

## Research Article

*International Journal of Digital Journalism***Development and Description of a For-Profit Digital Marketplace for Surplus Food Management and Food Waste Reduction****Dimitrios Nentas<sup>ID</sup>, Fotini Koulieraki\*, Areti-Maria Kalyvioti and Klimis Ntalianis<sup>ID</sup>**

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**Abstract**

Food waste is a major economic, environmental, and social challenge, especially in food retail, hospitality, catering, and food-service activities. This paper presents the conceptual design of Food Save Profit, a proposed for-profit digital platform for the management and commercialization of surplus food in Greece. The platform operates as a two-sided marketplace, connecting food businesses that hold near-expiry, surplus, or aesthetically imperfect products with consumers willing to purchase them at reduced prices. The proposed system combines merchant interfaces, a consumer mobile app, inventory and ERP connectivity, geolocation services, digital payments, QR-based pickup validation, administrator oversight, dynamic pricing, and ESG-oriented reporting. The paper discusses how such a model may help businesses recover value from surplus stock, offer consumers access to affordable food, and support food waste reduction. As the platform remains at the conceptual stage, future research should focus on pilot testing, empirical validation, food-safety governance, and the evaluation of the dynamic pricing mechanism under real market conditions.

**Keywords:** Food Waste, Surplus Food, Digital Platform, Two-Sided Marketplace, ESG Reporting

**1. Introduction**

Food waste is one of the most significant sustainability challenges faced by contemporary food systems. Large quantities of edible food are lost or discarded across the food supply chain, while at the same time households, vulnerable groups, and communities continue to experience food insecurity. The problem is not only ethical or social. It also represents a major economic and environmental failure, because food that is produced but not consumed carries embedded costs related to land, water, energy, labor, packaging, transport, and waste management.

Digital technologies provide new opportunities to address this problem. Cloud platforms, mobile applications, real-time inventory systems, geolocation services, digital payments, artificial intelligence, and data analytics can improve the visibility of surplus food and connect supply with demand more efficiently. In this context, food waste reduction can be approached not only through charitable or non-profit mechanisms, but also through market-based models that create direct incentives for businesses and consumers.

This paper proposes and describes Food Save Profit, a for-profit digital platform designed for the management and commercialization of surplus food in Greece [1]. The platform operates as a two-sided marketplace that connects food businesses, such as supermarkets, bakeries, restaurants, cafés, hotels, and catering companies, with final consumers who are willing to purchase safe, near-expiry, surplus, or aesthetically imperfect food products at reduced prices. Through this model, businesses can recover part of the value of products that would otherwise be discarded, while consumers gain access to affordable food.

The proposed platform integrates several operational and technological components. Businesses use a merchant interface to upload available products, while consumers use a mobile application to search for offers, complete electronic payments, and collect their purchases through QR-based validation. The backend of the system stores product metadata, connects with inventory or ERP systems, supports geolocation and map services, and enables real-time offer visibility [2]. A dynamic pricing mechanism can adjust discounts according to expiration time, remaining inventory,

local demand, time of day, and geographical conditions. At the same time, the platform administrator supervises merchant onboarding, transaction control, dispute resolution, quality monitoring, and ESG-related reporting.

The aim of this study is to present the conceptual design, architecture, and business logic of the Food Save Profit platform. The paper examines how a for-profit digital marketplace can transform surplus food from a cost and waste problem into a recoverable economic asset. It also discusses how such a platform may contribute to food waste mitigation, improved inventory management, consumer affordability, and the generation of measurable sustainability indicators [3]. In this way, the study is positioned at the intersection of supply chain management, digital transformation, platform economics, circular economy, and sustainable business models.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Supply Chain Conceptualizations**

The theoretical approach and analysis of the food waste phenomenon is primarily based on the scientific concept of the Food Supply Chain (FSC). This chain includes the extended set of production processes, human resources, management practices, technological infrastructures, and associated value chains through which food moves from the initial point of its primary production to the final consumer [4]. The structure, individual characteristics, and specific steps of each supply chain are unique to each type of product (e.g., fresh products, processed foods) and depend directly on geographic location, the institutional framework, and available transport and maintenance infrastructures [5]. To systematically break down these operations, the theory of Business Administration and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) define five basic, simplified stages: 1) Production and harvesting, 2) Post-harvest handling and storage, 3) Processing and industrial packaging, 4) Distribution and marketing, and 5) Retail sale and final consumption. These stages in practice are not always strictly linear, as storage and logistical transport intervene constantly, creating serious risks of losses due to poor coordination and lack of information.

Administrative literature emphasizes that breaks in information continuity between these operational phases create systemic blind spots, aggravating inventory obsolescence before products reach commercial shelves. Further administrative analysis of supply chain conceptualizations indicates that traditional resource allocation models frequently fail to account for externalities. In the context of Greek corporate infrastructure, this failure is amplified by an historical over-reliance on decentralized, un-digitized regional networks. By establishing an overarching administrative framework that synthesizes these distinct operational challenges, companies can transform their cost centers into centers of sustainable value.

### **2.2. Environmental and Ecological Degradation**

From an environmental and ecological perspective, the impacts of food waste are literally catastrophic for the ecosystem, as

8% to 10% of total global greenhouse gas emissions are due exclusively to food that was produced, packaged, and transported, but never consumed. When these organic wastes end up and are buried uncontrollably in Landfills, they decompose anaerobically, producing huge amounts of methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), a gas with a twenty-fold higher burden on climate change compared to carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). This destructive cycle highlights the absolute ecological necessity of intercepting organic waste flows before they transition into terminal waste streams [6,7]. Landfill dynamics in Greece exacerbate this issue due to high baseline ambient temperatures, which accelerate the decomposition process and increase fugitive emissions. Consequently, food resource preservation acts directly as an industrial mechanism for climate mitigation, offering a quantifiable reduction in municipal waste stress and alignment with strict European environmental performance goals.

### **2.3. Root Causes Across the Value Chain**

The primary and secondary causes of food waste differentiate significantly depending on the respective stage of the supply chain, a fact that requires specialized managerial interventions. At the primary production stage, losses are mainly due to unpredictable climatic conditions, crop diseases, and, most importantly, strict aesthetic rejection criteria (unacceptable shape, size, or blemishes) imposed by major retail chains [8]. In industrial processing and distribution, the problem arises from technical failures in quality control, mechanical breakdowns, and poor refrigeration conditions during transport (breakage of the cold chain). At the level of retail trade and mass catering, waste is caused by systematic over-ordering, incorrect forecasting of consumer demand, inability to timely promote products approaching their expiration date, as well as the use of outdated buffet models in hotels, which produce huge amounts of leftovers daily [9]. Finally, at the household level, impulsive purchases under the regime of offers, poor planning of weekly meals, incorrect storage inside the refrigerator, and widespread confusion between the indications 'use by' (which concerns safety) and 'best before' (which concerns quality) lead to the unjustified disposal of large quantities of perfectly safe food. In a deeper organizational level, the root causes are found in the total lack of modern, automated inventory management systems and the absence of appropriate digital collaboration tools [10].

### **3. The 'Food Save Profit' Digital Platform**

The proposed digital application and integrated platform under the commercial name 'Food Save Profit' constitutes an innovative, strictly for-profit business proposal, which was designed with the purpose of converting the major environmental and social problem of food waste into an exceptionally lucrative activity for the Greek market. The business model of the company is fully rooted in the modern economic theory of two-sided digital marketplaces, acting as the ultimate connecting link between the business world (B2B) and the final consumer public (B2C). The platform allows a wide range of contracted businesses, such as large supermarket chains, local bakeries, pastry shops, restaurants, cafes, and hotel units, to digitalize and instantly post on the application food inventories that are either approaching their expiration date or constitute surpluses of their daily production, disposing of them with a significant

discount ranging from 50% to 70% of the original retail price. In implementing the strategies detailed in the platform design and two-sided marketplace business model, corporate administrators must carefully align operational benchmarks with structural capacities [11]. Quantitative modeling suggests that a failure to synchronize these elements can result in transactional drop-offs. Therefore, the design parameters of 'FoodSave Profit' have been rigorously calibrated against empirical data from the domestic Greek retail market. This ensures that the technical protocols, marketing rollouts, and customer acquisition channels operate in absolute strategic alignment, driving maximum localized platform density and solidifying competitive positioning.

The architecture of the system can be analysed through five main sections, which operate in a complementary way. These sections are: the external users and interaction interfaces, the central cloud platform and backend, the artificial intelligence engine for dynamic pricing, the governance and operational supervision level, and finally the generated outcomes, namely transactions, performance data, and social or environmental impact.

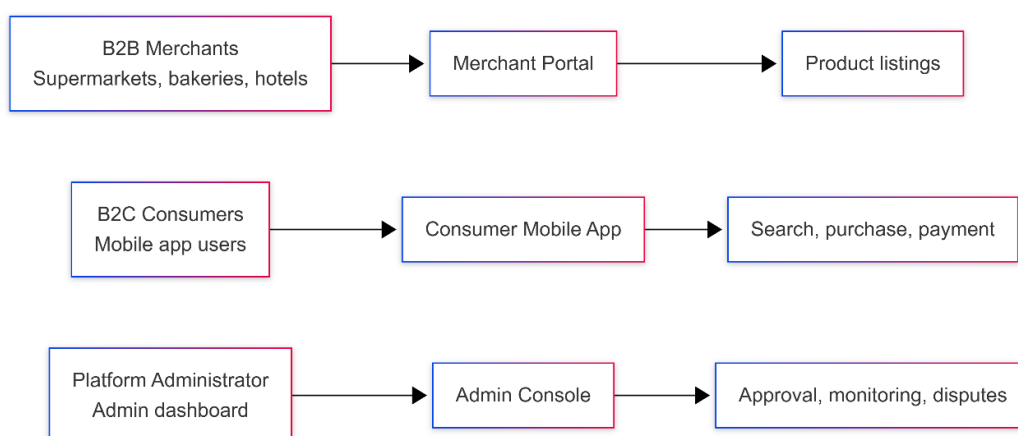
### 3.1. External Actors & User Interfaces

The first section concerns the external users and the interfaces through which they interact with the system. At this level, three main external interfaces: merchants, consumers, and the platform administrator. The businesses may include supermarkets, bakeries, restaurants, cafés, hotels, catering companies, or other food-related businesses [12]. Their role is to identify products that cannot easily be sold at their original price because they are close

to their expiry date, because they are part of the day's surplus, or because they have reduced commercial value, while still being safe for consumption. Through a dedicated interface, the business uploads the products to the platform and provides information such as product type, quantity, original price, available discount, expiry date, pick-up location, and the time window during which collection can take place [13].

On the other side, consumers mainly use the application through a mobile app. Through the app, they can view the available offers in their area, filter them by distance, product category, price, or pick-up time, select the product or package they are interested in, and complete the payment electronically. Once the payment is completed, the system issues a unique QR code, which is used to confirm collection from the store. In this way, the consumer does not need to contact the business directly or negotiate the price [14]. The whole process takes place within the platform, which organizes the information, secures the transaction, and reduces the likelihood of errors.

At the same time, the platform administrator uses a separate admin dashboard. Through this dashboard, the administrator approves businesses, monitors the operation of the platform, checks transactions, manages complaints and refunds, supervises product quality, and produces performance and ESG reports. Therefore, the first level includes all the main external interfaces of the system: the merchant interface, the consumer mobile app, and the administrator dashboard.



**Figure 1:** External Actors & User Interfaces

### 3.2. Core Cloud Platform & Backend

The Core Cloud Platform and Backend constitute the central technical infrastructure through which the Food Save Profit platform organizes, processes, and distributes all operational data. The backend connects the merchant interface, the consumer mobile application, the inventory database, the geospatial services, the dynamic pricing mechanism, the notification engine, the payment system, and the QR-based pickup validation process. In this sense, it functions as the central coordination layer that transforms a

merchant's surplus product entry into a visible, purchasable, and verifiable digital offer.

The process begins at the Merchant Portal, where a food business activates or enters a product listing. The product may concern surplus inventory, near-expiry stock, or food items that need to be sold within a limited time window [15]. Through ERP and inventory integration, the platform can retrieve or verify basic product information from the merchant's existing internal systems,

such as SKU or barcode, product name, category, available quantity, initial retail price, and expiration data. This integration reduces manual entry, minimizes operational errors, and allows the platform to operate efficiently even when large retailers or hotel units upload multiple items simultaneously.

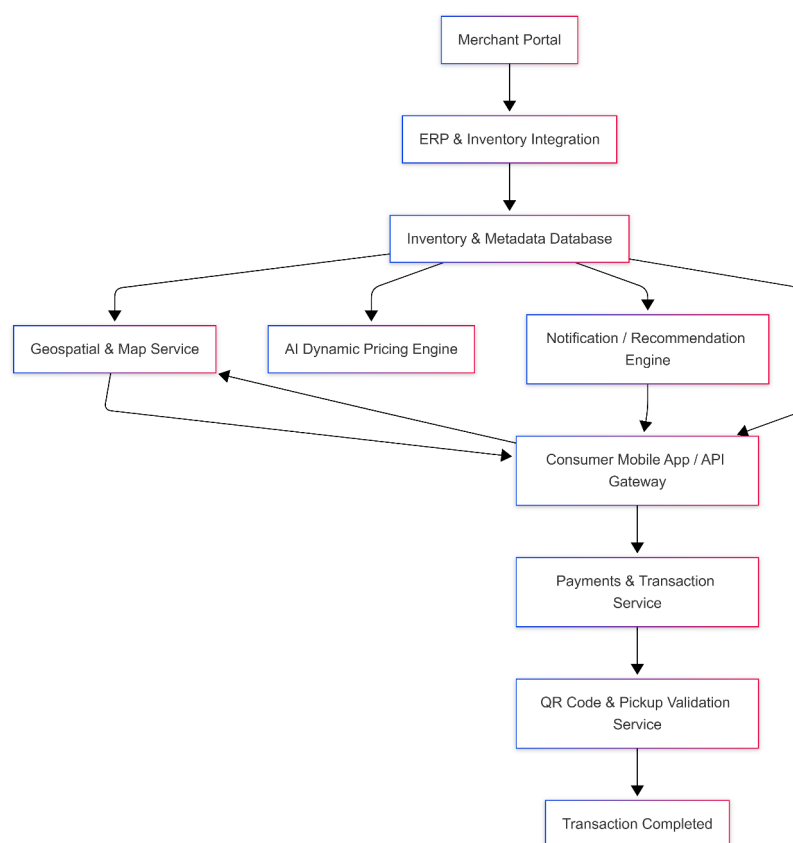
All product-related information is then stored in the Inventory and Metadata Database, which constitutes the main repository of the system. This database records the core metadata of each active offer, including product identification, quantity, packaging type, original price, discount rate, final price, expiration date, store location, and pickup time window. The database is therefore not a passive archive, but the main source from which the other subsystems draw the information required for platform operation [16].

From this central database, data are distributed to several interconnected services. The Geospatial and Map Service uses store-location data and consumer-location signals to display nearby offers in the mobile application. The AI Dynamic Pricing Engine uses product and market-related data to calculate or update the appropriate discount according to expiration time, remaining inventory, local demand, time of day, and geographical conditions. The Notification and Recommendation Engine uses offer availability, user preferences, location, and previous activity to send targeted alerts or personalized recommendations to

consumers.

The Consumer Mobile App communicates with the backend through the API Gateway. Through this interface, consumers can search for nearby offers, filter available products, view updated prices, select an item or package, and proceed to checkout [17]. Once a purchase decision is made, the Payments and Transaction Service processes the electronic payment, records the transaction, and supports the platform's revenue mechanism, including the allocation of commission between the platform and the merchant. After payment confirmation, the QR Code and Pickup Validation Service generates a unique QR code connected to the specific order, consumer, product, merchant, and pickup window. This code functions as the digital proof of purchase and as the control mechanism for the physical pickup process. When the consumer arrives at the store, the QR code is validated, the order is confirmed, and the transaction is marked as completed.

Overall, the backend architecture enables the platform to coordinate product listing, data validation, dynamic pricing, offer visibility, consumer purchase, payment execution, QR-based pickup, and transaction completion within a single integrated workflow. By connecting inventory data, consumer demand, geolocation, pricing logic, and payment validation, the Core Cloud Platform and Backend provide the operational foundation on which the Food Save Profit marketplace functions.



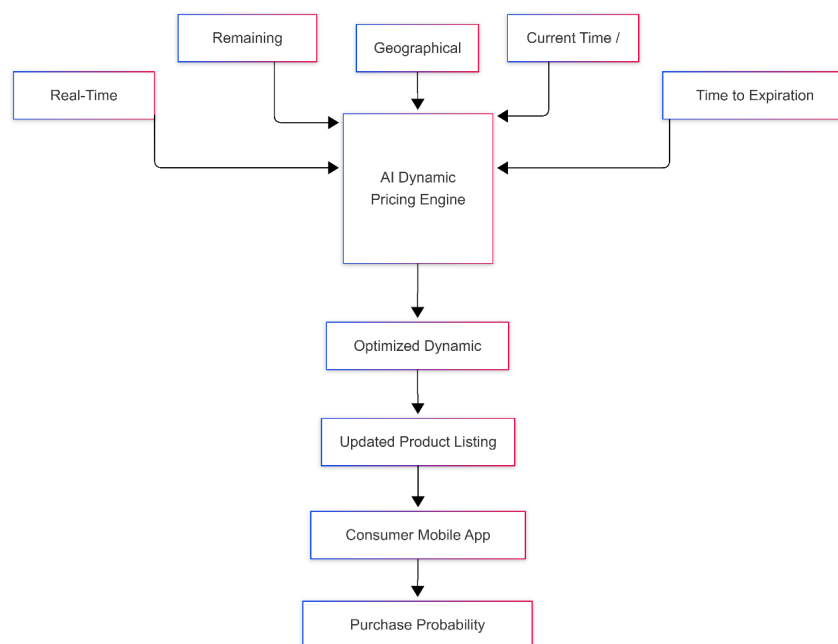
**Figure 2: Core Cloud Platform & Backend**

### 3.3. AI Dynamic Pricing Engine

The third section is the artificial intelligence engine for dynamic pricing. The main purpose of this subsystem is to calculate which price or discount increases the likelihood that a product will be sold before it becomes waste. Pricing is not static, instead, it adjusts according to the time remaining before expiry, the quantity of available stock, local demand, the time of day, the time left before the store closes, and the historical behavior of consumers. For example, a product that expires in two days may only require a moderate discount, because there is still enough time for it to be sold. In contrast, a product that must be collected within the next two hours will probably need a larger discount, because the available selling time is limited. If the system identifies high demand for similar products in the area, it may suggest a smaller

discount, since the likelihood of sale is already high [4]. However, if demand is low or there are many similar offers in the same area, the system may increase the discount in order to make the offer more attractive.

The dynamic pricing engine therefore works as a balancing mechanism between two objectives. On the one hand, the business wants to recover as much of the product's value as possible. On the other hand, the platform aims to increase the likelihood of sale and reduce food waste. If the price remains too high, the product may not be sold. If the price drops too much too early, the business loses revenue that it could have retained. Artificial intelligence tries to identify a practical point of balance.



**Figure 3:** AI Dynamic Pricing Engine

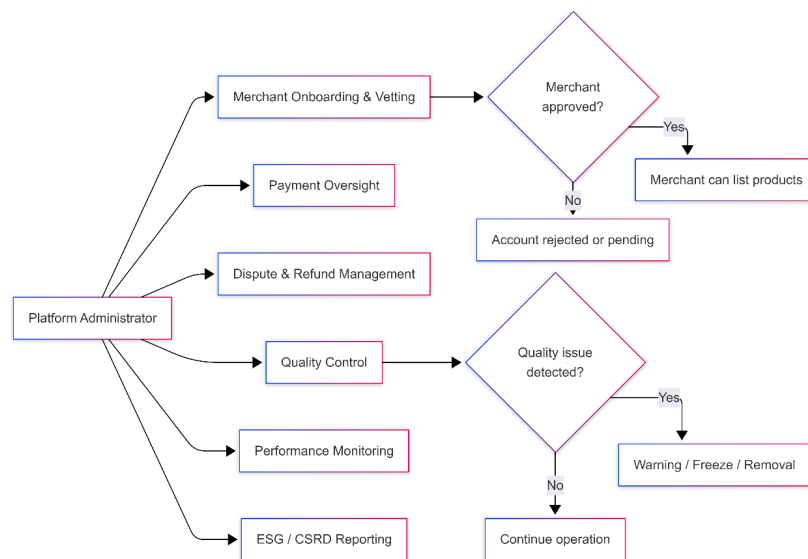
### 3.4. Governance & Operations

Because the system is not simply a list of offers, but a platform that manages food products, payments, quality, trust, and possible disputes, it needs a clear control mechanism. This level includes the administrator or platform manager, who supervises the overall operation of the platform.

The administrator can approve the businesses that participate, check whether they are allowed to offer food through the platform, monitor their behavior, and manage cases of non-compliance. For example, if a business repeatedly uploads products with inaccurate descriptions, frequently cancels orders, or receives many complaints from consumers, the administrator can intervene. This intervention may take the form of a warning, a temporary restriction, or even removal from the platform.

This level also includes the management of disputes and refunds. There may be cases where the consumer pays but the product is not available, the QR code is not recognized, the product does not match its description, or the collection process is not completed properly [9]. In such cases, the platform must have a resolution process. The administrator reviews the transaction data, the order status, and whether collection was confirmed or not, and then decides whether a refund or another corrective action is needed.

Governance is also connected to product quality and food safety. The platform must prevent the listing of expired or unsuitable products and ensure that businesses do not use the application to sell food that should not be sold. This means that clear listing rules, checks, action logs, and a way for users to report problems are necessary. The reliability of the platform depends to a large extent on the quality of this supervision level.



**Figure 4: Governance & Operations**

### 3.5. Outputs, Transactions & Impact

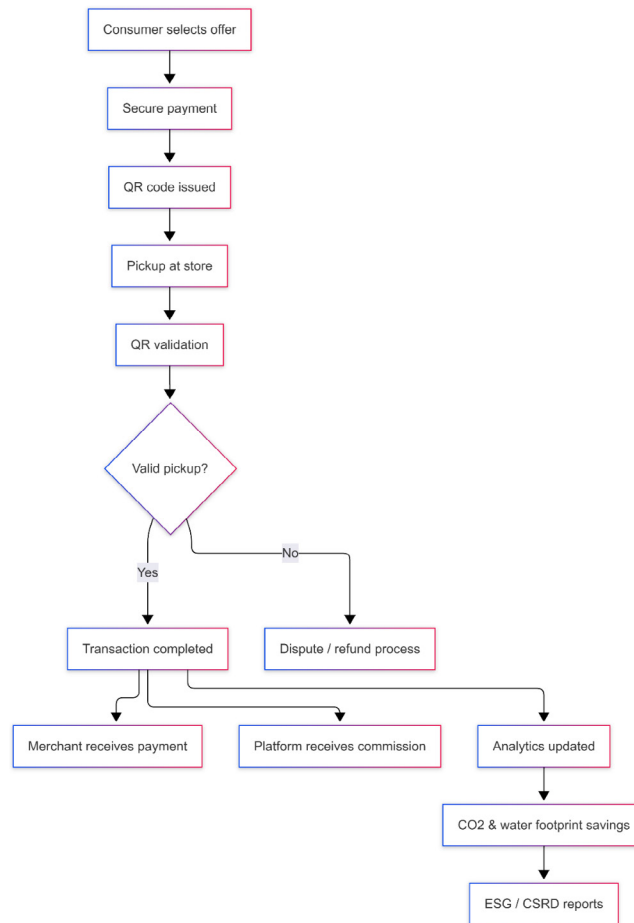
The fifth section concerns the final outcomes, transactions, and impact. This is where the system shows how a potential waste item is converted into a completed transaction and, at the same time, into a measurable benefit for the business, the consumer, and the environment. The process starts when the consumer selects an offer through the application. The consumer then proceeds with an electronic payment. Once the payment is completed, the order is reserved, the available stock is reduced, and the system issues a unique QR code.

The QR code acts as the link between the online transaction and the physical collection of the product. When the consumer arrives at the store, they show the QR code. The business scans it or confirms it through the system. If the code is valid, the order is marked as completed. Once the transaction is completed, the accounting data is updated, the amount due to the business is recorded, the platform's commission is calculated, and the analytics are updated. Analytics are particularly important because they allow both the

platform and the businesses to understand what works and what does not. The system can record how many products were uploaded, how many were sold, how many remained unsold, which product categories have higher demand, at what times most purchases take place, which areas perform better, and which discounts lead to faster sales. This data can help businesses not only sell surplus products, but also improve their inventory management.

Finally, the platform can generate environmental and social impact reports. Each product that is sold instead of being discarded corresponds to a certain amount of food that has been saved. Based on this quantity, the system can estimate avoided CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, water savings, or other sustainability indicators. These reports can be used by businesses for ESG reporting, corporate social responsibility, or compliance with sustainability requirements. In this way, the platform does not function only as a commercial tool, but also as a mechanism for documenting the reduction of food waste.



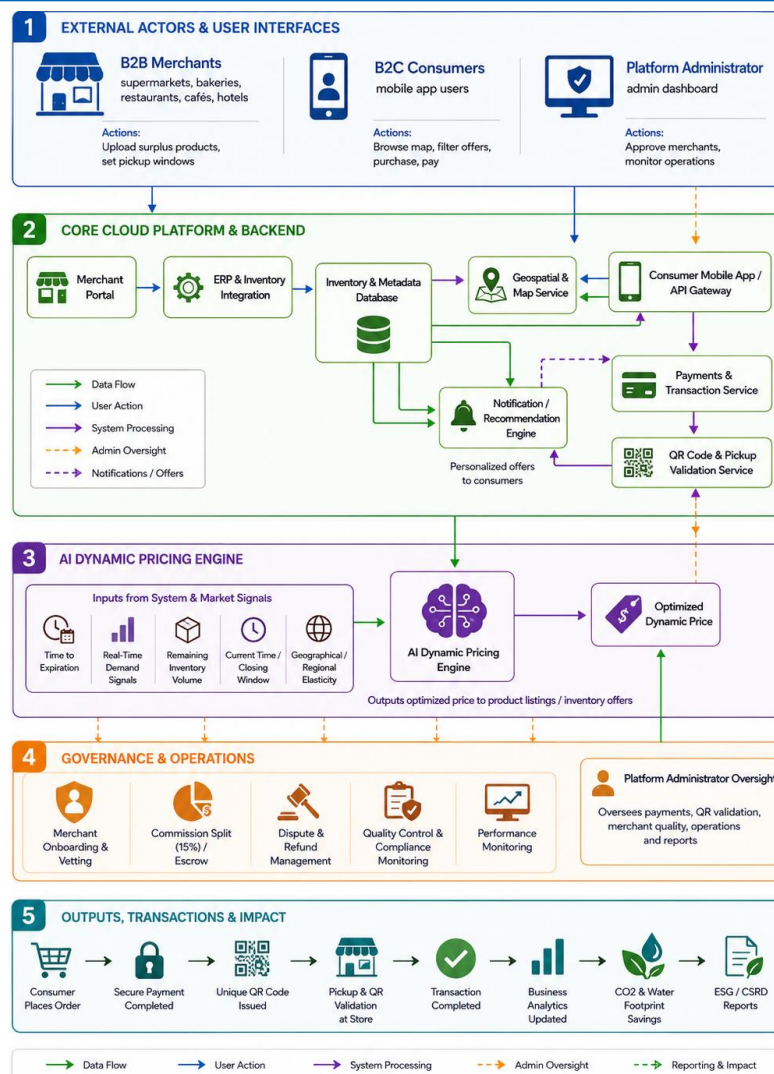


**Figure 5:** Outputs, Transactions & Impact

### 3.6. Platform Structural Architecture Map

To visually synthesize the technical and operational mechanics of the 'Food Save Profit' ecosystem, the comprehensive structural map below details the interactive flows between external entities and the core centralized system nodes managed by the Platform Administrator.

Overall, the five subsystems operate as a single chain. Businesses upload the available products, the backend organizes and stores the information, the artificial intelligence engine calculates an appropriate price, the consumer finds and purchases the offer, the QR code confirms collection, and the system completes the transaction while also updating the financial and environmental data. In this way, the platform connects the commercial use of surplus stock with the reduction of food waste and the production of measurable impact.



**Figure 6:** Subsystem Interaction Diagram

#### 4. Discussion, Conclusions and Future Research

The proposed Food Save Profit platform should not be understood only as a technological tool for listing discounted food products, but as a for-profit digital marketplace designed to transform surplus food into an economically valuable resource. Its central contribution lies in the combination of three elements: a two-sided marketplace structure, a dynamic pricing mechanism, and a monetization model that creates incentives for both supply-side and demand-side participants. Through this structure, the platform attempts to address food waste not only as an environmental or social problem, but also as a market inefficiency that can be reduced when the right economic, technological, and organizational conditions are created.

From a business model perspective, the platform creates value for merchants by allowing them to recover part of the economic value of products that would otherwise be discarded. For supermarkets, bakeries, restaurants, cafés, hotels, and catering businesses, surplus food often represents both a direct financial loss and an additional waste-management cost. By enabling these businesses to list near-

expiry products, daily surplus, or aesthetically imperfect items at discounted prices, the platform creates an additional revenue channel. At the same time, it reduces the operational burden associated with waste disposal and improves the visibility of the business among price-sensitive and environmentally conscious consumers.

For consumers, the platform creates value by providing access to food products at significantly reduced prices. The consumer side of the marketplace is supported by mobile access, geolocation, digital payment, filtering options, and QR-based pickup validation. This makes the purchasing process fast, transparent, and convenient. In this way, the platform connects economic affordability with responsible consumption. Consumers are not asked to participate in food waste reduction only for ethical reasons, rather, they are given a direct financial incentive to purchase products that remain safe and useful but are at risk of becoming waste.

The revenue model of the platform is based on multiple monetization streams. The first and most direct source of income



is the transaction fee, through which the platform retains a fixed commission from each completed sale. This creates a revenue mechanism that grows in proportion to platform activity and aligns the platform's financial interest with the successful completion of transactions. The second revenue stream is a Software-as-a-Service subscription model for business users that require access to advanced analytics, business intelligence tools, ESG reporting, and performance dashboards. The third revenue stream may come from premium consumer services, such as early access to high-demand offers or personalized deal notifications. This multi-sided revenue logic reduces dependence on a single income source and strengthens the long-term commercial sustainability of the platform.

The for-profit orientation of the platform is therefore not incidental, but central to its design. Unlike purely charitable or voluntary food redistribution initiatives, Food Save Profit is structured around economic incentives. Merchants participate because they can recover value from surplus stock. Consumers participate because they gain access to discounted food. The platform operator participates because each successful transaction and subscription contributes to revenue generation. This alignment of incentives is the key reason why the platform can be discussed as a potentially scalable business model rather than only as a social innovation concept.

However, the commercial nature of the platform also creates important governance requirements. Since the platform deals with food products, trust and quality control are essential. The platform administrator must verify merchants, monitor listings, supervise transactions, manage complaints and refunds, and prevent the sale of expired or unsuitable products. The credibility of the marketplace depends not only on its technical architecture but also on its ability to maintain food safety, transparency, and operational discipline. In this respect, the administrator's role is not peripheral, it is a core governance mechanism that protects both consumers and the platform's reputation.

A further contribution of the platform concerns data generation. Each transaction produces operational data about product categories, pricing behavior, consumer demand, geographic performance, pickup times, and unsold inventory. These data can help businesses improve inventory planning and reduce future surplus. In addition, the platform can translate completed transactions into sustainability indicators, such as avoided food waste, estimated CO<sub>2</sub> savings, water-footprint reduction, and ESG-related performance metrics. This creates an additional value proposition for businesses that face increasing pressure to document sustainability performance and comply with emerging reporting requirements.

The discussion also shows that the proposed model depends on network effects. The value of the platform increases when more merchants participate, because consumers gain access to a wider range of offers. At the same time, the value for merchants increases when more consumers use the app, because the probability of

selling surplus products rises. This two-sided structure means that early market penetration is critical. The platform would need to build sufficient density in selected urban areas before expanding geographically. A phased launch in large cities, such as Athens and Thessaloniki, would therefore be more realistic than an immediate nationwide rollout.

Despite its potential, the proposed platform remains at the conceptual and design stage. Future work should therefore focus on empirical validation. A pilot implementation with a limited number of merchants and consumers would allow the research team to test whether the proposed assumptions hold in practice. Such a pilot should examine transaction volume, average discount levels, consumer adoption, merchant satisfaction, product categories with the highest turnover, pickup reliability, refund rates, and the actual reduction of unsold food. Without such evidence, the platform can be presented as a promising design proposal, but not yet as a proven solution.

Future research should also evaluate the dynamic pricing algorithm under real market conditions. The proposed pricing logic assumes that variables such as time to expiration, remaining inventory, local demand, time of day, and geographic elasticity can improve the probability of sale. This assumption should be tested through real transaction data. Comparative experiments could examine whether dynamic pricing performs better than fixed discounting, whether aggressive late-stage discounts increase sales, and whether consumers respond differently across food categories and urban areas.

Another important direction for future work concerns legal, ethical, and operational compliance. Because the platform facilitates the sale of food products close to expiration, it must operate within clear food safety rules. Future development should specify merchant obligations, product eligibility criteria, refund policies, data protection measures, consumer complaint procedures, and liability allocation between the merchant and the platform. These issues are essential for the practical deployment of the system and for building trust among users.

In conclusion, Food Save Profit offers a structured model for transforming surplus food from a cost and waste problem into a revenue-generating digital marketplace. Its contribution lies in linking food waste mitigation with platform economics, dynamic pricing, digital payments, geolocation, merchant analytics, and ESG reporting. The proposed model suggests that profitability and sustainability can be aligned when surplus food is treated as a recoverable economic asset rather than as a terminal waste stream. Nevertheless, the platform's long-term success will depend on empirical testing, regulatory clarity, merchant adoption, consumer trust, and the ability of the platform operator to maintain a balanced and reliable marketplace.

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