

Is food waste
consuming us?



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Introduction

Sara Walton. Sector Lead, BSI Knowledge (Food, Retail, Services)

As we become more aware, as a global community, of the challenges and impacts we are having on our planet, food waste is clearly a core issue to be tackled. Developed countries have a responsibility to address food waste, not only from a humanitarian perspective but also the significant impact it is having on our environment.



In this brochure, we are delighted to showcase contributions from three of the country's leading thinkers on the food waste problem, each bringing a different perspective on the topic. **Andrew Parry** of WRAP, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, oversees the UK Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, which was launched in 2018 with the aim of halving food waste by 2030. Food business signatories to the Roadmap have already reported incredible results when it comes to cutting waste in their own operations, but, as Andrew points out, companies also have an important role to play in helping end-consumers to do the same. Representing the manufacturers

themselves, **David Bellamy** of the Food and Drink Federation values the collaborative atmosphere that voluntary initiatives such as the Roadmap and the Courtauld Commitment foster in what can otherwise be a highly competitive sector. David also offers some interesting thoughts on how the effects of Covid-19 are being felt across the UK food and drink industry. Meanwhile, **Lucy Bearn** of FareShare, the country's leading food charity redistributing thousands of tonnes of surplus food, emphasizes the social benefits of addressing the food waste challenge, and shines a light on the huge opportunities that still remain.

Waste reduction roadmap

Andrew Parry.
Special Advisor Food & Drink, WRAP

If the last year has taught us anything it is the value of community action and community relations. Faced with the changing rules and guidance in an attempt to control the pandemic, there have been numerous good examples of restaurants, food producers and retailers sharing surpluses through local charities. Making food available for vulnerable people that would otherwise go to waste is just one way businesses can strengthen relationships with potential customers, and with the wider community.

As well as the social benefits of avoiding food and drink waste there are, of course, significant economic advantages. Every year the UK as a whole throws away food that could have been eaten valued at £19 billion. And that is only the post-farm gate losses; a further £1 billion-worth of produce is wasted on farms. The environmental impacts are enormous too, with post-farm gate waste responsible for more than 25 million tonnes of annual greenhouse gas emissions. The UK Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, which WRAP and IGD launched in 2018, sets out a strategy and offers resources to tackle these challenges. Our overall aim is to halve food waste by 2030, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3.

Businesses are already reporting impressive progress against this ambitious target. In September 2020, we published case studies of almost 60 different companies who had reported reductions in food waste as a result of actions taken under the Roadmap. Examples include the fruit and veg grower G's Fresh, who increased their redistribution ten-fold in the space of a year, and Cranswick, a meat producer who cut food waste by 61% in part by turning surpluses into new products. Forty-five of those businesses alone prevented a total of 180,000 tonnes of food waste worth about £300 million: an average 17% reduction over just a couple of years. These are real commercial savings for business, and real reductions that contribute to national and international policy objectives.



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**We waste 3.5 million
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from farm-to-fork**

But when it comes to waste at the consumer end of the supply chain, we still have a way to go. The latest figures suggest that despite reductions equivalent to over 30% per person compared to 2007, household food waste makes up around 70% of the UK post-farm-gate total. Even here, though, there are causes for optimism. We are all more conscious about wasting food, both in and out of our homes. Surveys by the Food Standards Agency indicate that food waste as an issue rates higher than concerns about food prices, or the salt and fat content of what we eat. Worryingly, one reason people do not buy as much fresh produce as they should is because of concerns about wasting it. We estimate that 3.5 million tonnes of fresh produce

is currently wasted from farm to fork - equivalent to about 45 billion portions of our fruit and veg 'five-a-day'. Helping people to be more flexible in what fresh produce they buy (i.e. more 'wonky veg'), and store it better at home, would result in less waste from farm to fork.

Therefore, while we are delighted that UK businesses are significantly reducing their own food waste, we also want them to be thinking much more about how to help customers do the same. That could mean clearer product labelling, extending shelf life, or getting pack sizes right. It's also about backing national campaigns, like 'Love Food Hate Waste', to communicate simple messages to consumers about

buying the right amounts, storing food, what can and cannot be frozen and how to understand 'Best Before' and 'Use By' dates.

The good news is that people who work in food companies are creative and open to change. They obviously know their business and customers better than anyone, so with the right information and support, they will come up with great ideas to cut waste. Very often these tend to be low-cost or even no-cost solutions; it is not always about buying expensive new equipment. If businesses can act on food waste, and if they can show consumers they are acting, this will translate into greater customer loyalty and then everyone benefits.

Food waste is unacceptable

Lucy Bearn,
Head of Food & Logistics,
FareShare South West

Every year more than 250,000 tonnes of food which is processed, packaged and ready-to-eat is wasted by producers, manufacturers and retailers in the UK supply chain, for reasons ranging from inaccurate demand forecasting and packaging errors, to damage in transit or retailer rejections. These losses translate into real money which businesses are wasting, and which could be shared amongst vulnerable people within our communities. This would be bad enough in a normal year but, against a backdrop of financial hardship faced by many in 2020, it has never been more obvious that food waste is socially, economically, and environmentally unacceptable.

As the UK's largest food charity, FareShare offers an effective and flexible solution to this problem. We redistribute surplus food to 11,000 frontline charities and community groups who prepare meals for their vulnerable clients. Our countrywide network of more than 30 warehouses collects edible surplus food with a minimum of 48 hours of life remaining, directly from food businesses. Over the last 25 years we have developed close working relationships with thousands of companies across the food chain, from farmers and manufacturers to major retailers like Tesco, Asda and Waitrose. Last financial year alone, thanks to our amazing industry partners,

we redistributed almost 25,000 tonnes of fit-for-consumption food – enough to provide over 56 million meals.

But much work remains. Compared to the total amount of food available, what we are saving from waste and redistributing today is a drop in the ocean. We estimate that diverting an additional 1% of the available surplus could create 33 million extra meals for vulnerable people. It would also deliver social benefits worth £65m in savings to the health, social care, education, and criminal justice systems.



“Last financial year alone, thanks to our amazing industry partners, we redistributed almost 25,000 tonnes of fit-for-consumption food – enough to provide over 56 million meals.”

Fortunately, every food business, no matter how small, can make a difference. A simple and practical first step is to conduct an internal waste walk. Our food teams will visit a company, whether they are farmer or grower, manufacturer, or distributor, and walk through the whole process, from raw ingredients being delivered to end products being dispatched, to see where food is being wasted.

Sometimes the volumes appear negligible, but they build up massively when happening every day. We find that a lot of businesses are quite shocked. This wastage can be prevented by creating smarter technology or implementing better processes internally. Alternatively, the food surplus can be collected by charities like

FareShare. For instance, at one sausage manufacturer we visited, excess meat left in the sausage piping in between changing production lines was processed before ending up on the floor. We suggested that this surplus sausage meat could instead be packaged up and put to good use – and we are now working with this business to do exactly that. What’s even better, sausages are a valuable type of food for the charities we support.

There are also huge opportunities at farm level. The figures are harder to accurately work out but estimates by WRAP suggest that around 2 million tonnes of edible food and drink is thought to be lost before even leaving the farm gate. This may be due to forecasting errors or perhaps the



food is the wrong size or shape and will not be accepted by fussy consumers. Sometimes it is not even economic for a farmer to harvest a crop, and it is simply left in the ground to rot. In 2019, with funding from Defra, FareShare launched the FareShare Surplus with Purpose Fund. This project, for the first time, made it cost neutral for businesses to divert their surplus food to charity versus other means such as landfill and animal feed – by providing grants of up to £50,000 to cover additional costs incurred such as labour, packaging and transport. The funding supported growers to continue farming food, which would otherwise have been wasted, and FareShare was then able to redistribute these additional volumes of food with a huge amount of life left on it. We hope to continue this work in the future and our lobbying of government to extend this funding continues. As recommended by the EFRA Committee, with £5m per year over the next two years, FareShare could double the amount of fresh fruit and veg distributed to people at risk of hunger.

The pandemic has undoubtedly shone a new light on the UK’s food waste issue, as well as making situations worse in some cases. Farmers and manufacturers supplying the hospitality and airline sectors, for instance, have grown and produced food only for orders to be cancelled, and huge surpluses generated. But the underlying problems have been with us for a long time and FareShare, with twin goals of fighting hunger and tackling food waste, offers a clear, flexible and cost-effective solution.



UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

David Bellamy.
Senior Environment Policy Manager,
FDF - Food and Drink

A well-known statistic is that around a third of the world's food resources is lost annually as waste. These losses have huge economic impacts for businesses and consumers and can also result in severe food shortages and malnourishment, particularly in developing countries. The environmental costs are significant too: not only are greenhouse gases directly released as the waste rots, but the embedded impacts of the water, energy, fertilizer and other resources which went into producing that food in the first place must also be considered. For these reasons food waste is the subject of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3. The Goal seeks, by 2030, to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels, and to reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

Where exactly in the supply chain those losses occur varies around the world. In developing countries, more waste tends to arise at earlier stages of the supply chain, for example, through food being spoiled during storage and transportation, while here in the UK most food waste – around 70% of all post-farm-gate losses - arises at the very end of the supply chain, in other words in our homes.

Although UK food and drink manufacturers have been working hard for years to cut waste within their operations, there is still more to be done. As the industry's leading trade body, representing around 800 businesses, from global brands to

SMEs and sole traders, the Food and Drink Federation is continuing to drive progress. Launched in 2016, our Ambition 2025 supports and encourages members to increase the sustainability of the food system. We believe that a more competitive and sustainable UK food and drink manufacturing sector, which produces more from less and with less environmental impact, can make a real contribution to future food security and growth.

The recent challenges of 2020 have put all businesses under pressure, although in the food industry the impacts have been mixed and not always clear-cut. Manufacturers supplying restaurants, cafés and other

food service outlets have obviously been affected. Even where lost volumes may have been recouped to some extent through increased sales to retailers, profitability is still likely to have been impacted because margins tend to be lower. For all companies, the pandemic has certainly highlighted the need to look at the general resilience of the supply chain, to pick out vulnerabilities, and to ensure alternative sources of supply. And, of course, to work even harder to drive down food waste.

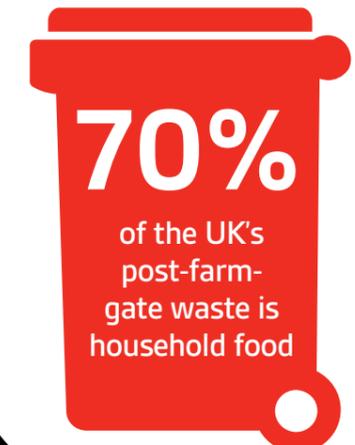
The FDF strongly supports voluntary agreements for tackling food waste, at arms-length from government regulation, such as the current Waste and Resources



“Ultimately, food waste is like any other inefficiency. Sometimes all you need is someone with a fresh pair of eyes to walk around a factory and to challenge the status quo.”

Action Programme (WRAP) known as Courtauld 2025. Such initiatives, where different working groups are brought together to solve different challenges, neutralise the very competitive atmosphere which sometimes characterises one-to-one relationships between brands and retailers. Courtauld provides a forum for companies to discuss and tackle food waste within their supply chain in a much more collaborative fashion and the different phases of the commitment over the years have delivered tangible results when it comes to reducing food waste. Similarly, we back the UK Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, led by WRAP and the Institute of Grocery Distribution. This lays down a universal blueprint for food businesses and retailers to measure, report and act on food waste both in their own operations and across their supply chains with the goal of halving food waste by 2030. (As the familiar mantra goes: if you don't measure it, you can't manage it.) This is particularly important as, up until now, individual retailers and manufacturers have often gone their own way. The Roadmap has been held up internationally as a shining example of how to go about meeting SDG 12.3.

For larger companies, food waste reduction programmes and continuous improvement is almost part of the corporate DNA. But we recognise that SMEs, under immense pressure to keep production lines running and fulfil orders, often have little downtime to take stock of things, and to challenge the 'We've always done it this way' attitude that sometimes prevails. So, as part of Ambition 2025, we regularly publish case studies of best practice to inspire and energize food businesses of all sizes to take action, including in food waste reduction. Ultimately, food waste is like any other inefficiency. Sometimes all you need is someone with a fresh pair of eyes to walk around a factory and to challenge the status quo.



Conclusion

BSI's role of facilitators of collaborative working across industry and organizations

BSI's ability to bring together key stakeholders to discuss challenges within the industry presents a powerful and unique way to begin to tackle the issue of food waste domestically and globally. As neutral facilitators, we can complement and engage with businesses, policy makers and NGOs, that are already taking steps to address the food waste challenge.

BSI has established itself as a global power in the professional services market bringing together industry expertise and knowledge from a wide range of trades. Working with businesses, government and not for profit offers a unique holistic perspective. With expertise ranging from manufacturing through to sustainability and digitalization, BSI is able to offer insight and perspective when considering these cross-sectorial and global issues.

As our contributors have reported, the UK food industry is already doing great work to reduce waste across the value chain. Yet, as with other sectors, the range of different, well-meaning, but often competing interests involved can hinder progress. That is where I believe standards bodies like BSI have such a critical role to play.

As is the process when developing a standard, BSI can give diverse stakeholders a chance to have their say while at the same time bringing clarity to the debate. BSI leads a way through the complexities to reach a consensus that take the best practical learnings from industry and research, to provide standards and guidance that should help us to reach and exceed our commitment to reduce food waste and in turn, lessen its effect on climate change.

Further Information

The Food Waste Reduction Roadmap
<https://wrap.org.uk/nsb-waste-reduction-roadmap>

Guardians of Grub
<https://www.guardiansofgrub.com/>

Fareshare
<https://fareshare.org.uk/>

FDF's "Ambition 2025 – Shaping Sustainable Value Chains"
<https://www.fdf.org.uk/sustainability-ambition2025.aspx>

WRAP's 'The Courtauld Commitment 2025'
<https://www.wrap.org.uk/nsb-drink/business-food-waste/courtauld-2025>

WRAP Case studies



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