



This *Focus on...* paper examines the challenges associated with food waste. The paper discusses what it is, the challenge, the impact of food waste and what WAMITAB offers.

What is food waste?

“Food waste is any waste raw, cooked edible and associated inedible material (e.g. bones, egg shells, fruit and vegetable peelings) generated during the preparation or consumption of meals.”

(Castle Point Borough Council, 2013)

A Global Issue

Worldwide about one third of all food produced (equivalent to 1.3 tonnes) gets lost or wasted in the food production and consumption system (Love Food Hate Waste, 2013).

According to research by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (2013), different food waste issues associated with food production, storage, transportation and consumer expectations will be experienced by different countries depending on their level of development over the next few years.

For example, newly developed countries that are beginning to industrialise, primarily in Africa, with high population growth rates will need to tackle food waste created due to inefficient harvesting, inadequate transportation and poor storage. In contrast, developed countries with more efficient

farming practices, transportation, storage and processing must tackle the modern consumer culture that produces food waste through behaviour.

Food Waste in the UK

Across the UK, food waste as a result of behaviour is a significant issue with 7.2 million tonnes of food and drink thrown away despite the fact that the majority was still edible, costing households £12 billion each year and the UK food industry £5 billion per year (Gov.UK, 2014).

Lang (2013) argues that the current food system “overproduces, wraps food in packaging, embeds energy, chucks away mountains of usable food and produces food residues” on such a massive scale that the waste cannot be used elsewhere as fertiliser or animal feed.

Many argue that a significant proportion of food waste in the UK is cultural, caused by unrealistic used-by-dates or related to the fact that “supermarkets [and to a certain degree consumers] demand cosmetically perfect food.”



Food Waste

July 2014

In the Government Waste Policy Review (DEFRA, 2011), tackling food waste was highlighted as a priority waste stream in terms of waste prevention, re-use and recycling.

A recent report by a House of Lords sub-committee (Lets Recycle, 2014), stated that the amount of food waste being sent to landfill (by both households and businesses) should be addressed at a UK Government level through initiatives such as mandatory separate collections. This is because food waste sent to landfill currently accounts for almost half of all waste CO₂eq emissions (DEFRA, 2011).

Businesses and households could save money if the amount of food waste sent to landfill was reduced further by being diverted to more sustainable treatments such as anaerobic digestion or in-vessel composting (Gov.UK, 2014).

Environmental Impact

The debate about food waste is heavily focused on the economic cost of the issue; however, food waste can also have a significant impact on the environment by using dwindling resources such as energy and water. Research suggests that 20 million tonnes of CO₂eq emissions are created and 6.2 billion litres of water are used every year to produce food wasted by UK households that could have been eaten (DEFRA, 2011).

Preventing food waste therefore avoids the emissions associated with the farming, manufacture, transport, cooking and disposal of food. WRAP (2013) estimate that reducing food waste could save 17 million tonnes of CO₂ (the equivalent of taking 1 in every 5 cars off the roads).

Evidence suggests that the public would support further measures to reduce food waste as WRAP (2013) research shows that

61% of shoppers are concerned about the environmental impact of their food and groceries.

Minimising Food Waste

There are a number of initiatives in place to encourage households to reduce their food waste. For example, WRAP's Love Food Hate Waste campaign provides simple advice designed to help consumers get more from the food they buy, including:

- Eating ugly fruit and vegetables
- Planning meals for a week before shopping
- Checking fridge temperature and seals
- Making use of your freezer
- Making soups and smoothies from soft fruit and vegetables

In cases where food waste is unavoidable, more households are being encouraged to compost or take advantage of separate food waste collections provided by their local authority.

At an industry level, minimising food waste is far more challenging as it requires greater cooperation between industry leading professional bodies, individual businesses and their supply chains.

The Government Waste Policy Review (DEFRA, 2011) argues that the limited provision and high cost associated with food



Food Waste

July 2014

waste collection services is a significant barrier to businesses (particularly SMEs) diverting their food waste from landfill.

However, WRAP (2013) estimate that the food service industry could save £722 million per year by reducing food waste in pubs, hotels and restaurants. A recent study indicated that 50% of consumers leave food uneaten because portion sizes are too big or they have ordered too much. This could be avoided by offering consumers more options and smaller portions.

Food Waste & the Waste Management Industry

Overall, many see education as the key to a significant reduction in the food waste produced across the UK. This is particularly true for businesses where the financial benefits associated with developing the knowledge and skills to divert more waste from landfill.

Industry opinion is starting to reflect this shift in thinking with CIWM (2013) Great waste survey finding that 73% of waste managers perceived food waste as a priority for the waste and resource management industry across the UK.

WAMITAB offers a variety of qualifications and training courses through its approved centre network designed to support individuals employed at operative to management level as they develop the skills, knowledge and attributes to address the resource efficiency of their business.

For more information follow us on Twitter, email info.admin@wamitab.org.uk, telephone 01604 231950 or visit www.wamitab.org.uk.

Sources

Castle Point Borough Council (2013) What is food waste?

<http://www.castlepoint.gov.uk/main.cfm?type=trfood2>

DEFRA (2011) Government Review of Waste Policy in England

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69401/pb13540-waste-policy-review110614.pdf

Gov.uk (2014) Reducing and managing waste

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-and-managing-waste/supporting-pages/food-waste>

Institution of Mechanical Engineers (2013) Global food waste not, want not

<http://www.imeche.org/knowledge/themes/environment/global-food>

Lang, T (2013) Food waste is the symptom, not the problem

<http://theconversation.com/food-waste-is-the-symptom-not-the-problem-15432>

Lets Recycle (2014) Lords slam food waste as 'morally repugnant'

<http://www.letsrecycle.com/news/latest-news/compost/lords-slam-food-waste-as-2018morally-repugnant2019>

WRAP (2013) Love Food Hate Waste

<http://england.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>

This paper has been written and produced by the Project Team at WAMITAB.

