The Salvation Army in the Netherlands cooks millions of meals every year for groups including elderly people, teenage mothers and drug addicts. Wageningen researchers collaborated on a plan to make more use of surplus products from the food industry.

Joost Snels of Wageningen UR Food & Biobased Research worked on the research project too. ‘Our recommendation is to work more flexibly in two senses. Firstly, by processing the ingredients that are delivered in a way that makes them usable for longer. Meat can be roasted and vacuum-packed, for example. And secondly, by it would have the added advantage of doing something to combat food wastage.

The Salvation Army received 25,000 euros from the former ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality to research the potential for a ‘matching kitchen’ that processes waste food.

MORE FLEXIBLE
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being more flexible about menus and what you offer Salvation Army clients. If you approach the process differently, you can offer them more choice.’ Elderly people in a Salvation Army nursing home could indicate their preferences in advance on a form, for example. Snels: ‘By taking a different approach to serving food, by letting them help themselves for example, you give them more of a feeling that they have some choice. That way they enjoy their food more.’ Jalving: ‘We don’t need to make money from it. What we save on purchasing, we’ll give back to our clients. You could do that by serving more luxurious food – ice cream once in a while perhaps – and above all by offering more choice.’

Besides the advice on flexibility, the Wageningen researchers designed an optimization programme for processing the ‘non-commercial waste products’. The programme takes account of the use-by date, the product’s processing potential, and storage capacity. It should make it possible for the Salvation Army to respond more quickly to offers of food. Snels: ‘If companies have to wait too long for a clear answer, they won’t call again.’

Snel says that many companies like working with the Salvation Army. ‘It is a large, professional and reliable organization with which you can make clear arrangements. For example, some companies want to be sure that their waste product will be made unrecognizable, or that it won’t end up for sale by some other route.’ Jalving: ‘That was a big eye-opener to us. We didn’t realize beforehand that companies would be so keen to work with us on this professional basis.’ He hopes that he will soon be able to give one of the Salvation Army’s kitchens a makeover so that it can be used for this new approach to cooking.’