

# The Food Waste Crisis

By Amanda Amaeshi (August 2016)

In Scotland, 600,000 tonnes of food are thrown away every year<sup>1</sup>. This is food waste. This amount of food, which could feed approximately 1.2 billion poor people, represents almost a third of household waste. In addition to this, at least 4.7 million people in the UK are in food poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Food waste creates economic and environmental harms. Money, time, resources, and effort are often wasted by throwing away good food. It also generates very harmful greenhouse gas, which is dangerous to the planet.

## But how does food waste occur?

There are two sides to it: the production stage and the consumption stage. In the *production stage*, some foods do not enter the food chain for many reasons relating to farmers, supermarkets, pests, and climatic conditions. Supermarkets are usually fussy about the quality of food from farms. They often reject odd looking and unusually sized produce. However, they seem to forget that with the unpredictable weather and the pesky pests, it is almost impossible to grow the perfect produce. Food waste at the *consumption stage* includes food going out of date and leftovers due to too much food. In households<sup>1</sup>, food waste consists of mostly fresh fruit and veg, and bakery products such as bread and cakes.

## So, what can be done to solve this?

I decided to pop into my local Tesco and Asda stores to speak to their managers and hear what they had to say about food waste, especially the company's policies for "wonky produce" and their food waste management strategies. I spoke to Fraser from Tesco and Siobhan from Asda. Both managers stated that the reason their respective supermarkets were fussy about the produce's quality was because they didn't think the quality was high enough for people to want to buy them.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://scotland.lovefoodhatewaste.com/node/2479>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/feeding-britain-the-statistics-that-show-the-scale-of-our-food-wastage-problem-9910558.html>



Many supermarkets, including Tesco and Asda, have started selling “imperfect fruits and vegetables” that would not have met their company’s standards before. Both managers stated that since introducing the imperfect produce selections, the range have become quite popular because they were sold at a reduced price and tasted the same as the cosmetically perfect produce. However, when I asked if it would be possible to relax their policies permanently, the response I got was not what I expected.

*Siobhan: "Yeah. People don't seem to mind because they taste the same".*

*Fraser: "If Tesco relaxed the system permanently and the stock doesn't sell, it would be wasted anyway."*

### **What other solutions could there be?**

One way the big supermarkets can reduce waste is by donating foods approaching their use by dates to charities or food banks. Like before, when I suggested this during the interviews the response was different. Fraser stated that Tesco does give to charities, but there are some issues. Firstly, it is hard to transport the chilled goods between fridges because “we must comply with the cold chain procedure”. This means they are unable to leave the food out of a fridge or cool box for more than 20 minutes. Also, “we never know what will be left at the end of the day”. Siobhan stated that Asda does not give to charities “because the only leftovers each night are already out of date”.

When asked about their companies food sustainability practices; Fraser replied that Tesco has policies for fresh and cooked meat and puts up their sustainability<sup>3</sup> work online. Siobhan replied that she is not aware of any strict policies on any food produce other than fruits and vegetables.

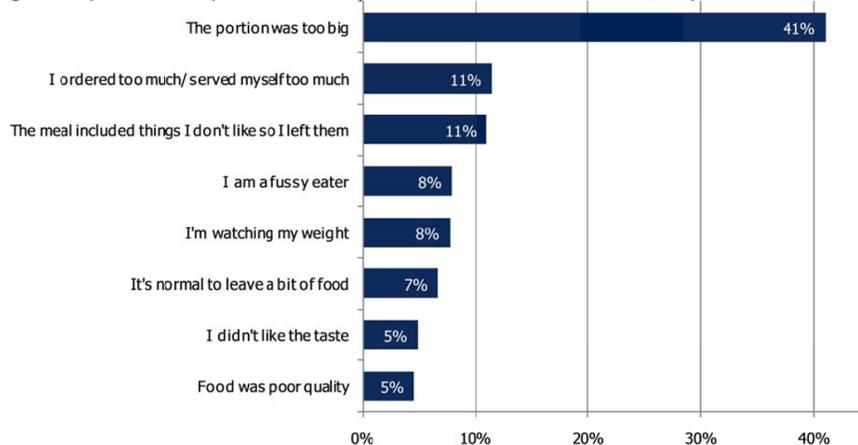
Another food waste source is from our homes and from food outlets (restaurants and fast food). Household food waste accounts for most of the food waste in our country<sup>4</sup>. To understand how to reduce

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tescopl.com/tesco-and-society/sourcing-great-products/reducing-our-impact-on-the-environment/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/22/uk-tops-chart-of-eu-food-waste>

household food waste, we have to explore reasons why it happens. A report by WRAP found that 41% of individuals who eat out stated that the food left was as a result of being served too much food. Below is a chart showing the different reasons why individuals waste food whilst eating out.

**Figure 6 | Reasons why food was left (Base all those who left food: 1,387)<sup>18</sup>**



Source<sup>5</sup>: *Understanding out of home consumer food waste, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) 2013*

From the chart above, an obvious way to reduce food waste is to only order/prepare what you can eat. If you are still hungry, you can always go back for more. Leftovers can be refrigerated and eaten another time. This doesn't only save food, but it also saves money! In the event that it cannot be eaten (seriously, who wants to eat a banana skin or egg shells?!), you can turn it into compost. Check online for composting tips.

#### **Tips on how to minimise food waste:**

1. Understanding the terms 'use by' and 'best before' dates. Use by dates are there for your safety. It is dangerous to eat food after the use-by date and doing so risks your health. Best before dates tells you how long the food will be at its best quality. Once the food passes this date, it isn't necessarily bad, but you should still check, just to be sure.
2. Every time you go shopping and you bring back new food, put them at the back of your cupboards/fridges and bring the food that will expire soon closer to the front. That way, you know what needs to be consumed first.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/OOH%20Report.pdf>

3. If you have any food that's close to expiration that you know won't be eaten, give it to charity. They will really appreciate the food you have given. Every month, my mum and I give to our local homeless charity.

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## Feeding Britain: The statistics that show the scale of our food wastage problem

About 4.3 million tonnes of 'surplus' food is thrown away every year

Lizzie Dearden | @lizziedearden | Monday 8 December 2014 |   



Personally, the most important thing for me is that everyone raises awareness about food waste. From supermarkets and restaurants to farmers and consumers, everyone can play their part to help shape the world we live in and eliminate headlines like this (see insert on the left) from our media.

*So, what are you going to do to help reduce food waste?*

Now that's some food for thought!