

Food Waste and Food Redistribution

Westminster Hall debate briefing

16th April 2024



Background

- Food waste is a significant contributor to the climate and nature crises. It generates [8% to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions](#), five times more than the aviation sector, and increases land use pressures by taking up the equivalent of almost a third of the world's agricultural land.
- [One fifth \(19%\) of food is wasted](#) worldwide, amounting to about one billion meals per day thrown away. At the same time, one third of humanity faces food insecurity, whilst 783 million people currently live in hunger.
- Despite considerable progress in the UK to tackle food waste, [10.7 million tonnes of food is wasted every year](#), worth about £22bn and producing 18 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. This is despite [8 million UK adults](#) and 3 million children experiencing food insecurity.
- Much of the food that is thrown away in the UK is still [considered 'edible'](#) – about 71% according to the UN Food Waste Report. Food waste at the [household stage accounts for 60%](#) of all food waste, whilst commercial food system and retail make up 28% and 12% respectively.
- The UK's current targets are to reduce 50% of food waste by 2030 from the 2007 baseline, in line with the target set by the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) agreed at COP15. The British charity WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme) has found that [32% reductions in food waste](#) are still needed to meet this target and, if met, would [offset 11.3% of current UK greenhouse gas emissions](#).

What has been done so far in the UK?

- Defra [extended voluntary food waste reporting](#) for businesses until 2025, citing that imposing mandatory reporting would drive up food prices. However, the [government's own assessment](#) found that food waste cost the UK £19bn, whilst just a 0.25% reduction in food waste would offset any costs incurred by mandatory reporting.
- The government's own Climate Change Committee (CCC) had also advised that [mandatory reporting be introduced by 2022](#) for the UK to stay on its balanced Net Zero pathway.
- Around 70% of UK businesses have signed up to WRAP's [Food Waste Reduction Roadmap](#), set up to help businesses to reduce their food waste. Whilst WRAP has reported progress by these businesses, few volunteer figures on their food waste and the government recently scrapped plans to implement mandatory food waste reporting. This goes against WRAP's own assessment that mandatory reporting is vital to ensure businesses are reducing their food waste.
- Many UK businesses also engage in food redistribution schemes that have many short-term benefits and help the [13m people in the UK experiencing food insecurity](#). In the long-term however, more solutions that address the root cause of food poverty are needed rather than relying on redistribution schemes. Businesses are meanwhile being criticised for relying on

food redistribution schemes to get rid of food rather than [tackling their own structural problems that create food waste](#) in the first place.

- The incineration and landfill of organic waste also produces methane, a greenhouse gas with 80 times the warming effect of carbon in the short term. Some organic waste, especially from non-household sources, is still landfilled or incinerated. Scotland will ban the landfilling of organic waste by 2025, but a similar ban in England will only come into effect in 2028. Whilst a 2028 ban will cut landfill methane emissions by just 1% by 2030, a [2025 ban would cut emissions by an extra 13% by 2030](#).

What steps should the government take?

- **Make food waste reporting for businesses mandatory.** Whilst WRAPs Food Waste Reduction Roadmap works with 70% of UK businesses they are [not obliged to disclose their food waste data publicly](#). Both WRAP and the CCC have said that mandatory reporting must be implemented to tackle this issue.
- **Bring forward the ban on landfilling organic waste.** Defra should bring the ban forward from 2028 to 2025 in England, as this will [reduce methane emissions to a far greater](#) effect – 13% by 2030, rather than just a 1% reduction should they stick with the 2028 target.
- **Help to reduce household waste.** Household waste makes up 60% of food waste, making it impossible to ignore and an important target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from this area. It also costs the average four-person household in the UK on average £1,000 per year. Measures to do this [suggested by WRAP](#) include encouraging more fruit and vegetables to be sold loose, removing ‘best before’ dates, and ensuring businesses follow best practise for storing fresh produce.

What do voters think?

- Food waste was [the top concern](#) for British consumers buying food, according to a 2022 report from the Food Standards Agency.
- Polling from food surplus charity FareShare in 2023 [found that](#) 88% of the public believe surplus food should be donated to people and charities, and 78% feel government should do more to help charities access surplus food.

Suggested interventions

- Will the government reconsider its scrapping of mandatory food waste reporting and bring this into effect before 2025, given the considerable economic and environmental benefits that this scheme could have for businesses and consumers alike?
- Will the government bring forward the ban on landfilling organic waste from 2028 to 2025, helping the UK to meet its commitments under the Global Methane Pledge signed at COP26?