

# Doggy bags to pig feed: 10 things we learned about food waste

A panel of experts joined us online to talk about preventing and getting value from food waste. Here's what we learned

Hannah Gould

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## **1. We're wasting a lot**

In the UK alone, 15m tonnes of food is lost or wasted each year, with consumers chucking away 4.2m tonnes of edible food. The foods most commonly found in British bins are bread, vegetables, fruit and milk. If food waste sent an annual bill, the average household would be looking at £470, or £700 for families with children.

## **2. We're beginning to realise it's not okay**

With the help of high profile chefs including Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, food waste is climbing up the public agenda. Along with levels of sugar and salt, waste was the most frequently mentioned consumer concern last year, according (pdf) to the Food Standards Agency.

## **3. There's a food waste pyramid**

If the food is edible, the best use for it is to sell it to humans or redistribute it through charities. If it's not fit for human consumption, the next best option is feeding it to livestock, like pigs. This is currently banned under EU rules but could reduce the need for typical animal feed crops such as soya, which is linked to deforestation. If the food isn't fit for humans or animals, the next best solution is anaerobic digestion, which converts the waste into energy.

## **4. Orange peel is worth something**

If food waste collection and processing improved, we could also get additional value from waste, like vitamin C from orange peel and omega-3 from fish.

## **5. Packaging isn't always the enemy**

Whole Foods recently admitted to making a "mistake" and pulled peeled oranges in plastic containers from its shelves. This follows the banana scandal of 2012, when German owned supermarket Billa felt the wrath of customers and the internet for stocking the fruit peeled and wrapped in plastic. While some food packaging is unnecessary (ridiculously unnecessary in these cases), packaging also protects food in transit, which reduces waste.

## **6. Tech could stop us needlessly throwing food out**

Another criticism of packaging is that it applies generic and misleading expiry dates to food. Bump Mark, a responsive expiry label that indicates when food actually goes bad, could be the answer.

Technology can also help people find homes for surplus food they have. Online platform Neighbourly, for example, helps connect businesses with charities and has distributed more than 50 tonnes of food, while the Olio app connects neighbours with each other and local shops to share food.

## **7. We need a doggy bag revolution**

Sixteen restaurants participating in Zero Waste Scotland's Good to Go doggy bag scheme reported an average 42% reduction in food waste and 92% of diners said they ate the leftovers at home. While we overwhelmingly want to be offered doggy bags, two fifths of us are currently too embarrassed to ask for one.

## **8. We're only measuring farm waste now**

While consumer and retail waste has taken the spotlight, farms have been overlooked. As a result, nobody knows how much waste is happening at the farm level but it's estimated to be "colossal", according to Martin Bowman, campaign and media coordinator at Stop the Rot. The Courtauld Commitment from the UK's waste and resources action programme intends to start measuring farm waste by 2018.

## **9. Supermarkets should expand wonky veg ranges**

Overproduction of food is often tied to unexpected weather patterns and waste is made worse by supermarkets cancelling orders and applying cosmetic standards to produce. There are signs of improvement. Tesco, for example, has committed to buying all of the bananas produced by just under half of the plantations from which it sources. The introduction of "wonky" fruit and veg lines will also help more fruit make it to market, but ranges will need to expand to have a real impact.

## **10. Indirect suppliers need better protection**

Many farmers don't supply directly to supermarkets but via middlemen. This exempts them from protection from unfair trading practices such as last minute order cancellations which lead to waste. Extending the remit of the groceries code adjudicator (which oversees relationships between supermarkets and their suppliers in the UK) to cover indirect suppliers would help address this.

More q&as

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