



# Food waste BRIEFING

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## Food waste

### Summary

- **Food waste is a financial and environmental problem:** Around a third of all food produced in the world is either lost or wasted. This contributes to between [8 and 10 percent](#) of total greenhouse gas emissions. Wasted food is a waste of the land used to grow it that could be better used to reach other societal objectives, such as nature recovery. Throwing edible food away is also a waste of money for businesses and individuals alike.
- **The Environment Act will help to tackle food waste:** By introducing a new separate food waste collection for households across England, the government is redirecting food away from landfill and redistribution and towards recycling and reduction instead.
- **There are lots of resources available to support you to tackle food waste locally:** From sharing tips with local businesses and residents on how to reduce food waste to supporting local surplus food redistribution efforts, there are lots of ways for local councillors to reduce food waste.

### Background

- **An area almost the size of Wales is used to produce the food and drink currently wasted in the UK:** This is an inefficient use of land at a time when there are increasing demands on it, such as nature restoration and renewable energy.
- **UK households waste [£14 billion](#) worth of food each year:** Around 70% of the 9.5 million tonnes of food that goes to waste each year in the UK comes from the home. This equates to 6.6 million tonnes of which 4.5 million tonnes is edible and worth approximately [£9.5 billion](#). Around one quarter of this wasted food is due to cooking, preparing or serving too much.
- **Almost half of councils do not collect food waste:** More than 13.4 million English households currently do not get their food waste picked up separately from their general waste, meaning that a huge amount of food waste is going to either landfill or incineration. Evidence suggests that if all local authorities provided kerbside food waste collection, the amount of food waste collected would increase by [1.35 million tonnes by 2029](#).
- **Food waste produces greenhouse gas emissions:** When left to decompose in landfill, food waste releases methane into the atmosphere, a potent greenhouse gas which drives climate change. Greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by an estimated [1.25 million tonnes per year](#) if all local authorities collected household food waste separately to send to anaerobic digestion, as explained below.
- **There are economic benefits from tackling food waste:** Evidence suggests that a £1 investment by businesses in action to reduce food waste yields a [£14 return](#). As well as

helping to reach societal objectives such as net zero by 2050, tackling food waste creates opportunities for businesses and individuals to save and make money.

### Tackling food waste using the waste hierarchy

- **The waste hierarchy:** The “[waste hierarchy](#)” ranks waste management options according to what is best for the environment. The government has committed to the principles behind the hierarchy and endeavours to reflect these principles in policy.
- **Prevention:** The most effective way to reduce food waste is to prevent waste from occurring in the first place. A separate food waste collection can also help people to visualise the amount of food waste they are creating and encourage them to reduce it.
- **Reuse:** Reusing surplus food whilst it is still edible is the second stage of the waste hierarchy. The priority should be given to feeding humans through redistribution, either directly or by transforming surplus food into new products. If food is unsuitable for human consumption, the next best option is to reuse it for animal feed. However, current legislation means that not all surplus food can be reused in this way with raw, cooked or partially cooked meat, fish, eggs, shellfish and other by-products being such examples.
- **Recycling:** [30%](#) of the UK’s food waste cannot actually be reused as it is either unsuitable or inedible. The two options available for food waste recycling are [anaerobic digestion \(AD\)](#) and [composting](#); the former creates a biogas and digestate that can be used as a fertiliser while the latter creates a rich compost that can be used in horticulture and agriculture. Although there is an ongoing debate as to which process is better, the UK has broadly adopted AD. However, for households and community schemes, [non-industrial composting options are available which are less energy, carbon, and labour intensive](#).
- **Recovery:** The next best option is to send it to be incinerated at an energy from waste facility. This process will burn the food waste to generate electricity and heat but will not produce the additional digestate. Because [most food waste is made up of about 70% water](#), which requires a lot of energy to burn, incineration with or without energy recovery is relatively inefficient compared to recycling and reuse.
- **Disposal:** The final, and least preferred, tier of the waste hierarchy is disposal which equates to landfill or incineration *without* energy recovery. Landfill does not create the correct conditions required for this waste to break down organically and instead causes the food waste to release methane.

### Government policy

- **Food waste targets:** The government has pledged to reduce food waste by 20% by 2025. The government is also committed to meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goal to halve global food waste by 2030.

- **Defra is looking into food waste reporting for large food businesses in England:** As part of a commitment made in the government's National Food Strategy, Defra is looking at how it can improve food waste reporting for large food businesses. Potential measures range from 'do nothing' to enhancing existing voluntary schemes, or mandating compulsory reporting. Results of the consultation are due to be published in 2023.
- **Defra will be mandating a separate food waste stream:** The Environment Act introduces a requirement for all local authorities in England to arrange for the separate collection of food waste for recycling. Defra will provide further guidance on eligibility and exemptions ahead of the national roll out. The government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) also announced £295 million of capital funding was being brought forward to allow local authorities in England to prepare to implement this new weekly separate food waste collection for all households from 2025. No further guidance has been issued by Defra yet.
- **Defra has set a target to reduce residual waste by 50% by 2042 from 2019 levels:** Residual waste is the waste that is left once all other waste has been either prevented, reused, or recycled. A separate food waste collection will help to reduce residual food waste by separating it from general waste collection so it can be recycled.

#### Ideas and resources

- **Get involved with national campaigns:** WRAP runs an annual national [Food Waste Action Week](#) in early March to draw attention to the issue of food waste. WRAP provides [local authorities](#) with digital resources to promote the campaign and to raise awareness locally. This is an excellent campaign that you can use to raise awareness among local residents and to share tips and best practice with them.
- **Conduct a council-wide food waste audit:** An audit of food waste in council-run services can provide data to inform strategies to reduce waste, such as in the [canteen](#).
- **Make use of WRAP's wealth of information and resources:** WRAP provides many resources in the form of [webinars](#), [best practice guides](#), and funding for local authorities. They also have dedicated team members who focus on local authorities and regularly run collaborative projects and trials with councils across the country. Their [Love Food Hate Waste](#) programme also provides tips and guidance on how to make food go further.
- **Advise local businesses:** Some of the "[biggest opportunities for dealing better with food waste](#)" are in the hospitality and food service sectors. Encouraging businesses to donate their surplus or sell it on platforms such as [Too Good To Go](#) can help to earn money from otherwise wasted, surplus food. Educating businesses about the financial, social, and environmental opportunities of food redistribution can take place through a variety of mediums, including: your council website and social media channels, direct engagement

with the businesses, and providing training to food standards officers about food waste for them to disseminate to local businesses.

- **Support local food redistribution efforts:** The support can range from providing a location to host a redistribution project (such as Hubbub's network of [Community Fridges](#)) and promoting the initiatives on council social media channels and websites to providing [funding](#) for the community initiative.
- **Support businesses tackling food waste through your procurement process:** Many businesses have seized the business opportunity presented by food waste and surplus produce. Brands such as [Rubies in the Rubble](#), [Toast Ale](#), [Flawsome! Drinks](#), and [Dash Water](#) all use 'wonky' fruit and vegetables in their products. You could support green businesses through your food procurement process.

### Conservative case studies

- **Councils across the country offer residents discounts on home composting equipment:** From [Wiltshire](#) to [Hampshire](#), councils are facilitating home composting of food waste by partnering with a business like [GetComposting](#) to offer residents a discount on equipment and guidance on how to compost at home.
- **[Derbyshire Dales District Council](#) encouraged the use of food waste caddies to boost collection rates:** Thanks to a grant awarded by WRAP, the council rolled out a package of interventions including providing all 34,000 local households with a free supply of caddy liners, along with leaflets and bin stickers. Food waste tonnage increased by an average of 2,603kg per week in the nine weeks following the intervention.
- **[Somerset County Council](#) communicated the importance of separating waste correctly:** The council found that around a quarter of household general waste bins consisted of food waste which, if recycled in the separate food waste bins provided, could save them almost £1 million a year. The campaign, entitled 'Slim My Waste, Feed my Face', provided every household with fun stickers for their general waste bin to prompt residents to put food waste in the correct bin, along with an information pack about food recycling.
- **[Leicestershire County Council](#) hosted a series of local events to provide tips on reducing food waste:** As part of its Food Waste Action Week efforts, the council hosted a series of food waste prevention events, including: drop-in events at local markets, a composting workshop, and cooking courses in community kitchens.
- **[Essex County Council](#) has a friendly competition to reduce food waste with a monthly prize draw:** By taking the [Essex Food Waste Pledge](#), residents receive monthly tips and inspiration for how to reduce food waste at home. There is a monthly challenge and prize draw for residents taking part.





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