply chain (FSC) actors, including consumers. This latter narrative also reflects recent statistics from the Swedish Food Agency (2025), showing that consumers understand all actors across the FSC to bear much responsibility in reducing societal food waste. The interviewees also recognised a tangible societal pressure, driving awareness and engagement in issues of food waste (de Hooge et al. 2017; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2022), that has played a role in the fact that the phenomenon of discounting close-to-date foods has been able to expand so rapidly in recent years (Aschemann-Witzel 2018; Bech-Larsen et al. 2019). According to the interviewees, prominent placement of a dedicated close-to-date fridge, or displaying discounted close-to-date foods in their usual place illustrate fitting ways for retailers to communicate that despite a shorter shelf-life, these items are worth consumer attention. In turn, for consumers like interviewees 3 and 11, showcasing that discounted close-to-date

foods would be understood as retailers shouldering more of their responsibility for societal food waste.

## 6.2 Assessing edibility and storage

As seen in previous studies, storage infrastructure in the home dictated many aspects of food provisioning. In planning and shopping, the size of or space left in fridges and freezers could limit the volume of food bought and hence how often shopping trips were required (Bava et al. 2008; Dobernig & Schanes 2019; Marshall 2023). In some cases, such limitations were seen as facilitating the consumption of close-to-date offers for the interviewees. For example, planning would be restricted to less days, making rescheduling easier, and the high turnover of a smaller fridge meant that fresh foods were often used up within very few days in any case, reducing the need for longer shelf-lives.

A great deal of dialogue during the interviews was devoted to knowledge and skills relating to determining the quality and safety of foods. The interviewees often used date markings as indicators for order of use and potential risk, the latter especially related to raw meats. Misinterpreting date markings has been identified as a cause of food waste at the household level, potentially exacerbating other drivers such as overprovisioning and improper storage (Priefer et al. 2016; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019; Ananda et al. 2022). However, this group of individuals exhibited high levels of independence from date markings in assessing the continued edibility of foods. In the case of best before dates on dairy products, this aligns with the latest statistics (Swedish Food Agency 2025). For these products, the interviewees often learned these skills in their youth but picked up on them more as adults. Those who felt confident in assessing the safety of meat and fish beyond the date marking had more often learned from a mix of personal experience and active learning via media or work. These factors reflect previous findings indicating that familiarity with suboptimal foods requires and can strengthen skills and knowledge in this in this practice (de Hooge et al. 2017).

## 6.3 Discounted close-to-date foods and waste

The findings showed that links between close-to-date offers and waste generation were not always clear cut. The literature review depicted a lack of consensus on potential links between consumer use of offers and discounts and food waste (Falasconi et al. 2019; Giordano et al. 2019; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2022; Van Lin et al. 2023; Tsalis et al. 2024). My interviews indicated three paths for discounted close-to-date foods that relate to the generation of food waste in the home. Firstly, and for the most part, the interviewees determined that the special context surrounding the acquisition of discounted close-to-date food (the *active* purchase decision), probably led to it being less likely to go to waste. At the store,



the demarcation of these products as requiring rescue symbolised all the reasons the interviewees gave for waste being undesirable, reminding the consumer of the resources and impacts behind the food on the shelves (Dobernig & Schanes 2019). Once at home, the food's presence then nagged the interviewee with its impending need to be eaten. This path implies that discounting close-to-date foods can work to reduce food waste. In contrast, the two other paths that emerged did result in food waste. The consumption of discounted close-to-date vegetable boxes by two interviewees always resulted in the acquisition of some item that was disposed of directly due to it being beyond redemption. In this scenario, the retailer has directed food waste down the FSC, acting irresponsibly with this intervention (Swedish Food Agency et al. 2018). Lastly, the interviewees could partially use a discounted close-to-date food that subsequently lacked another use-occasion, leading to some fraction of the item going to waste (Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). In this scenario, the retailer's waste is again reduced, while the consumer's waste is increased, however, the picture is more complex than in the first scenario.

The path with vegetable boxes illustrates an obvious lack of diligence on the part of the retailer. In addition, revealing the nuances in the last scenario also highlights questionable ethics. The framing of close-to-date offers as rescuing food from waste facilitates their partial wastage. Compared to other foods, close-to-date foods are bought more cheaply and framed as a rescue. The discount communicates that the food is less valuable while the framing provides the grounds for diminished emotional attachment and reduced frustration at disposal. To conclude, by provoking overprovision and ameliorating dissonance, this scenario also promotes food waste at the household level.

## 6.4 Motivations of thrift

The interviewees demonstrated various ways in which thrift can be expressed within food provisioning practices. Meaning in the interviewees' performances was suffused with motivations depicted in Holmes' (2018) account of contemporary thrift: financial necessity, conscience and enjoyment. These motivations are extremes and rarely work independently. Just as I have used the concept of following a food journey (Evans 2011a, 2018; Tsalis et al. 2021), Holmes (2018) highlights thrifty behaviour not only in relation to the financial transactions occurring to acquire resources that move *into* the home, but also in terms of how thrift expresses itself via these resources as they move *through* the home in food provisioning practices. As discussed above, in planning and shopping with close-to-date offers, the interviewees were price involved and cautious not to over-purchase, aligning with normative expectations of respectability in how one *should* spend money (Evans 2011b; Holmes 2018). The interviewees also made explicit connections between close-to-date discounts and rescuing food from waste, indicating moral conscience in their reasoning with these purchases. Enjoyment

was also often linked to price involvement, for instance striking a good deal. In addition, pleasure could be derived from the relative convenience offered by the streamlined choice that close-to-date offers delimited, which could also represent a source of inspiration and exploration.

In storing close-to-date foods, the interviewees often acted to extend the period over which they held value, by freezing or cooking, for example. Typifying careful use of resources in alignment with motivations of financial necessity and conscience (Holmes 2018). Stretching out the period of value of close-to-date foods was also achieved by altering their appropriation in order to really exhaust and properly release the value therein. Again, this frugality exemplifies thrift motivations of financial necessity and conscience.

Storage and value extension as described above were not restricted to discounted close-to-date foods, although they could be vital in allowing for their consumption. The interviewees' management of leftovers was a subsequent value extension practice motivated by thrift (Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). This could take the form of financial necessity and moral conscience, exhausting and properly releasing the value of acquisitions, as throwing them away was tantamount to throwing away money and/or a blatant misuse of resources (Stancu et al. 2016; Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2017b; Falasconi et al. 2019). Enjoyment was also a motivation in the use of leftovers. This could present as a manifestation of perceiving food provisioning as a sport, in which one of the challenges is to use everything up. Diligent use of leftovers also reflected notions that it can lead to familial bonding (Cappellini & Parsons 2012). As exemplified by pet names for family members who ate up leftovers that, for various reasons, were considered undesirable (Evans 2012a), and making an event out of a family mealtime for which the goal was to empty the fridge of leftovers.

Despite their consumption of close-to-date offers being clearly characterised by thrift motivations, interviewees were not immune to wasting them. These instances were often typical of examples in the literature in which the fridge acts as a conduit for waste, especially of leftovers, delaying the sometimes inevitable disposal during which time the discomfort of throwing the food away diminishes (Bava et al. 2008; Evans 2011a, 2012a; b; Dobernig & Schanes 2019; Hebrok & Heidenstrøm 2019). These purchases were sometimes connected to price involvement that was more deal-prone than value or price conscious, strengthening clear links between specific price involvement strategies and the different thrift motivations. Value and price consciousness align with motivations of financial necessity and moral conscience, leading to less overall consumption as the value of acquisitions is fully released (Holmes 2018; Tsalis 2020). Deal-proneness however is more strongly linked to enjoyment due to the satisfaction felt in finding a good bargain. This adds value to the acquisition but does not necessarily dictate how or indeed if the value is subsequently appropriated.

## 6.5 Limitations

### 6.5.1 Methodological limitations

Engaging in the findings of this thesis requires the consideration of various methodological and external contexts that data collection was subject to. The self-selection and referral sampling methods, for example, could have led to a bias in the findings (Robson & McCartan 2016; Dobernig & Schanes 2019). Despite the intentional avoidance of references to food waste in the recruitment stage, the interviewees readily connected close-to-date offers with food waste issues. This may seem natural due to the nature of the framing of these offers as waste reducing, although it warrants attention all the same. Whilst generalisation is of no interest to this study, it highlights a pre-existing interest in the study's background topic that could tempt assumptions that consumers of these foods in general are more waste conscious than others. In addition, the sample seems to lack representativeness in that it did not show maximum variation in age or income. Plausibly a consequence of the area used for recruitment by flyers, no respondent was under 30 and, apart from in one case, no interviewees were appreciated to be socio-economically vulnerable. These factors were perhaps reflected in the degree of consensus across the group in their reasoning with close-to-date offers, as well as in a sense of saturation that occurred relatively early in the data collection period. Taken together, this implies that a wider recruitment catchment may have added nuance to the study's findings.

A measure of social desirability bias was almost certainly present in the interviews. In particular, this may be important in dialogue pertaining directly to food waste, an issue which, due to a high level of societal awareness, people understand as negative (Tsalis et al. 2024). As a result, individuals tend to both underestimate and under-report their waste. In my constructivist approach, the interviewees' accounts were taken at face value and my attention was directed towards their subjective interpretations of their own everyday lives. As I had no intention of quantifying or comparing the interviewees' waste, or of generalising the findings, this bias is not thought to significantly threaten the validity of this study. However, should the findings inform future research, this aspect requires attention.

Lastly, a word on the current geopolitical instability in relation to its impacts on inflation and consumer adaptations to economic crises. The interviews were conducted during and around a nationally recognised, week-long boycott of the dominating food retail chains in Sweden. The boycott was enacted as a protest against sharply rising food prices (Bryant 2025). As yet it is unclear how many took part in this boycott or whether any effect was felt, nevertheless, this points to a tangibly changing economic situation that was not accounted for in the scope of this study. Whilst all of the interviewees had been consumers of discounted close-to-

date foods for some time, some divulged that effects of the prevailing economic climate had led to intensified interest in such offers as they tried to spend more cautiously in the supermarket. Speculation might lead one to hypothesise that more price conscious consumers ought to turn to discounted close-to-date foods although this was not reflected in the sample.

### 6.5.2 Theoretical limitations

As a final note for discussion, I reveal a weak point in the theory and propose additions to the moments of consumption that work to enhance their empirical application. Shortcomings in the analytical power of the three As and three Ds were detected in the analysis of the adapted appropriation of *mature* foods, e.g. sour milk, hairy carrots etc., in order that their residual value be fully appreciated. Whilst Evans' (2019) conception of the three Ds as counterparts to Warde's (2014) three As is a helpful heuristic, its simplicity tempts the researcher to understand the moments of consumption as linear and the counterparts as dichotomous. However, the reasoning that led the interviewees to their adaptations clarifies that moments of consumption, save acquisition and disposal, are iterative. In the case of appreciation and its counterpart devaluation, the value of any given food is essentially assessed in terms of its suitability for the task at hand, implicating a total dependence on appropriation. This also indicates that, in terms of suitability for appropriation and appreciation at a given time, food may be assessed several times, before it is used or disposed of. Food's capacity to satisfy the consumer does not therefore simply depreciate with time. Further, that altered appropriation allowing for the use of mature foods results in different but not necessarily diminished appreciation reveals that notions of appropriation vs divestment and appreciation vs devaluation also lack nuance.

I proffer therefore, that the moments of consumption à la Warde (2014) plus Evans (2019), fall short of painting a complete picture. This feels especially pertinent in studying sustainable consumption, which was the impetus for Evans (2019) to highlight the three Ds in the first place. An addition to the 3As and 3Ds framework is therefore warranted, in which *reevaluation* and *reappropriation* are accounted for, working to clarify iterations that are not entirely explained by the As or the Ds. I find it both difficult and not particularly useful to separate reevaluation and reappropriation, conceiving rather that they act simultaneously and wholly interdependently, in an iterative manner to continually assess the value or usability of food, which depends on contexts beyond that of just freshness. With a view to the study of sustainable consumption, and doubling back to its links to thrift and frugality, these moments illuminate how (sustainable) consumers are wont to exhaust the value of their acquisitions and counter notions of the consumer culture (Evans 2011b; Holmes 2018).

## 7. Conclusions

Having scrutinised the food provisioning practices of 15 interviewees, I have been able to identify and explain the links between close-to-date offers and the generation of household food waste. On the one hand, close-to-date offers appear to enable the reduction of food waste at the retailer level without generating waste at the household level. This was possible because the interviewees possessed the skills and motivation to use them up. On the other hand, close-to-date discounting, has been shown to both directly and indirectly cause waste at the household level. Direct causes were the sales of inedible food in close-to-date vegetable boxes. Indirect causes were the provocation of overprovisioning in tandem with more fickle attachments, which promoted the partial use and partial wastage of foods.

From my analysis, the consumption of close-to-date offers is understood to be driven by food provisioning practices that are flexible enough in terms of competence and meaning to appropriate and appreciate the material foods. Skills in cooking and independently assessing edibility were fundamental in enabling this consumption, laying the ground for the initial acquisition of what the interviewees understood to be perfectly good foods at better prices. This indicates that consumption of close-to-date offers depends foremost on consumers with distinctive financial and culinary skillsets. This implies that a discrete subset of consumers is relied upon to mitigate retailer actions that result in surplus and suboptimality. In effect, close-to-date consumption is a niche, accessible mainly to those already equipped in thrifty management of food provisioning.

Interestingly, speaking with these individuals brought about the feeling of being privy to insider knowledge: They knew that the general consumer assumption upon which the intervention is based, that quality and safety deteriorates as the best before date approaches, was at most a half truth. The interviewees demonstrated a shared understanding that, for them, the real value of close-to-date foods stretched far beyond that communicated by the implementation of discounts. However, just as this intervention highlighted value for money in the eyes of the interviewees, it follows that widespread negative associations made between date markings and quality and safety are reinforced. By formally devaluing close-to-date foods, such associations are confirmed, cementing misunderstandings. Food retailers wield immense power over food supply chains and this intervention acts in direct conflict with attempts to educate consumers and rectify their misunderstandings.

The intervention is essentially unchanged since its initiation as a way for retailers to mitigate their financial losses in the face of rising popularity of perishable goods. Legitimised by the reframing as food waste mitigation, consumer acceptance for the practice has grown substantially. However, its economic foundations do not address the root cause of the problem, treating instead the symptoms of consumers' inaccurate assumptions.

Taken together, this begs the question: should retailers be doing more to affect changes in food waste behaviour at a systemic level?

## 7.1 Implications

Firstly, it feels prudent to address the question that closed the previous section. Interventions aimed at rectifying false assumptions surrounding date markings are not addressed within the scope of this study. However, as understanding and acting on the connotations of date markings appears to be highly contextual, a multipronged effort is required to tackle misunderstandings of date markings. This must include attending to the myriad ways consumers learn how to appropriate food and, perhaps most importantly, how they appreciate the value of food.

Future research must enhance this work. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of close-to-date offers, a mixed methods approach should use the findings of this study to inform research design. Although in doing so, caution should be used to avoid skewing design towards consumers represented in the sample recruited in the current study. One important step is to describe the population of consumers of close-to-date offers using a survey. This would allow for the identification of consumer groups whose insights might not be accounted for here and should inform future recruitment for qualitative studies in this field.

This study has shown that the consumers of close-to-date offers can hold expertise that are key to recognising and exhausting the inherent value of food. This indicates that insights into the food provisioning performances of these consumers ought to inform interventions aimed at encouraging more sustainable consumption of food. However, the development and exhibition of these expertise is contextually dependent. Enhancing the findings of this study to facilitate more sustainable consumption relies therefore, on explaining more thoroughly the contexts which nurture and hinder the consumption of close-to-date offers.

Lastly, depicting this intervention as a purely economic measure that has merely been reframed highlights its lack of suitability as a promotor of social and ecological sustainability. This should encourage policymakers to rethink their recommendation of this intervention and to focus instead on guidelines and regulation that force food retailers to use their substantial power more pro-actively.

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# Popular science summary

This study looks at foods that are discounted because they are *close-to-date*, i.e., they are approaching their best before or use-by date. Close-to-date foods are often avoided by customers because they associate date markings with both quality and safety, which in turn leads to food waste.

Food waste is problematic for a range of reasons. Firstly, the production and distribution of food uses vast quantities precious natural resources and demands a lot of man-power. Wasting food means that these resources have been unnecessarily spent. In addition, emissions from these activities contribute substantially to climate change and cause environmental destruction which is regrettable, even in terms of the food that we eat up. Lastly, whilst many can afford to throw away food, doing so displays a lack of regard for the billions of people across the world that do not have adequate access to food.

Discounting close-to-date foods is a way for retailers to increase the likelihood that they will be sold. In response to the need to reduce food waste, close-to-date offers are now widely available in Swedish supermarkets. According to national guidelines, this must not lead to more food waste from the people buying close-to-date offers. Despite this, there is not a lot of research into the effects of discounting close-to-date foods on household food waste.

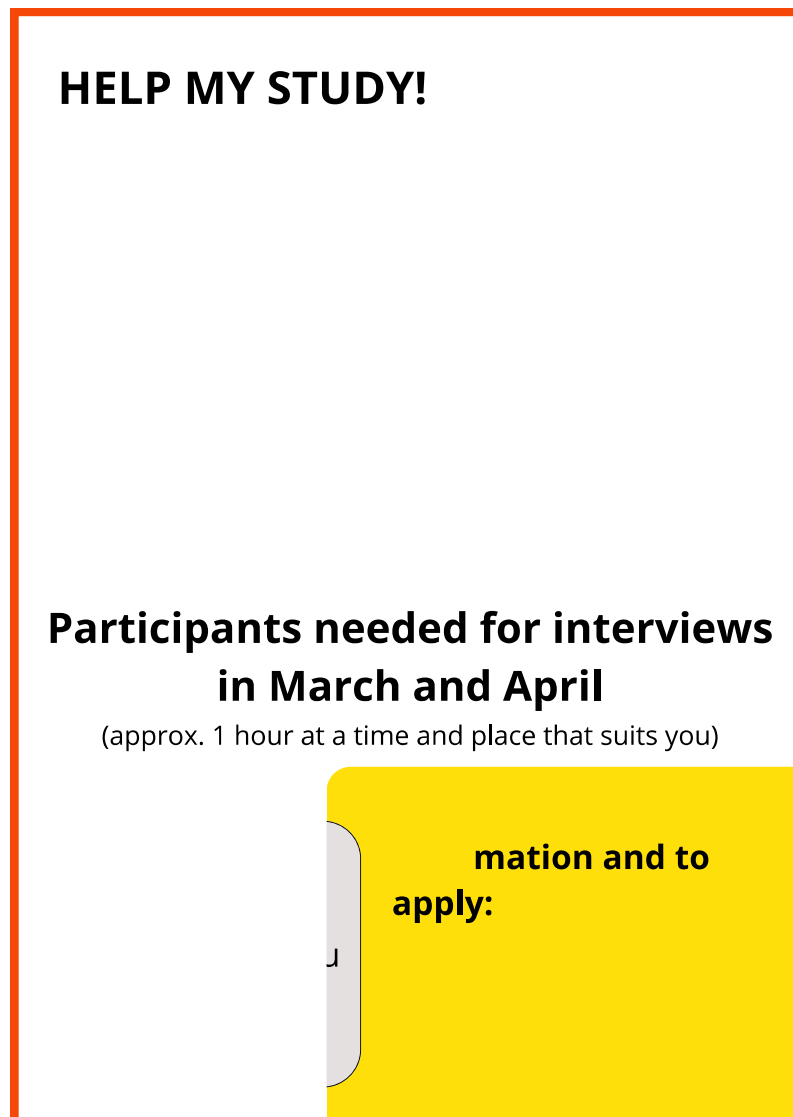
This study aimed to understand how people use close-to-date offers in their everyday lives and whether it might lead to food waste. To do this, I interviewed 15 people who all bought discounted close-to-date foods and asked them about their *food provisioning*, e.g., shopping, cooking and eating, both in general and when they used close-to-date offers.

The interviewees reported multiple reasons for buying discounted close-to-date foods: they were attracted by the discounts and were triggered to save money; they were motivated to rescue food and reduce food waste; and they could get a sense of satisfaction and pleasure from the whole process.

Throughout their food provisioning with close-to-date offers, the interviewees used mostly the same knowledge and skills that they used with other foods. This was characterised by a tendency to be mindful of using what they had bought and employing specific skills in order to extend the period of value of their purchases. These factors are thought to enable the use of close-to-date offers by the interviewees and other consumers like them. At the same time, this implies that individuals that do not possess the same knowledge and skills are unable to exploit close-to-date offers.

The study concludes that while some waste reduction may occur due to discounting close-to-date foods, this measure will not contribute to behavioural change.

## Appendix 1 – Recruitment flyer



## Appendix 2 – Interview guide

**\*Clarify DISCOUNTED close-to-date - NOT special offers or BOGOFs etc...**

**Use examples - return to examples**

**What about F&V in this context?**

**Breakfast?**

**MUNDANE/SYMBOLIC**

Background info: living situation, social life, work, hobbies, interests. Regular week.

Planning? How? Get an understanding of how good at cooking food - use recipes/freestyle...?

How often food shop? Where?

What's important when food shopping? (e.g., price, quality, organic, Swedish, seasonal...)

Other offers and discounts used?

Changes during life (how plan, shop, cook, important factors?) Any constants?

Important people throughout?

**SHOPPING**

Where buy EDBP? Good knowledge about where it's located?

EDBP related to planning.

Reasoning in the store - compare with for other food.

What kinds of foods bought with EDBP? What food never bought EDBP? What understanding of expiry dates?

What understanding of EDBP in store? What does it mean - generally, to them? Motivation?

Has that always been the case?

Awareness and understanding of why others buy EDBP?

Understanding/thoughts about food waste at retail level? How does it affect behaviour?

**HOME**

How store EDBP?

EXAMPLE - was there a plan at purchase? Stuck to the plan? Always the case?

Example of another outcome?

Reasoning in the home? Compare with other/full price food - difference? Are skills/knowledge challenged?

How determine still ok/gone off? How learnt?

Understanding of EDBP in the home - motivation? What does it mean? Same as in store?

Has that always been the case?

**Waste**

Largest cause of food waste at home?

How dispose of food at home?

Does EDBP food go to waste? Feelings? Meaning?

Compare with wasting other food - EXAMPLE? Feelings? Meaning?

Understanding/thoughts about food waste in the home? How does it affect behaviour?

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