



AVOIDING FOOD WASTE

STS FOOD SAFETY 2018

Part of the **ELAS** group of companies





Introduction

It is estimated that some 10 million tonnes of food is wasted each year within the UK, 60% of which is seen to be avoidable. This is believed to be worth around £17 billion per year. These figures are quite staggering.

About 70% of food waste is from households and 26% spread between manufacturing, hospitality and food service and the bad news is that between 2011 and today, the amount of food wasted by the hospitality and food service sector is increasing. It is now estimated that this sector of the industry wastes one million tonnes of food per year.

There have been some quite high profile events in recent months including The Co-operative agreeing to sell food past their best before dates at vastly reduced prices. There are also charitable groups, such as Fareshare and WRAP who are doing their best to ensure that food wastage is reduced as far as possible.

Excess food waste has moral, environmental and commercial impacts and whilst steps are available to reduce wastage it is believed that more can be done. The STS expert food safety panel looks at some of the barriers to reducing waste and the best practices that are available to overcome them.

Executive Summary

The STS expert panel recognises that food wastage has reached unacceptable levels and that actions can and should be taken to reduce these levels.

Our key messages include:

Working with action groups such as Fareshare, WRAP and other local initiatives, helps to achieve a consistent and positive approach to avoiding food waste across both the supply chain and food service/hospitality industries.

Getting your staff involved and raising the visibility of your food waste reduction initiatives is a must. Offer them the opportunity to take part in volunteer schemes and raise the profile of your activities with your customer base.

Liaise with your food supplier base. Work with suppliers to change packaging sizes if this is the source of too much wastage. Where possible, confirm to suppliers that your excess food can go with schemes operated by the likes of Fareshare.

Work with local enforcement agencies and ensure that your approach is acceptable and does not compromise food safety.

Why has reducing food waste been difficult?



Ignorance

General awareness of the amount of food wasted has been poor and businesses are often shocked at how much food is wasted.

WRAP are running a campaign currently called '**Your Business is Food**' which includes the initiative to keep a record of how much food is thrown away over the period of a week. By breaking this record into three categories (**spoilage, preparation and plate**) businesses taking part receive a visual demonstration of how casually we treat food waste.

This lack of awareness can easily be translated into a financial value which suddenly becomes quantifiable. For example, a WRAP case study of a Greene King pub demonstrated reduced food wastage of 15% per cover which would equate to 4 tonnes per year.

Moral Versus Cost

In some cases, the argument for reducing food waste is purely a moral one. Where food has been over ordered the food business will still have to pay for that order and its disposal.

Some less scrupulous business may simply look to the fact that arranging for food to be collected for redistribution is not worth the time or effort required to set up such an agreement. As such, the food is disposed direct to a waste contractor.

Logistics

There is a clear difference between dealing with food from the supply chain to food that is at restaurant/hospitality level already. Larger restaurant groups may have the desire and moral compass which states that food waste should be avoided at all costs.

However it is not always as simple as it sounds. Redistributing food waste from a large number of restaurants does present logistical difficulties, especially in areas where food charities are perhaps not as prevalent as in others. Some restaurant groups try very hard to ensure that left over food is not wasted. These restaurants for example ensure that cooked meat is frozen down for subsequent collection by partner charities.

However, other businesses find this less easy and local agreements very often need to be found. Furthermore, not all food is suitable for freezing and the logistics around daily collection of foods becomes unfeasible.



Visibility

Supply chain agreements where surplus food in the supply chain is provided to food charities such as FareShare, are hugely successful. However, as the food has not hit the restaurants, it often results in a business' interaction with food waste avoidance becoming invisible. At restaurant level, staff and management may be completely unaware that the programmes are in place and therefore fail to become involved or inclined to reduce waste.

There is also the risk that as a supply chain arrangement is in place, businesses may feel that they are doing their bit already and do not look to expand their food wastage programmes down to restaurant level.

Even when there are programmes in place at restaurant level, staff may not be given the opportunity to become involved with the project. This purely results from management teams failing to fully interact with their teams to communicate how and why their food waste reduction schemes are in place and the benefits that they can achieve.

Enforcement

There is a common fear behind using food that is at the end of its shelf life. Food that is past its use-by date simply should not be used as it presents the potential risk of causing harm to the consumer. However food which is marked with a best before date or in the case of some produce, has no shelf life date at all, can be perfectly safe to eat. Although it may not be quite the quality expected.

Foreign language labels can also generate food waste. For example, where incorrectly labelled food is delivered to outlets accidentally, the food is usually wasted rather than re-distributed. There are very good reasons for the tight labelling laws that we have, but they can be the cause of food being disposed of when it is perfectly good and safe to eat.

There is also a lack of guidance which results in a disparity in activity between local authorities, with some being extremely supportive whilst others treat food donations with thinly concealed suspicion. As such, many businesses do not take steps to share perfectly good food.

“There is also a lack of guidance which results in a disparity in activity between local authorities”

What can you do to avoid food waste?

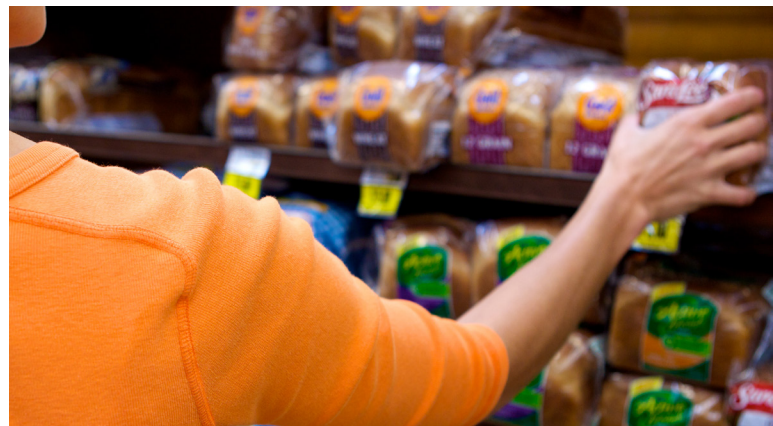


Connect with programmes

Fareshare and WRAP are two of the best well known organisations in the UK who work to raise awareness of the food wastage issue. Both run initiatives that provide lots of useful guidance documentation and plans that guide businesses along the path of reducing food waste.


WRAP are currently operating the 'Love Food Hate Waste' programme. This invites food businesses to analyse their food waste on a weekly basis and then gives guidance to help target practices that generate this excess waste. Not only is there guidance on menu/stock planning and how to avoid throwing away decent food, but also recipes for using leftovers. It's an excellent scheme that businesses are seeing very positive results from. More information is available via www.lovefoodhatewaste.com

Fareshare also have their own schemes that provide information and advice on how to avoid wasting good food. The Fareshare scheme redistributes food that would have gone to waste to charities across the UK. Fareshare in 2017 handled nearly 17,000 tonnes of food and supplied to 1,500 towns and cities across the UK. This is quite some coverage. The Fareshare scheme is usually based around supply chains.



Where retailers or restaurant groups may have over ordered a product or are simply not going to sell the food before it goes out of date, Fareshare take this food and distribute it to their chain of charities. This of course requires buy-in from the businesses, recognising that this is not a money spinner but is purely great moral practice. In essence, the business was going to lose money on the excess stock so there is no additional cost loss. What they achieve now though is that great feeling of taking positive steps to ensure that the food is used rather than simply thrown away. More information about the company and their practices is available via www.fareshare.org.uk

There are many local initiatives around the UK and these are easy to connect with, whether via local chambers of commerce, charities or local authority schemes. Take time to connect with the likes of WRAP and Fareshare and they will help lead you down the road of reducing your food waste.



*“ It is not exactly new news that
throwing away less food saves money
and makes you more profitable ”*

Get your team involved

One of the positives of the WRAP ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ scheme is that it is extremely visible to staff within the food business. Where individuals are involved in avoiding food waste, there is often complete buy-in which can achieve very positive results.

Some companies who provide food to local food charities on a weekly basis have recognised that their teams have fully adopted the company practice of making sure that the amount of food wasted is kept to a minimum.

Volunteering at food banks and other charitable centres is a very clear way of ensuring that you see where the food you are providing goes to. Many centres are regularly looking for assistance so are happy to accept help where it is offered. It is also worth considering offering your team the opportunity to take part in these volunteering sessions – this can boost the buy-in to the initiatives that you are promoting internally.

Don’t be afraid of telling your customers that you are looking at reducing food waste. Whether this is by the use of point of sale notices, posters or simply talking with your customer base, you have the opportunity to show yourselves as being an ethical and caring business.

If you reduce your service end food wastage there will of course be financial benefits to your business. It is not exactly new news that throwing away less food saves money and makes you more profitable. You can demonstrate this quite clearly in your accounts, thus creating a quantifiable visibility.

Work with your supplier base

One of the key reasons for businesses having too much food other than over ordering, is pack size. Suppliers regularly have standard packaging and portion sizes. This may suit some businesses but not all. A very simple suggestion is to liaise with your suppliers to ensure that the pack sizes you are provided with are suitable to the amount you actually need. If you are receiving less of a particular type of food then it is likely that your wastage will decrease.

Freezing food is a simple solution to portion/ pack size concerns. However, it is not always clear whether a product can be frozen or not. Again, liaison with suppliers to confirm such detail is a simple step to take to make sure that you are doing the right thing.

Not all food types need a shelf life date applying, especially unprepared fruit and vegetables. Where suppliers routinely apply dates, request that they stop doing this where dates are not required. It is such a simple step but can be highly effective.

Work with enforcement agencies

The fear of formal action from local authorities can be avoided by working with them. Many authorities are working with food charities and will be more than happy to work with you. Such initiatives are often inter-departmental and it is likely that Environmental Health Officers (EHO) will be involved. As such, they will be pleased to hear from you.

Where local authorities are not delivering local initiatives, then it is certainly good practice to liaise with your EHO before you adopt plans to reduce food waste if you are concerned that there may be food safety risks. Primary authority programmes are available via all local authorities – indeed these are initiatives that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) are pushing. Such agreements are not for all businesses, but where there are multi sites, they are an excellent way of ensuring a consistent approach to food safety, both across service delivery and enforcement. Agreeing food wastage strategies with a primary authority is a very sensible plan!

“It is certainly good practice to liaise with your EHO before you adopt plans to reduce food waste”

The FSA and DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) clarified their fruit and vegetables standard in the autumn of 2017. This has allowed for businesses to re-distribute unprepared fruit and vegetables that have passed their best before date.



This has had a positive impact on Fareshare and has allowed them to keep pushing boundaries where safety is not compromised. This does therefore lead to the recommendation that food businesses could look at their own labelling policies and give consideration to changing blanket labelling requirements e.g. 2 day shelf life for all foods, to per product labelling guides. This should quite significantly reduce the amount of good food that is discarded.

There are technological solutions available to assist with per product labelling. At the moment they are not necessarily cheap to invest in but they can have a significant impact, not just in avoiding food wastage, but in ensuring that labelling policies are fully adhered to.



About the Panel

STS is proud to be working alongside a number of food safety experts from across the hospitality industry. We would like to acknowledge our gratitude to:

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