

What is food waste?

Food waste refers to any food that is discarded or uneaten and cannot be used for any purpose, including human consumption, animal feed, or industrial uses. Food waste can occur at any stage of the food supply chain, from production and processing to retail and consumption. This can include food that has spoiled or expired, as well as food that is perfectly edible but discarded due to cosmetic imperfections, overproduction, or other reasons. Food waste is a significant global issue that contributes to economic, environmental, and social challenges, including food insecurity, resource depletion, and climate change.

What are food waste examples?

Some examples of food waste are:

1. Fruits and vegetables that are not sold due to cosmetic imperfections, overproduction, or expiration dates are often discarded.
2. Foods that have passed their expiration or "best before" dates and are no longer suitable for human consumption are often discarded.
3. Unsold bakery items such as bread, cakes, and pastries that are not sold before their shelf life expires are often thrown away.
4. Food left uneaten on plates in restaurants, cafeterias, schools and homes is considered food waste.
5. Food that is produced in excess or not used during production, such as unused ingredients or byproducts, is considered food waste.
6. Food that has gone bad due to improper storage or handling, such as milk that has spoiled, is considered food waste.
7. Food that is discarded in households, such as leftovers or expired items, is considered food waste.

How does food waste impact a business?

Food waste can significantly impact your cafe, restaurant, take-away, school or other food business in various ways.

First, it can cause financial loss as it represents a direct loss of the cost of ingredients, additional costs of storage, labour, and disposal, which can impact profitability.

Second, it can cause reputation damage, as businesses that are known to waste food can lose customers who are concerned about sustainability and environmental issues.

Finally, food businesses may face legal requirements and regulations regarding waste disposal, and failure to comply can result in fines or other penalties.

This means that reducing food waste is essential for your businesses to minimise negative impacts, save money, protect the environment, improve or protect your reputation, and comply with regulations.

What does food waste do to the environment?

[Food waste impacts](#) on the environment in many negative ways, including:

1. Greenhouse gas emissions: Food waste generates significant amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, including methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.
2. Land use and deforestation: Producing food that is eventually wasted requires significant land and resources, contributing to deforestation, habitat loss, and the depletion of natural resources.
3. Water use: Producing food that is eventually wasted requires significant water use, which can contribute to water scarcity and other water-related issues.
4. Energy use: The production, transportation, and disposal of wasted food requires significant amounts of energy, contributing to carbon emissions and other environmental impacts.
5. Waste disposal: The disposal of food waste in landfills can contribute to pollution, as decomposing food waste generates methane and other harmful gases that can contribute to air and water pollution.

How much food is wasted in the UK everyday?

According to the latest estimates by the Waste and [Resources Action Programme \(WRAP\)](#), the UK wastes around 9.5 million tonnes of food every year, which is equivalent to around 24 meals per person per month!

This translates to roughly 7,100 tonnes of food that is wasted every day in the UK food industry or 2,600,000 tonnes every year through food production, manufacturing, retail, and hospitality sectors. This is a significant amount of waste, and reducing it can help to address issues such as food insecurity, environmental sustainability, and economic efficiency.

Why does the UK waste so much food?

The top 5 reasons why the UK wastes so much food are:

1. Overbuying and stockpiling: Consumers often purchase more food than they need, leading to surplus food that is eventually thrown away.
2. Confusion around expiration dates: Consumers often misunderstand the difference between "use by" and "best before" dates and throw away perfectly good food based on incorrect assumptions.
3. Supply chain inefficiencies: Supermarkets and suppliers often reject perfectly good produce based on cosmetic imperfections or strict quality control measures, contributing to a significant amount of food waste.
4. Food industry standards: The UK food industry often produces excess food to meet high industry standards, leading to a significant amount of food waste throughout the supply chain.
5. Lack of awareness and education: Many consumers are not aware of the impact of food waste on the environment, economy, and society, and do not have access to information about practical solutions for reducing waste.

How can food businesses reduce food waste?

As a business, there are things you can do to reduce food waste, including:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to reduce food waste, including setting goals and tracking progress, and involve staff at all levels of the organisation.
- Regularly assess inventory levels and monitor food waste patterns to adjust purchasing and production accordingly.
- Donate surplus food to local charities or food banks instead of throwing it away.

- Utilise technology, such as smart inventory systems or predictive analytics, to optimise ordering, inventory management, and production.
- Offer smaller portions or allow customers and consumers to customise their portions to reduce food waste.
- Use excess food to create new dishes or repurpose it for staff meals or charitable donations.
- Train colleagues on the importance of food waste reduction, proper storage techniques, and portion control to minimise waste.

Food waste training

A great place to start when training colleagues on food is the [Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate](#), which covers HACCP food labelling and storage principles, which can help to reduce waste. Legally, colleagues need to have a food hygiene certificate so this is something you would need to cover anyway.

There are several other courses and training programs available in the UK that can help staff to reduce food waste. One of the most popular programs is the "Guardians of Grub" campaign, developed by the [Waste and Resources Action Programme \(WRAP\)](#). The campaign provides free online training and resources to businesses in the hospitality and food service sectors, aimed at reducing food waste throughout the supply chain, which covers topics such as food waste prevention, food storage, portion control, and menu planning.

Another example is the "[Love Food Hate Waste](#)" program, which offers free resources and tools to individuals and businesses to help them reduce food waste. It includes online training modules, recipe ideas, and tips for reducing waste at home and in the workplace.

Other organisations, such as the [Sustainable Restaurant Association \(SRA\)](#) and the [Soil Association](#), also offer training and certification programs that help businesses to adopt sustainable practices, including reducing food waste.

By doing your bit as a business to reduce food waste, you can have a positive impact not only on your business itself, but also on the environment.

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