

A pioneering food bank in Kuwait

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

Can you imagine the fate of unsold food nearing the end of its shelf life? At cooperative societies and supermarkets, food companies offer products at a discount before they expire. The rest end up incinerated or buried in landfills. In Kuwait, solid waste goes up each year by more than two million tons, 50 percent of which is foodstuff, according to a 2013 World Bank Report.

These numbers spurred Maryam Al-Eisa to action, leading her to set up re:food, a food bank in Kuwait. Eisa hopes that her project becomes the spark that leads to an initiative to set a law limiting commercial food waste, and impose levies on food surpluses to decrease the amount dumped in landfills.

Kuwait Times spoke with Eisa to learn more about her non-profit project. Some excerpts:



“ More than 700 individuals and families benefit from the 'redistribution' of food via this local food bank. ”

**Kuwait Times: What is re:food?**

Maryam Al-Eisa: re:food is a licensed non-profit organization. The main goal of it is to re-channel food and beverage industry waste to local beneficiaries. So basically, we collect excess food that is nearing expiry and distribute it locally. I started looking into what other countries do to manage their waste, and I was blown away with what Sweden and South Korea do.

In Sweden, they recycle 99 percent of their waste, while we can't even recycle 1 percent in Kuwait. In South Korea, on the other hand, the government imposes a tax based on the amount of waste generated. An individual can't open a garbage bin without swiping their civil ID.

KT: After doing your research on solid waste, what other steps did you need to take before establishing re:food?

Maryam: Our research took around a year. We went to two major food banks. At the Greater Boston Food

Bank in Massachusetts, we learned how a food bank is operated in the US. We also visited the Food Bank of Saudi Arabia, the most advanced food bank in the region. However, the latter specializes in cooked food. But we decided to go with unprepared food because it's more cost efficient.

KT: On your site, there's a list of sponsors and partners. What are the main differences between them?

Maryam: We receive different kinds of sponsorships and partnerships. The partners right now are food and beverage companies, such as Al-Yasra Food, Nutrina, Boushahri Group, Mohammed Al-Hajery, GTRC and Alghanim. Our sponsors are Al-Quraishy, Abdulhameed Al-Sarraf and Ooredoo. They donated money to buy refrigerators, while Ooredoo provided us with an Internet connection and laptops. The partners are responsible for providing us with a consistent supply of food. We receive it frozen, chilled or dry.

