



House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Food waste in England:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Eighth Report of
Session 2016–17**

First Special Report of Session 2017–19

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Eliot Barrass (Clerk), Sian Woodward (Clerk), Daniel Schlappa (Second Clerk), Sarah Coe (Senior Committee Specialist), Anwen Rees (Committee Specialist), Ian Hook (Senior Committee Assistant) and Ian Blair (Committee Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 7341; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.

First Special Report

The Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its Eighth Report of Session 2016–17, on [Food waste in England](#) [HC 429] on 30 April 2017. The Government's response was received on 12 July 2017 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government response

The Government thanks the committee for its report on Food waste in England. It is estimated that 10 million tonnes of food and drink are wasted each year in the UK – around 70% is from households and 30% from other sources, which has an environmental and financial cost. That is why we are taking action. We have large-scale interventions in place to promote reductions in food waste by households and businesses. We have made significant progress through the Courtauld Commitment, a voluntary agreement with retailers and food manufacturers, and the Love Food Hate Waste campaign, which gives consumers advice and tips on reducing food waste at home. Between 2007 and 2015, these helped reduce food waste by 11%, saving people and business around £3 billion a year without the additional burdens of regulation.

We all need to go further. Defra has put in place frameworks to make further reductions. Courtauld 2025 was launched in March 2016. This ambitious voluntary agreement brings together organisations across the food system – from producer to consumer – to make food and drink production and consumption more sustainable. The agreement includes a target to reduce total food waste by 20% across the whole of the supply chain. Analysis by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) indicates that this reduction would deliver an estimated £20 billion in savings to the UK economy, including £4 billion savings to businesses - the majority of savings would benefit householders.

The committee looked at a number of issues, which the Government has addressed to below.

Food Waste hierarchy

Paragraph 14: We recommend that the incoming Government works with the Environment Agency to enforce the waste hierarchy, for the benefit of all.

The legislative provisions on the waste hierarchy require businesses that import, produce, collect, transport, recover or dispose of waste to, on the transfer of waste, take all reasonable measures available to it to apply the waste hierarchy. Departure from the hierarchy is permitted where it is justified by life-cycle thinking on the overall impacts of the generation and management of the waste. An organisation departing from the waste hierarchy, must consider general environmental protection principles, technical feasibility and economic viability, protection of resources and the overall environmental, human health, economic and social impacts before doing so.

The Environment Agency will continue to promote the recycling of food waste where that is possible, advising on the impact of food waste contamination on recyclables'

collection and treatment, and in appropriate cases enforcing the hierarchy in accordance with its enforcement and sanctions statement and guidance. The Minister has raised the committee's concern with the Environment Agency.

Prevention

Paragraph 23: The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement. We were disappointed to hear that a large number of manufacturers had not signed up to its targets. We call on WRAP and the Government to redouble their efforts to increase participation in the Courtauld process by food manufacturers.

Nineteen food manufacturers were business signatories to Courtauld 2025 at the start of the 2017 financial year. In addition, six trade bodies that represent the food manufacturing chain signed up as engagement signatories (organisations that are able to help deliver the agreement's targets, especially through influencing non-signatory businesses and consumers, and by helping develop new best practice). Wide participation is achieved through signatories utilising their wider networks. For example, Dairy UK host the Courtauld 2025 Dairy Working Group meetings, canvassing views from smaller dairy processors who are not signatories to the agreement, as well as providing technical input to support discussions. Several non-signatory businesses and sector organisations are also involved in Courtauld 2025 activities.

The Government has written to ten major food businesses stressing the role that manufacturers can play in reducing food waste, encouraging them to participate in this agreement.

Paragraph 24: We recommend that there should be a national food waste target. An ambitious, formal target on food waste would influence the Government's approach to food waste, ensuring that there continues to be a focus on reducing food waste.

The Government is fully behind the delivery of the Courtauld 2025 agreement's ambitious targets. One of these is a 20% reduction in food and drink waste arising in the UK. Achieving this target will put us on a path to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 food waste target by 2030, and will prevent a further 10 million tonnes of food waste being generated over the 10 year period. Courtauld 2025 signatories have a further target to double the amount of food surplus they send for redistribution by 2020. We do not consider that introducing further targets would be proportionate.

Paragraph 37: We commend the work that has been undertaken by WRAP to spur food waste reduction. We are concerned that, despite its significant achievements, Defra's funding for WRAP has reduced over recent years. It is essential that the Government provides WRAP with sufficient public funding so that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain its food waste reduction programmes. We urge Defra to increase the funding if evidence suggests it is necessary in the lead up to 2025.

Defra funding for WRAP is £9.62m for 2017–18. This funding is to help drive forward and deliver improved resource management and efficiency. This includes devoting nearly £4m to take action to reduce food waste and improve sustainability across the supply chain. Despite reduced Government funding, WRAP still delivers an ambitious programme

being highly regarded by the business community, local authorities, non-Government organisations and others, and will continue to deliver priority projects like Courtauld 2025 and Love Food Hate Waste.

Every year Courtauld 2025 signatories will be expected to submit data to WRAP on their food waste arisings and a number of other indicators relating to specific activities and behaviours that will be important to ensure delivery against the target. WRAP will publish a short report on the progress of C2025 every year, and will publish progress against targets at the milestone points of end 2018, end 2021, and end 2025. The first annual report will be published in the autumn of 2017, covering progress in 2016. This information will enable us to track progress, and ensure that we are on course to meet the agreement's targets.

Paragraph 38: We believe that awareness of food and food waste should start at an early age in schools. We recommend that the Government examine how lessons on food and food waste can be incorporated as part of the school curriculum.

The new national curriculum came into force in September 2014 for maintained schools. Through this, the Department for Education has strengthened the requirements on schools to teach children about food, nutrition and healthy eating and how to cook a repertoire of dishes, and also to have a greater understanding of where food comes from. For example, at Key Stage 2, students must know and understand seasonality and at Key Stage 3, they must understand the source, seasonality and characteristics of a broad range of ingredients.

The topic is also covered in other parts of the curriculum. For example, there is a requirement for pupils to be taught about the distribution of natural resources including food in Geography at Key Stage 2. Schools are of course, free to teach specific subjects in more depth or to teach any other subject or topic they deem relevant for the pupils in addition to meeting their statutory duty, and as part of the school's wider curriculum.

At present, around 70% of schools in England are members of the International Foundation for Environmental Education's Eco-Schools Programme. Numeracy and scientific inquiry skills are developed through the Programme's Environmental Review and monitoring and evaluation steps. Communication skills are developed through activities such as interviews and questionnaires.

Paragraph 47: A large proportion of unnecessary waste in the hospitality sector is the result of large portion sizes and resulting waste left on customers' plates. The incoming Government must work with the hospitality sector to encourage it to examine ways of preventing plate wastage, for example, by offering smaller portions, by providing clarity on the sides that arrive with a meal, reducing the amount of sides, and encouraging take-home service for leftovers.

This is already happening. The Hospitality and Food Service Agreement (HaFSA) was a voluntary agreement with the UK hospitality and food service sector, which included restaurants, hotels. This ran between 2012 and 2015. During this period, food and packaging waste in this sector reduced by 11%, and recycling rates increased from 42% to 56%.

The sector is now included alongside the grocery sector in Courtauld 2025. Through the ‘Your Business is Food’ scheme (developed by WRAP with support from Courtauld 2025 signatories in the hospitality sector) small and medium sized businesses are encouraged to undertake audits, find out where food waste is happening and make an action plan, including suggested actions to reduce left overs such as offering more portion size options, offering side dishes as options or by request, and offering take away boxes for leftovers.

Paragraph 54: We commend Tesco for publishing its food waste data from across the supply chain. Sainsbury’s is moving in the same direction, but needs more transparency. The fact that no other retailers have followed their lead shows that a voluntary approach is inadequate. We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses over a particular size to publicly report data on food waste. This would create more transparency.

WRAP’s voluntary agreements report collective progress against targets, and Courtauld 2025 does the same. This encourages collective action. WRAP provides support to encourage businesses to do as much as possible to reduce waste, by benchmarking them with an anonymised peer group, for example, rather than through public reporting.

The current approach to reporting under Courtauld 2025 is that aggregate figures are produced, maintaining the confidentiality of signatories. We do not currently have plans to require food businesses to publicly report food waste as reporting is already taking place under Courtauld 2025. However, we note that retailers such as Sainsbury’s and Tesco have chosen to publish their food waste data. Marks and Spencer have also recently stated that they will start reporting on progress to achieve food waste targets on an annual basis.

Paragraph 58: We recommend that food businesses over a particular size are required to produce a Food Surplus and Waste Management Plan.

WRAP is currently in discussions with Courtauld 2025 signatories from the hospitality sector who have expressed an interest in piloting the use of such a Plan and we will consider the merits of this approach.

Paragraph 67: We recommend that the incoming Government continues the current review with WRAP and the Food Standards Agency on food date labelling, with a view to issuing guidance to industry by the end of 2017. The review should specifically look at whether there is a need for “best before” dates at all.

We welcome the Committee’s recognition of the review on date labelling and related advice. Defra will continue to work with others to further reduce household food waste and remove the barriers to increased redistribution, for example through charity organisations. This review will produce updated guidance that will stress the primary importance of food safety, explain clearly what the different date labels mean and how to decide what date to use, and explain what can and cannot be done as the date approaches or is passed. It will also include refreshed guidance on storage, including fridge temperatures and freezing and defrosting advice. Defra and the Food Standards Agency have been working closely with WRAP, who are currently consulting on this guidance.

Food labelling legislation is currently harmonised at EU level. It requires consumers to be given a ‘use by’ date where this is needed for food safety reasons, and a ‘best before’ date where there is not an immediate food safety issue. A number of food types are exempt from these requirements because by their nature, they do not deteriorate, do so very

slowly, or their deterioration is obvious and apparent to a potential consumer. There has been some discussion with Member States and the Commission on expanding the list of exempted products. Exit from the EU will give us the possibility to independently act on this and other opportunities. In the meantime, we are active in international discussions on date marking, such as the Codex standards for food and agricultural products, where we will also seek to safeguard exemptions where it is not necessary to have mandatory date labelling.

Redistribution

Paragraph 103: We recommend that Government intervention in particular industries, such as anaerobic digestion, does not discourage the best possible use of food waste, as set out in the food waste hierarchy.

WRAP's work through the Courtauld 2025 Redistribution Working Group also suggests that there is a range of barriers to increasing redistribution, many of which are unrelated to the costs involved. These include factors such as systems and logistics, reputational risk and brand integrity, awareness and understanding, legalities and compliance and resource constraints. WRAP has already published resources to help address some of these barriers, with more work in progress. For example, WRAP published a Redistribution Framework in March 2016 to provide a structured approach to creating and operating partnerships between food surplus providers and redistribution organisations. The Redistribution Working Group remains part of C2025 with its remit including identifying how to redistribute products after the best before date as well as supporting the date labelling guidance work noted above.

We agree that Government intervention should not discourage the appropriate use of food waste as set out in the food waste hierarchy. Existing support mechanisms for renewable energy production from anaerobic digestion were established to encourage the development of technologies to decarbonise gas and electricity grids, and are not intended as a direct subsidy for food waste collection and treatment.

Recent changes to the Government's renewable heat incentive now also provide stronger incentives for the use of waste feedstocks for anaerobic digestion. The reforms have introduced a requirement that new participants who are producing biogas from anaerobic digestion, either for combustion or for conversion to biomethane and subsequent injection into the gas grid, must produce at least 50% of their biogas from waste or residue in order for all the biogas produced or biomethane injected to be eligible for subsidy support. Similarly in its response to a consultation on the Review of Support for Anaerobic Digestion and Micro-combined heat and power under the Feed-in Tariff (FIT) scheme, the Government decided that all feedstocks which are wastes or residues will be able to receive unlimited payments under the FIT scheme. Both these measures will help to further incentivise the diversion of food waste from landfill towards anaerobic digestion.

All major UK supermarkets now have relationships with redistribution organisations, and WRAP estimates that 47,000 tonnes of surplus food – the equivalent to 90 million meals – was redistributed by the manufacturing and retail sector in 2015. Courtauld Commitment 2025 business signatories are aiming to double the amount of food surplus they send for redistribution, and help other companies further increase the level of unsold food redistributed, by 2020. For example, Tesco has agreed a deal to donate all the unsold

food in its stores to charities. The supermarket has announced plans to work with 5,000 local charities across the UK in an initiative that aims to eradicate all its food waste by the end of 2017.

Paragraph 104: We recommend that the incoming Government takes steps to better communicate the current tax breaks or incentives that are available to companies, in order to support their efforts to redistribute surplus food.

This information is published on <https://www.gov.uk/tax-limited-company-gives-to-charity/overview>. While continuing to reinforce the importance of the food waste hierarchy, we will share this with Courtauld 2025 signatories. The priority should be preventing food surplus and food waste arising in the first place.

Paragraph 105: We recommend that the incoming Government undertakes an assessment of how it might further promote the redistribution of surplus food by additional fiscal measures.

The UK is keen to increase the amount of surplus food redistributed, but we do not consider that the recommended approach is necessary or proportionate. We are making good progress to increase levels of food redistribution without the use of additional fiscal incentives which could have unintended consequences and perversely incentivise inefficient business practices leading to more food waste. Preventing surplus food occurring in the first place should be the priority.

Financial incentives for redistribution are currently used in some countries, including France. As assessment by WRAP has demonstrated that there are very similar levels of food redistribution from the UK and France despite our different policy approach (500 tonnes per £billion of production for the UK, and 480 tonnes per £billion for France).¹

Recycling

Paragraph 128: On balance, we conclude that local authorities should remain responsible for addressing the specific challenges and barriers to increasing food waste collections that they face at a local level. However, guidance and best practice should be shared at a national level in order to move towards a standardised approach and to assist local authorities to improve their individual performance. The incoming Government must examine opportunities to incentivise local authorities.

Paragraph 129: We recommend that the incoming Government works closely with WRAP and Local Authorities to ensure that separate food waste collections are offered to as many households as possible within England. Local authorities must look at the opportunities to introduce separate food waste collection when new waste contracts are put into place.

¹ Statistics on food redistribution in France contain significant amounts of food donated by businesses, the EC and others (i.e. food donated as an act of charity, rather than surplus food), which would not contribute to food waste prevention nor be included in the UK definition. Of the 100,000 tonnes quoted as being redistributed in France, around 37% comes from donations – so the amount equivalent to the UK is around 63,000 tonnes. The population in France may be about the same as the UK, but its food industry is larger. Normalising for this would result in very similar levels of food redistribution from the two countries (500 tonnes per £billion of production for the UK, and 480 tonnes per £billion for France).

The Government agrees that local authorities are best placed to determine the details of local waste services including food waste collection. The number of households with access to a food waste collection has significantly increased since 2010/11 from 6.5 million to nearly 10.3 million in 2015/16.

The Government recognises that more can be done to support further growth in food waste collection. The Government endorsed the launch of the Food Waste Recycling Action Plan in July 2016 which sets out actions that the food waste industry can take to increase the collection of food waste and supported WRAP to provide advice and expertise to local authorities wishing to extend food waste collections or to increase capture. WRAP Guidance on this was published in 2016. WRAP has also published a Cost Benefit Analysis tool to help local authorities weigh up the costs and benefits of implementing specific measures to increase food waste collection such as bin stickers and provision of caddy liners. We will continue to encourage local authorities to increase food waste collection, we agree that the best time to consider changes to collection services is when contracts come up for review.

Paragraph 130: We recommend that the incoming Government considers a national strategy to ensure a consistent collection of waste and recycling across England.

The Government supports comprehensive rubbish and recycling collections and believes local authorities are best placed to deliver these services in consultation with local residents. Having clear and easy to follow recycling systems is important for making it easier for householders to recycle and reducing the variety of different schemes there are taking account of best practice can help to improve the quantity and quality of recycling.

In 2015 the Government asked WRAP and industry stakeholders to develop a framework for promoting greater consistency in the collection of household recycling. This Framework was published by the sector in September 2016. The vision for greater consistency set out by this framework is that:

“By 2025 packaging is designed to be recyclable, where practical and environmentally beneficial, and is labelled clearly to indicate whether it can be recycled or not. Every household in England can recycle a common set of dry recyclable materials and food waste, collected in one of three different ways.”

Local authorities can consider the framework and to take it into account when reviewing contracts. It would be a matter for each local authority or group of authorities to consider the local business case for applying the framework and the potential to reduce costs. To develop this work further WRAP has been allocated £1 million of Defra funding for the year 2017/18 to work with groups of local authorities to determine the local business case for introducing greater consistency. This work is ongoing.

Consistency in collection services alone, however, is not a silver bullet. Other actions are needed to improve recycling including actions by packaging producers to improve the recyclability of packaging and to provide clear communications on what can be recycled. The Greater Consistency Framework sets out a series of actions beyond collection systems to support greater consistency and to make it easier for householders to participate in recycling services. Improving local authority performance on recycling is central to expanding food waste collection and to improving the quantity and quality of recycling generally. Better performance is needed particularly in urban areas and government

wants to challenge the assumption that it is too difficult to improve recycling in cities and flatted properties especially. To this end we have engaged with social housing providers to explore opportunities for initiatives across housing estates to increase recycling rates. As the Minister commented in her evidence to the Committee, she has met two London based housing associations to discuss how to improve recycling and following this initiative we are now working with Resource London and WRAP on work that will deliver step changes on recycling in London. We are also looking at ways to expand this work to densely populated urban areas outside London.

Paragraph 139: We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses and retailers to separate food waste. This should be done through a phased approach, applying first to businesses that produce more than 50kg of food waste per week, then applying to smaller food businesses that produce between 5kg and 50kg of food waste per week.

We have already made good progress in this area and Defra has funded and worked closely with WRAP since 2007 to reduce food waste in the supply chain. Overall by 2015, WRAP's frameworks and interventions have helped reduce food waste by 1.25m tonnes (11%) without the additional burden of regulation. We will go further through this voluntary route and Defra has put in place the frameworks to make further reductions through Courtauld 2025. We are also monitoring the mandatory approach taken by Scotland and Northern Ireland in this area, and the work that Wales has carried out to promote separate food waste collection.