



# House of Commons

## Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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# Food waste in England

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## Eighth Report of Session 2016–17

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 25 April 2017*

## **The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee**

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### **Committee staff**

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### **Contacts**

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5774; the Committee's email address is [efracom@parliament.uk](mailto:efracom@parliament.uk).

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## Summary

Food waste is a global public policy issue. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to approximately 1.3 billion tonnes per year.

In the UK, it is estimated that 10 million tonnes of food and drink waste arises post-farmgate each year, 60% of which could be avoided. This has serious economic, environmental and social implications and impacts. Our Report focused on consumers, the retail and hospitality sectors, and local government. The manufacturing and agricultural sectors were outside the scope of the inquiry.

The Committee's key recommendations and conclusions are:

- We recommend that the incoming Government works with the Environment Agency to enforce the waste hierarchy, for the benefit of all.
- The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement. We were disappointed to hear that a large number of manufacturers had not signed up to its targets. We call on WRAP and the Government to re-double their efforts to increase participation in the Courtauld process by food manufacturers.
- We recommend that there should be a national food waste target. An ambitious, formal target on food waste would influence the Government's approach to food waste, ensuring that there continues to be a focus on reducing food waste.
- We commend the work that has been undertaken by WRAP to spur food waste reduction. We are concerned that, despite its significant achievements, Defra's funding for WRAP has reduced over recent years. It is essential that the Government provides WRAP with sufficient public funding so that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain its food waste reduction programmes. We urge Defra to increase the funding if evidence suggests it is necessary in the lead up to 2025.
- We commend Tesco for publishing its food waste data from across the supply chain. Sainsbury's is moving in the same direction, but needs more transparency. The fact that no other retailers have followed their lead shows that a voluntary approach is inadequate. We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses over a particular size to publicly report data on food waste. This would create much more transparency.
- Retailers must work with WRAP to agree a consistent method of reporting, enabling comparisons to be drawn.
- We recommend that the incoming Government continues the current review with WRAP and the Food Standards Agency on food date labelling, with a view to issuing guidance to industry by the end of 2017. The review should specifically look at whether there is a need for 'best before' dates at all.

- We recommend that retailers relax their quality standards and start selling “wonky vegetables” as part of their main fruit and vegetable lines.
- We welcome the will shown by retailers to redistribute surplus food. However, we believe that more must be done. There is a huge amount of surplus food that is currently not being redistributed. We urge WRAP to set retailers a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food they redistribute to charities and voluntary organisations and to agree this target, and the timescale over which it will be achieved. Retailers must ensure that the political will in their head offices is turned into action at a local level.
- We recommend that Government intervention in particular industries, such as anaerobic digestion, does not discourage the best possible use of food waste, as set out in the food waste hierarchy.
- We recommend that the incoming Government takes steps to better communicate the current tax breaks and incentives that are available to companies, in order to support their efforts to redistribute surplus food.
- We recommend that the incoming Government undertakes an assessment of how it might further promote the redistribution of surplus food by additional fiscal measures.
- On balance, we conclude that local authorities should remain responsible for addressing the specific challenges and barriers to increasing food waste collections that they face at a local level. However, guidance and best practice should be shared at a national level in order to move towards a standardised approach and to assist local authorities to improve their individual performance. The incoming Government must examine opportunities to incentivise local authorities.
- We recommend that the incoming Government works closely with WRAP and Local Authorities to ensure that separate food waste collections are offered to as many households as possible within England. Local authorities must look at the opportunities to introduce separate food waste collection when new waste contracts are put in place.
- We recommend that the incoming Government considers a national strategy to ensure a consistent collection of waste and recycling across England.
- We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses and retailers to separate food waste. This should be done through a phased approach, applying first to businesses that produce more than 50kg of food waste per week, then applying to smaller food businesses that produce between 5kg and 50kg of food waste per week.

# 1 Introduction

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1. Food waste is a global public policy issue. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that one-third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to approximately 1.3 billion tonnes per year. The UK Government has acknowledged “food waste is an issue requiring urgent action throughout the world”.<sup>1</sup>
2. In the UK, it is estimated that 10 million tonnes of food and drink waste arises post-farmgate each year in the UK, 60% of which could have been avoided.<sup>2</sup> Although actions have led to a reduction of 1.6 million tonnes in the UK’s annual food waste arisings compared to 2007, there is much more to do. Modelling suggests that, without further intervention, food waste may increase again by 1.1 million tonnes by 2025.<sup>3</sup>
3. Food waste has economic, environmental and social implications and impacts. Economically, food waste has a cost to households and causes increased disposal costs to local authorities. The environmental impact is significant, both in terms of the impact of producing food, which is then wasted, and in terms of the additional emissions of food disposed of via landfill. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)<sup>4</sup> estimates that UK food waste is associated with greenhouse gas emissions of over 20 million tonnes, with approximately three-quarters of those emissions arising in the UK and the remainder overseas.<sup>5</sup> Globally, the World Resources Institute has stated that food loss and waste, were it a country, would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions after the USA and China.<sup>6</sup> Finally, wastage of food raises social questions, when others are struggling with food shortages in the UK and abroad.
4. Food waste is a devolved matter in the UK—each administration has its own waste strategy which is broadly similar in theme, but diverges in terms of specific targets and approaches.

## Our inquiry

5. We launched our inquiry into food waste in England in July 2016, focusing on consumers, the retail and hospitality sectors, and local government. The manufacturing and agricultural sectors were outside the scope of the inquiry. We invited written submissions on the following areas: the economic, environmental and social impact of food waste in England; effective measures in reducing food waste by retailers, the hospitality sector, local government, and consumers; proposals necessary to further reduce food waste; whether voluntary initiatives work or whether there is a need for legislation; and comparative approaches to reducing and managing food waste in the devolved nations, and across Europe.

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1 [PQ 26219 \[on Food: Waste\] 8 February 2016](#)

2 WRAP, [“Estimates of Food Surplus and Waste Arisings in the UK”](#), January 2017, p13

3 WRAP, [UK food waste-Historical changes and how amounts might be influence in the future](#), November 2014

4 WRAP works with governments, businesses and communities to deliver practical solutions to improve resource efficiency. WRAP is a delivery partner for Defra in England.

5 WRAP, [Estimates of Food Surplus and Waste Arisings in the UK](#), January 2017, p13

6 [“What’s Food Loss and Waste Got to Do with Climate Change? A Lot, Actually.”](#), World Resources Institute, 11 December 2015

6. We took oral evidence from food waste campaigners; redistribution charities; business representatives; retailers; the hospitality sector; local authorities; industry representatives; WRAP; and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). We visited FareShare's depot in London, and a FoodCycle kitchen in Hackney. We also visited an Anaerobic Digestion Plant in Mitcham, London, owned by Bio Collectors. We are extremely grateful to them and to those who provided oral and written evidence.

7. The unexpected and imminent dissolution of Parliament on Wednesday 3 May has meant that this Report has been produced earlier than expected and within a tight time-frame. We have therefore focused on a number of key issues, where we feel improvements can be made. All the evidence we have received is available on our website. We are confident that our successor Committee will wish to look again at some, or all, of the issues raised in the next Parliament.

## 2 Food Waste hierarchy

### Waste hierarchy

8. European Union law has largely driven the policy and legal frameworks for waste management in the UK. The revised EU Waste Framework Directive (2008) sets out five steps for dealing with waste, ranked according to their environmental impact; this is known as the waste hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> The waste hierarchy has been incorporated into UK law through the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011, the Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011, and the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

9. To make the hierarchy easier to use by businesses in the food and drink sector, WRAP produced a specific food and drink material hierarchy.

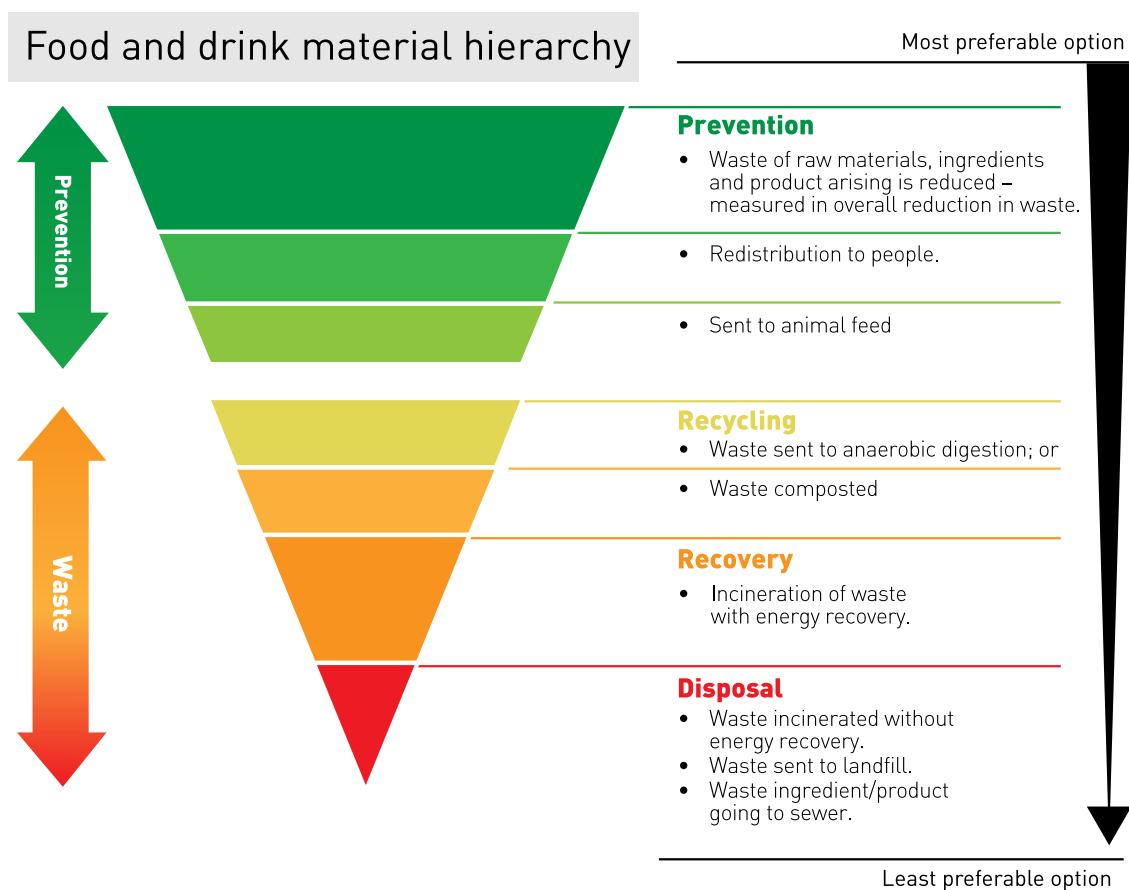


Figure 1: WRAP: Food and Drink material hierarchy

10. The food waste hierarchy sets out steps for preventing and managing food waste to minimise the impact on the environment. The best action is to prevent raw materials, ingredients and products from becoming waste in the first place. If surplus cannot be prevented, then redistribution to people and then animal feed is the next best option. The best way of treating food waste is to recycle it by sending it to anaerobic digestion or

composting. Recovery through the incineration of waste with energy recovery comes next in the hierarchy. At the bottom of the hierarchy, the worst way of dealing with food waste is disposal through waste incineration without energy recovery or to send it to landfill.<sup>8</sup>

11. During the inquiry, witnesses expressed concern that the waste hierarchy was not being enforced.<sup>9</sup> The Environment Agency has a duty to enforce the waste hierarchy. The Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association (ADBA) told us that “it was frustrating that there has been no enforcement [of the waste hierarchy]”.<sup>10</sup>

12. There was also concern that ‘perverse’ incentives by the Government to encourage anaerobic digestion had resulted in unintentionally moving waste further down the hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> We examine this in further detail in Chapter 4.

13. We asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, what conversations she had had with the Environment Agency, in their role of enforcing the waste hierarchy. We were disappointed to hear that the Minister had not had any discussions with the Environment Agency on this issue.<sup>12</sup>

14. **The waste hierarchy exists to prevent and manage food waste and to minimise the impact on the environment. We are concerned at reports that the waste hierarchy, whilst widely acknowledged as necessary, is apparently not being enforced. We recommend that the incoming Government works with the Environment Agency to enforce the waste hierarchy, for the benefit of all.**

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8 WRAP, [Why take action](#)

9 [Qq80](#), [346](#), [363](#), [364](#), and [366](#)

10 [Q363](#)

11 [Feedback \(FOW0022\)](#)

12 [Q588](#)

## 3 Prevention

15. The most desirable outcome is prevention, in line with the waste hierarchy, ensuring that edible food does not become waste.

16. The Government looks to voluntary initiatives, rather than a regulatory approach, to deliver food waste reductions. UK-wide voluntary initiatives are led primarily by WRAP, supported by funding from Defra, the devolved administrations and the EU.

17. WRAP estimates that, by weight, household food waste makes up 71% of the UK post-farmgate total, with manufacturing contributing 17% of food waste, the hospitality and food service 9% and retail 2%.<sup>13</sup>

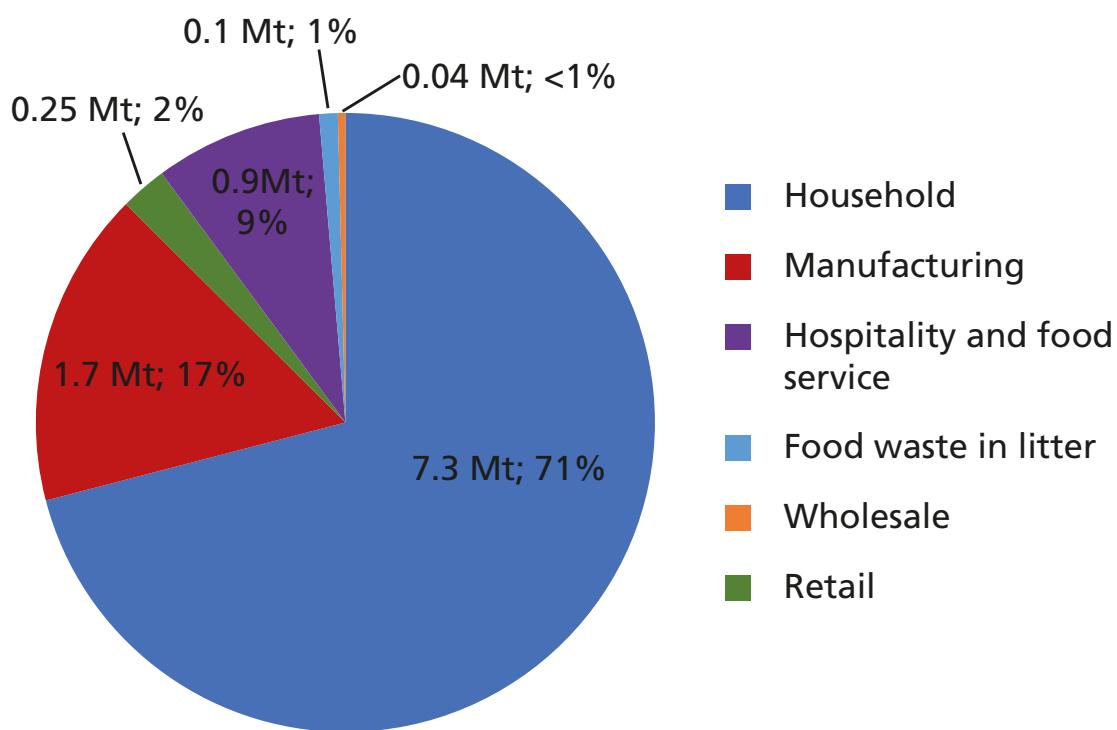


Figure 2: Amounts of food waste arising in the UK by sector (total post-farm-gate = ca. 10 Mt)<sup>14</sup>

18. In this Chapter we examine work being done to reduce food waste generated by households, the hospitality sector and retailers.

### Courtauld Commitment

19. The Courtauld 2025 Commitment was launched in March 2016.<sup>15</sup> This is a voluntary agreement that brings together organisations across the food system—from producer to consumer—to make food production and consumption more sustainable. This agreement

13 WRAP, [Estimates of Food Surplus and Waste Arisings in the UK](#), January 2017, p13

14 Based on various sector-specific WRAP reports (household, 2015 data; grocery wholesale, 2015 data; manufacturing, 2014 data; hospitality and foodservice, 2011 data; food waste in litter, 2012 data) and additional WRAP analysis of retail food waste based on 2015 British Retail Consortium (BRC) reported data. NB data for household also includes waste to sewer, which is not currently available for other sectors.

15 This follows on from WRAP's previous voluntary agreements in this area: Courtauld Commitment, Phases 1 (2005–2008), 2 (2010–2012) and 3 (2013–2015). The Courtauld Commitment is so named because the original phase 1 agreement was launched at a Ministerial Summit at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2005.

includes a target to reduce food and drink waste in the UK by 20% by 2025, compared to a 2007 baseline. Signatories to the 10-year Commitment include some global food manufacturers as well as major UK retailers, who represent more than 93% of the grocery market. 24 bodies from the local authority sector are also signatories, with the aim of improving communications.

20. However, many companies, particularly on the manufacturing side, are not signatories to Courtauld. Tristram Stuart, from Feedback, stated that while it was relatively easy to encourage retailers to sign up, because “they have a public-facing brand and there is a lot at stake,” it was harder to bring pressure on food manufacturers since there was not a similar “level of power over manufacturers, many of whom have pretty invisible brands, or brands that are very secondary to the public eye”.<sup>16</sup>

21. As well as its limited scope, the fact that the Courtauld Commitment was a voluntary initiative was highlighted as a further weakness. Some witnesses said that a regulatory approach to reducing food waste was needed in England. They highlighted the situation in Scotland, where the Scottish Government had announced a plan to introduce a mandatory target to cut food waste by a third by 2025.<sup>17</sup> Feedback called for a mandatory national target for food waste reduction in England.<sup>18</sup> Friends of the Earth called for a requirement by all manufacturers, distributors and large supermarkets to reduce their food waste by at least 20% by 2025, including through redistribution to charitable organisations.<sup>19</sup>

22. When we raised these ideas with the Minister, she told us that she did not consider that there was a need for a mandatory national food waste reduction target.<sup>20</sup>

23. **The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement. We were disappointed to hear that a large number of manufacturers had not signed up to its targets. We call on WRAP and the Government to re-double their efforts to increase participation in the Courtauld process by food manufacturers.**

24. ***We recommend that there should be a national food waste target. An ambitious, formal target on food waste would influence the Government’s approach to food waste, ensuring that there continues to be a focus on reducing food waste.***

## Food waste in households

25. £13 billion of food was wasted in the UK in 2015, approximately 7.3 million tonnes. WRAP told us that most consumers were unaware of the amount of food that they wasted. The average household lost £470 a year because of avoidable food waste, whilst those with children incurred a loss of £700, with the average person in the UK losing £200 a year.<sup>21</sup> It was estimated that around two-thirds of the potential reduction in UK food waste would need to come from action at a household level.<sup>22</sup>

16 [Q28](#)

17 Natural Scotland, [Making Things Last: A Circular Economy Strategy for Scotland](#) (February 2016), section 1.3

18 [Q28](#)

19 Friends of the Earth, England, Wales & Northern Ireland ([FOW0035](#))

20 [Q528](#)

21 [Q387](#)

22 WRAP ([FOW0045](#))

26. Work focusing on the role of the consumer in the household is led by WRAP. Since 2007, WRAP's consumer campaign, 'Love Food Hate Waste', has looked to help UK households recognise and tackle food waste, highlighting the environmental and financial impacts of the food that householders waste in the UK. A new strategy for the campaign was launched at the end of 2016, working in partnership with signatories, with the aim of "delivering the step change required to further reduce household food waste".<sup>23</sup>

27. Witnesses congratulated the results that WRAP's campaign had managed to obtain in the last decade, with a 21% reduction in avoidable household food waste from 2007 to 2012.<sup>24</sup> However, the findings from Courtauld Phase 3 showed that the target to reduce household food waste by 5% by 2015 compared with 2012 had not been achieved, with the estimated amount of annual household waste having risen from 7.0 million tonnes in 2012 to 7.3 million tonnes in 2015, an apparent increase of 4%.<sup>25</sup>

28. Witnesses noted the challenge in changing consumers' behaviour to food and food waste. While it was agreed that there was high awareness around the issue, this was not currently being translated into action by households. WRAP admitted that there were no "silver bullets" or simple single interventions that would deliver significant reductions.<sup>26</sup> Feedback said that a culture shift was needed to make the issue 'cool': "Make it an issue that is not just, "We should all stop wasting food", but 'This is cool' and we can change our culture".<sup>27</sup>

29. We heard that there was a greater need to target messages to specific groups of the population. WRAP told us that recent research had shown that there were "subgroups of people who are motivated by different things and have different needs".<sup>28</sup> WRAP recognised that it was becoming more difficult to achieve a change among consumers and that they had to "up their game".<sup>29</sup>

30. During our inquiry, we learnt about the £1 million Sainsbury's had invested in Swadlincote in South Derbyshire. This was to develop and trial new technology and community initiatives in a bid to cut household food waste by 50%, equating to a saving of £350 per household. Trials in the town included: giving out fridge thermometers; winnow technology;<sup>30</sup> smart fridges; a community fridge; and food saver champions and school engagement. Sainsbury's told us that the purpose overall was to reduce food waste, but also to develop "in an open-source way, ways we can share with [...] people across the industry, councils and schools what are the things that work, so that we collectively get to the heart of the problem".<sup>31</sup> We look forward to the publication of the results by Sainsbury's.

31. Witnesses told us of the need to improve public education on the origins of food, food management and the implications of surplus food. We also heard about the importance of educating young students. Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority told us that new initiatives for learning and skills development around food were required, for example,

23 WRAP, [Reducing the amount of food and drink that gets wasted in the home](#)

24 [Q11](#)

25 WRAP, [Courtauld Commitment 3: Delivering action on waste](#) (10 January 2017), p7

26 WRAP ([FOW0045](#))

27 [Q12](#)

28 [Q404](#)

29 [Q404](#)

30 These are electronic scales connected to an App which logs all food waste over a period of time and calculates how much was being thrown away.

31 [Q167](#)

growing fruit and vegetables in school grounds. It said that “the national curriculum has neglected this for many years, leading to a large proportion of young adults unable to cook, prone to wasting food and eating a diet high in convenience and take-away foods contributing to poor public health and impacts on NHS resources”.<sup>32</sup>

32. The Minister acknowledged that food waste reduction in households had plateaued, telling us that it was difficult to change the behaviours of households.<sup>33</sup> She told us that the Government was currently “working on a strategy” to influence individual behaviour.<sup>34</sup> Chris Preston, Deputy Director, Waste and Recycling at Defra, acknowledged that there was a need for a refreshed behaviour change campaign, targeting specific consumers:

Not all consumers who waste food are the same. It will require looking at things like the top 10 wasted foods and why people waste particular types of foods, and targeting the interventions to make a difference for the future.<sup>35</sup>

33. The Government told us that it would be working closely with WRAP to change consumer behaviour. However, witnesses expressed concern that WRAP would not have the necessary funding to achieve its goals.<sup>36</sup> The table below shows a steady decrease in central Government funding for WRAP in recent years.

Charitable income by source	2013–14 £ million	2014–15 £ million	2015–16 £ million
Central Government	25.8	19.6	14.8
Devolved Administrations	35.6	13.2	9.2
Discontinued operations	[part of the 35.6 above]	4.0	-
EU Grants	3.0	2.7	1.4
Other income	1.3	0.6	1.1
Trading and investment	0.6	0.6	0.3
Total	£66.3	£40.7	£26.8

Table 1: WRAP Funding

34. The Minister acknowledged that WRAP had seen a significant reduction in its funding. She told us that, as a charity, it had the ability to undertake external work to increase its revenue, and to seek alternative funding sources. She did, however, recognise that there was a need to constantly keep under review whether WRAP’s resources were sufficient for the tasks and the targets it was being asked to meet by the Government.<sup>37</sup>

35. **Householders have a key role to play in reducing food waste. We are disappointed that food waste reduction in households has stalled. This level of waste is unacceptable economically, socially and environmentally. The work to reduce food waste further will be hugely challenging and require a considerable investment of resource.**

32 Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority ([FOW0039](#))

33 [Q546](#)

34 [Q521](#)

35 [Q522](#)

36 [Qq79, 11](#)

37 [Q561](#)

36. A priority must be placed on awareness-raising work. We welcome the work that has been done by WRAP in the last decade, and strongly believe that the research, advice and information provided by the organisation is invaluable.

37. *We commend the work that has been undertaken by WRAP to spur food waste reduction. We are concerned that, despite its significant achievements, Defra's funding for WRAP has reduced over recent years. It is essential that the Government provides WRAP with sufficient public funding so that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain its food waste reduction programmes. We urge Defra to increase the funding if evidence suggests it is necessary in the lead up to 2025.*

38. *We believe that awareness of food and food waste should start at an early age in schools. We recommend that the Government examine how lessons on food and food waste can be incorporated as part of the school curriculum.*

## Food waste in the hospitality and food service

39. The findings from Courtauld Phase 3 showed that the hospitality and food service met its target of reducing waste, despite a 2.1% increase in the number of meals eaten outside the home between 2012 and 2015.<sup>38</sup>

40. Waste from the hospitality sector includes preparation waste, spoilage and customer plate waste. Approximately 30% of the total waste generated in the hospitality sector was from customers' plates.<sup>39</sup> The most common foods thrown were items such as chips, bread rolls and coleslaw.<sup>40</sup>

41. It is estimated that the equivalent of 1 in 6 meals served in the UK is wasted.<sup>41</sup>

42. The Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR) recognised that there was still room for improvement within the hospitality industry. It noted that the amount of waste generated varied significantly with the type of business, with casual dining outlets wasting less than pubs which themselves wasted less than restaurants.<sup>42</sup>

43. Witnesses told us that there were a number of ways in which the hospitality sector could tackle plate food waste. Brighton & Hove Food Partnership told us that measures could include offers of smaller portions for a slightly reduced price, menus directly encouraging customers to take leftovers home, and clarity on sides that come automatically with orders. If hospitality sectors were going to reduce portion size then it was agreed that customer involvement was key: "eateries need to communicate to customers why they are doing this. If customers understand why it is being done, they are less likely to complain. There is a lot that can be done at the menu level".<sup>43</sup>

38 WRAP, [Courtauld Commitment 3: Delivering action on waste](#) (10 January 2017)

39 Sustainable Restaurant Association Too Good to Waste Campaign, '[The Campaign for Restaurants](#)', accessed 20 April 2017

40 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership ([FOW0051](#))

41 WRAP, [Courtauld Commitment 3: Delivering action on waste](#) (10 January 2017)

42 ALMR ([FOW0037](#))

43 [Q120](#)

44. Witnesses agreed that addressing common issues of portion size would deliver dual outcomes for both the “health of our environment and the health of our people”.<sup>44</sup> The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) told us that collaboration between Defra, the Department of Health and Public Health England should be encouraged so that up-to-date portion guidance could be provided to consumers: “Improving education on portion size and increasing the range of competitively-priced pack sizes to meet the needs of single households may have co-benefits, such as reducing rates of obesity”.<sup>45</sup>

45. In Scotland, the ‘Good to Go’ initiative encourages restaurants to provide a take-home box service for leftovers. ALMR supported the initiative but informed us that it would not be suitable for all business models, and that there were reputational and financial costs to businesses to consider.<sup>46</sup>

46. The Minister, when asked to comment on if the Government was considering a similar scheme in England, replied that she had not looked into it, but it was “something we could look into”.<sup>47</sup>

47. **A large proportion of unnecessary waste in the hospitality sector is the result of large portion sizes and resulting waste left on customers’ plates. The incoming Government must work with the hospitality sector to encourage it to examine ways of preventing plate wastage, for example, by offering smaller portions, by providing clarity on the sides that arrive with a meal, reducing the amount of sides, and encouraging take-home service for leftovers.**

## Food waste in the retail sector

48. Food waste in the retail sector is small in comparison to other parts of the supply chain. According to WRAP, retail wastes around 0.2 million tonnes of food per year compared to 1.7 million tonnes in manufacturing and 7.3 million tonnes in the home.<sup>48</sup> However, the British Retail Consortium recognised that retailers had a pivotal role in reducing food waste in their capacity as “gate keepers” between food producers and households.<sup>49</sup>

49. In this section, we consider issues around transparency of food waste monitoring in the retail sector, and how retailers can support consumers in reducing waste, through improved labelling and packaging.

### Transparency

50. UK retailers and large food and drink manufacturers currently collate food waste data from their operations under the Courtauld Commitment. However, the data is not audited, and when published by WRAP is anonymised and aggregated. Tesco and Sainsbury’s are the only retailers to publicly publish their food waste data.

44 [Q121](#) [Vera Zakharov]

45 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ([FOW0023](#))

46 [Q265](#)

47 [Q556](#)

48 WRAP, “[Estimates of Food Surplus and Waste Arisings in the UK](#)”, January 2017

49 British Retail Consortium ([FOW0019](#))

51. Witnesses called for more transparent and effective monitoring of waste. Feedback told us that making this data publicly available would increase competition between businesses, generating positive results for consumers, retailers and suppliers.<sup>50</sup> FareShare called for mandatory public reporting of food waste for food businesses:

This has been a hot topic of debate, discussion and pressure for quite a considerable period of time [...] If you do not measure it, you are not going to do anything about it. The concept and the idea of getting each retailer to measure, and to be open and transparent about where their food waste is, will really, really help to make a difference. It is no coincidence that Tesco and Sainsbury's are doing a lot around food waste as a result of that transparency.<sup>51</sup>

52. We also heard that there was currently a lack of consistency in how major retailers measured their waste, making comparisons within the industry difficult. For example, Tesco told us that they measured their waste by category, with the figures checked and verified by auditors. They used the World Resources Institute's metrics.<sup>52</sup> Sainsbury's, in comparison, measured their waste in tonnage, and did not go down to category level.<sup>53</sup>

53. The Minister told us that she was not in favour of requiring retailers to publicly report their food waste: "We have two supermarkets leading the way. If other supermarkets were interested in doing it, of course we would not stand in their way".<sup>54</sup>

54. *We commend Tesco for publishing its food waste data from across the supply chain. Sainsbury's is moving in the same direction, but needs more transparency. The fact that no other retailers have followed their lead shows that a voluntary approach is inadequate. We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses over a particular size to publicly report data on food waste. This would create much more transparency.*

55. *Retailers must work with WRAP to agree a consistent method of reporting, enabling comparisons to be drawn.*

56. WRAP called for a Food Surplus and Waste Management Plan for businesses, resulting in businesses following "consistent approaches to identifying sources of food surplus and waste, provide them with guidance on options for prevention (and recycling), and support delivery of policies on both, and increase the probability of Courtauld 2025 and UN-Sustainable Development Goal targets being met".<sup>55</sup> This was endorsed by BEIS.<sup>56</sup>

57. The Minister told us that she was unaware of BEIS's views and would look into the issue further.<sup>57</sup>

58. *We recommend that food businesses over a particular size are required to produce a Food Surplus and Waste Management Plan.*

50 Feedback ([FOW0022](#))

51 [Q73](#)

52 [Q163](#) [Tim Smith]

53 [Q163](#) [Louise Evans]

54 [Q539](#)

55 WRAP ([FOW0045](#))

56 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Energy ([FOW0023](#))

57 [Q540](#)

## Date Labelling

59. The Food Labelling Regulations 1996 implemented European Union Directive 2000/13/EC. Specifically, they set out the information required by law to be included on food packaging, including the criteria for ‘best before’ and ‘use by’ dates.<sup>58</sup> Although there is no legislative requirement, some retailers also use a ‘display until’ date. The distinction between these three date labels is set out below:

- “‘Use by’ dates refer to safety. Food can be eaten up to the end of this date but not after, even if it looks and smells fine”.
- “‘Best before’ dates refer to quality. Foods will be safe to eat after the ‘best before’ date, but may not be at their best”.
- Display until dates are “used on-pack to assist retail staff with stock rotation”.<sup>59</sup>

WRAP explained that a large amount of food waste was generated because food was not used in time.<sup>60</sup> We discussed with witnesses the suitability of current labelling requirements and the impact of date labels on food waste.

60. Feedback questioned whether ‘use by’ dates were used in the way in which they were intended and were conflated with ‘best before’ dates. It told us:

… if you go and talk to a manufacturer of pork pies or any of those cold meat products that are rightly use-by-date-type products, and you say, “How have you calculated your use-by date?”, they will tell you that the date is not the date on which they think the product will become microbiologically hazardous, or anything near that; it is the date on which they think the pastry is no longer going to retain its ultimate crispness.<sup>61</sup>

61. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall agreed with the assessment that manufacturers were using ‘use by’ dates more like ‘best before’ dates.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership described ‘use by’ dates as “too conservative; many foods are perfectly fine past it”.<sup>63</sup>

62. Witnesses questioned whether there remained a need for the ‘best before’ date labelling at all. Feedback argued that there was “certainly a very strong case for getting rid of best-before dates on an awful lot of products”, especially fruit and vegetables.<sup>64</sup> Many consumers were misled by the labels and took the view that it was necessary to dispose of such products after the ‘best before’ date had passed.<sup>65</sup> The Industry Council for Research on Packaging and the Environment described ‘best before’ dates as “meaningless” and told us that they were “confusing people”.<sup>66</sup>

58 The Food Labelling Regulations 1996 ([SI 1996/1499](#)), Sections 20 to 22

59 WRAP, [Information sheet: How to apply date labels to help prevent food waste](#), August 2013

60 WRAP, [Courtauld Commitment 3: Delivering action on waste](#) (10 January 2017), p4

61 [Q18](#) [Tristram Stuart]

62 [Q18](#) [Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall]

63 [Q101](#)

64 [Q19](#)

65 [Q19](#)

66 [Q144](#) [Jane Bickerstaffe]

63. We discussed with the retailers arguments that we had heard on the confusing nature of date labelling. Waitrose acknowledged that “some consumers find the labelling confusing or do not understand what the different marks mean”; however, they explained that the use of different date labels, particularly ‘best before’, was important for them ensuring the quality of their food and assisting with stock rotation.<sup>67</sup>

64. Tesco made similar points to us and was undertaking some work on consumer education on this point.<sup>68</sup> Sainsbury’s noted the concerns we raised with them on customer confusion and said that they might undertake some customer research to understand the level of confusion among consumers.<sup>69</sup>

65. Defra agreed that there was room for improvement with food date labels, which were “really confusing for most people”.<sup>70</sup> The Minister told us that Defra was currently working with WRAP and the Food Standards Agency to update guidance to industry on date labelling. Mr Preston explained that Defra’s work with these agencies had led to a rethink on the use of ‘best before’ date labels:

They also identified changes to things like “best before” dates on things like cheese that will go beyond their “best before” date. You obviously want the “use by” date to be there, because food is not safe to eat after that point, but everybody eats their cheese well after the “best before” date.<sup>71</sup>

The Minister told us that before the General Election was called for 8 June it had been Defra’s intention to send out revised guidance to industry on date labels “by the end of the year”.<sup>72</sup>

**66. We believe that current date labelling on food products is potentially misleading and unnecessarily confusing to consumers.**

**67. We recommend that the incoming Government continues the current review with WRAP and the Food Standards Agency on food date labelling, with a view to issuing guidance to industry by the end of 2017. The review should specifically look at whether there is a need for ‘best before’ dates at all.**

## Packaging

68. Packaging is designed to protect food and prolong its life. WRAP, the Food and Drink Federation and the Minister explained that technical work was underway to improve food packaging “through innovation”, to extend the life of produce and to reduce food waste.<sup>73</sup> WRAP gave some examples of work already underway:

You sometimes see packs of chicken that are divided into two, so you can cut it in half and freeze half of it, or you can open one half at a time. It is kept in that carefully controlled atmosphere that makes it last as long as possible.<sup>74</sup>

67 [Q240](#)

68 [Q245](#) [Tim Smith]

69 [Q242](#) [Louise Evans]

70 [Q549](#) [Chris Preston]

71 [Q549](#) [Chris Preston]

72 [Q549](#) [Dr Thérèse Coffey]

73 [Q408](#) [Marcus Gover]. See also [Q262](#) and [Q521](#).

74 [Q407](#) [Marcus Gover]

69. Waitrose acknowledged that retailers had a role to play in helping consumers to reduce food waste and this included them making “changes to packaging [and] portion size recommendations”.<sup>75</sup> Tesco told us about similar work that they were doing “with the customer’s thoughts [of reducing food waste] in mind”.<sup>76</sup> Tesco’s work included chicken breasts packed in two packets and frozen avocado. While WRAP acknowledged that there was good innovation underway to improve food packaging they explained that they “would like to see more”.<sup>77</sup>

70. Witnesses told us that the role of packaging was insufficiently recognised, and that the lack of understanding of packaging had, to date, limited its impact in reducing food waste. LINPAC Packing noted that:

Contrary to much popular opinion, packaging is not a source of waste and environmental impact as it preserves and conserves far more product wastage that it creates at the end of its useful life—as now recognised by WRAP, ‘packaging is a solution not a problem’.<sup>78</sup>

71. WRAP recognised that consumer’s attitudes to packaging could be “colouring” their attitudes to wasting food and limiting the effectiveness of messages about food waste. The campaign, “Fresher for Longer” was launched to educate consumers of how packaging could help their food to remain edible for longer.

72. Industry representatives stressed the need for improved communication from retailers with their customers around the benefits of packaging. The Packaging Federation told us that some supermarkets had made more progress than others.<sup>79</sup>

73. **It is not always clear to consumers what the role of packaging is, nor how to use packaging to make food last longer. Retailers have an important role to play in raising consumers’ awareness.**

74. *We recommend that retailers should make improvements to their packaging, such as increasing the use of split and re-sealable packets, to help consumers reduce food waste.*

75. *Further, we recommend that retailers should make food storage instructions clearer on packaging.*

76. *Retailers must work harder to explain to customers the role that packaging plays in reducing food waste.*

### ***‘Wonky’ vegetables***

77. Retailers set standards that their suppliers must meet if their produce is to be sold in supermarkets. These standards have resulted in criticism that retailers discriminate against food, particularly fruit and vegetables, which are perfectly fit for human consumption but do not meet artificial cosmetic standards.<sup>80</sup> It is estimated that 5–25% of apples, 9–20% of

75 [Q250](#)

76 [Q255](#) [Tim Smith]

77 [Q436](#)

78 LINPAC Packaging ([FOW0013](#))

79 [Q129](#)

80 [Q27](#) [Tristram Stuart]

onions, and 3–13% of potatoes are rejected on cosmetic grounds. Making small changes to specifications (such as a 2 millimetre change to potato specifications) could, it is estimated, “reduce waste by 15%”.<sup>81</sup>

78. In an effort to reduce food waste and to use those fruit and vegetables that fell below cosmetic standards, some retailers were now selling ‘wonky’ fruit and vegetables.

79. Some of our witnesses called on retailers to relax the artificial cosmetic standards concerning so-called “wonky veg” and questioned the value of the recent moves by some retailers to sell such produce as specifically “imperfect”. Mr Fearnley-Whittingstall explained that the supermarkets hadn’t always had such specific quality standards: “It didn’t used to be a problem for any member of the public to buy a slightly curved carrot or a slightly wonky parsnip”.<sup>82</sup> He considered that the cause of this change in culture was not anything to do with the food value of the products being sold by supermarkets, but was instead “an arms race [among supermarkets] in pursuit of appearance and cosmetic perfection”.<sup>83</sup>

80. We questioned the supermarkets on their approach to “wonky vegetables”. Tesco confirmed that they had widened their “specification[s] to the point where [...] still perfectly edible food can be sold, usually at a discount”, or was used in their “recipe dishes”.<sup>84</sup> Waitrose also told us that they had flexed their specifications as much as they could.<sup>85</sup> Sainsbury’s took a different approach and used the fruit and vegetables which did not meet its specifications in their “juices, smoothies, soups [...] and ready meals”.<sup>86</sup> Morrisons had increased the number of “wonky vegetable” lines sold and no longer marketed them as specifically imperfect; they had identified in 2015 that their customers were attracted to “wonky vegetables” because “they [could] buy [them] at a lower price or in a bigger bag”.<sup>87</sup>

81. Feedback stated that introducing explicit ‘imperfect’ product lines was a useful first step in engaging consumers with non-uniform products. However, it called on retailers to “normalise” this type of food by also including imperfect produce into existing economy lines of produce.<sup>88</sup>

**82. Retailers have set unnecessary cosmetic standards for fruit and vegetables. The result of this is that these “wonky vegetables” are either not being sold or are being sold at discounted prices. Supermarkets’ standards are contributing to England’s food waste problem.**

**83. We recommend that retailers relax their quality standards and start selling “wonky vegetables” as part of their main fruit and vegetable lines.**

81 [Q441](#) [Marcus Gover] and [Q441](#) [Andrew Parry]

82 [Q37](#)

83 [Q37](#)

84 [Q193](#) [Tim Smith]

85 [Q194](#) [Victoria Harris]

86 [Q193](#) [Louise Evans]

87 [Q193](#) [Steven Butts]

88 [Feedback \(FOW0022\)](#)

## 4 Redistribution

84. Redistribution is the process whereby surplus food that would have otherwise have ended up as waste is instead provided for people to eat. Redistribution in the UK is on a voluntary basis.

85. FareShare stated that the UK redistributes less than 10,000 tonnes of surplus food to charities each year, with a value to the voluntary sector of £19.6 million.<sup>89</sup> It was estimated that there was the potential for at least 110,000 tonnes of surplus food from the retail sector to be diverted from waste each year, and redistributed to feed people in need. This could provide 262 million meals for people in need each year.<sup>90</sup>

86. Representatives from the retail industry told us that there was a strong will within the industry to improve redistribution rates. Several of the major supermarkets had partnered with charities to re-distribute store level surplus food that was unsold at the end of the day to local charities and community groups. For example, Tesco had partnered with FareShare on a UK-wide programme.<sup>91</sup>

87. Retailers told us how they were using technology to make it easier for charities to identify what surplus food was available. For example, through a specially designed app, Tesco stores could inform linked groups about what food was available and organise collection. This was currently operational in over 800 Tesco stores, with a view to implementing it in all Tesco stores by the end of 2017.

88. While charities welcomed the partnerships that had already developed, they noted that some difficulties, both financial and practical, remained to improving redistribution figures.

89. Charities expressed concern that the will at head office to improve redistribution rates did not always filter down to individual stores within the chain. FareShare called for a more consistent UK-approach by retailers.<sup>92</sup>

90. Many of our witnesses highlighted the logistical difficulties of collecting surplus food from businesses, with many retailers asking for surplus food to be picked up by charities at the back of stores at 10pm. Brighton & Hove Partnership noted that most voluntary groups did not have the capacity to collect, sort and store edible food that became surplus. It told us that retailers needed to take more responsibility on ensuring that surplus food donation was feasible: “Most food poverty charities are run by volunteers with limited resources, which makes collecting food at specific times and in a specific manner very difficult”.<sup>93</sup> Feedback suggested that tax relief could be given to haulage firms who delivered surplus food from retailers to charities.<sup>94</sup>

89 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

90 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

91 Tesco ([FOW0058](#))

92 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

93 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership ([FOW0051](#))

94 [Q59](#)

91. Some charities were also not in favour of the increasing use of technology by different retailers. During our visit, FoodCycle told us that it was a burden to search through different apps from different retailers and companies. They thought it would be more beneficial if the retailers co-operated on one app, which would make it easier and quicker to see what was available across all retailers in the area.

92. We also heard of some administrative difficulties that charities faced. While visiting FoodCycle's kitchen, volunteers told us of the length of contracts that they had to sign with retailers in order to set up partnerships—some were over 25 pages long. This provided an administrative burden for smaller charities.

### Distorting the food waste hierarchy

93. Concern was expressed that surplus food that could legally go to people was often sent for anaerobic digestion (AD) instead, even though anaerobic digestion was further down the food waste hierarchy. This was encouraged by tax incentives for waste that was turned into green energy, while there was no similar financial support to enable businesses to redistribute their surplus food to people in need.

94. FareShare noted that, as a result of these incentives, many businesses disposed of edible surplus food via AD or converted it to animal feed, because this cost less than keeping it in a fit state for human consumption, which had additional costs in terms of segregation, storage and handling.<sup>95</sup>

95. Mr Fearnley-Whittingstall was critical of supermarkets' increasing use of AD both on social and practical grounds:

When we know there are hungry people, the idea of making electricity out of food when we could be feeding people, feels wrong. But actually scientifically it's the wrong thing to do, because the energy recovery from AD is pathetic, compared to the energy recovered by people eating food.<sup>96</sup>

96. FareShare noted that France offered tax deductions for redistribution schemes to cover the direct costs of charity redistribution. It called for fiscal incentives to be available in England to provide "a level playing field", so that it did not cost businesses more to redistribute surplus food to charities and community groups than it did to turn it into energy or animal feed.<sup>97</sup> This would ensure that economic incentives were more aligned with the food waste hierarchy.

97. FareShare suggested that the Government provide a fund to assist redistribution, to be administered for the food industry by an appropriate organisation, such as The Food and Drink Federation or WRAP:

Based on current levels of charity redistribution, this would require an estimated investment of £1 million a year to cover the additional costs involved with keeping food safe to eat and transporting it to charities, rising to £10 million a year if the goal of redistributing 100,000 tonnes a year is reached.<sup>98</sup>

95 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

96 "Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall rejects Morrisons' 'pathetic' wonky veg trial", The Guardian, 9 November 2015

97 [Q123](#)

98 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

98. When raising the issue of fiscal support with the Minister, we were surprised to hear that fiscal tools were currently available to promote redistribution. There is a general provision in the tax code where companies can get tax relief on trading stock that is produced but not sold. This includes food donated to charities—the cost of producing trading stock, which is donated, is deducted from their profits before tax is calculated.<sup>99</sup> We are unsure how well this is known throughout the food business industry.

## Need for Legislation?

99. We discussed whether legislation was required to improve redistribution rates. Legislation introduced in France in 2016 made it illegal for retailers above a certain size to destroy or landfill food and required them to establish relationships with redistributors of surplus food, and to offer suitable food to them.

100. The majority of the witnesses were not in favour of legislation in England. FareShare was not convinced that legislation would be suitable, as it would be difficult to police in practice and might create more red tape.<sup>100</sup>

101. We welcome the will shown by retailers to redistribute surplus food. However, we believe that more must be done. There is a huge amount of surplus food that is currently not being redistributed. We urge WRAP to set retailers a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food they redistribute to charities and voluntary organisations and to agree this target, and the timescale over which it will be achieved. Retailers must ensure that the political will in their head offices is turned into action at a local level.

102. It is concerning that current government policies and incentives designed to improve and manage food waste are actually encouraging the waste hierarchy to be ignored.

103. *We recommend that Government intervention in particular industries, such as anaerobic digestion, does not discourage the best possible use of food waste, as set out in the food waste hierarchy.*

104. *We recommend that the incoming Government takes steps to better communicate the current tax breaks or incentives that are available to companies, in order to support their efforts to redistribute surplus food.*

105. *We recommend that the incoming Government undertakes an assessment of how it might further promote the redistribution of surplus food by additional fiscal measures.*

99 Q583

100 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))

## 5 Recycling

106. In the UK, in 2015 alone, £13 billion of edible food was thrown away from households. In total that suggests 7.3 million tonnes of food went in the bin, which WRAP said, if prevented, would have had the environmental benefit of taking one in four cars off the road.<sup>101</sup>

107. In this Report we have examined some of the ways food waste could be prevented or reduced. This Chapter focuses on the unavoidable food waste—waste created as part of food production such as banana skins, teabags, and egg shells. Some of our witnesses told us that recycling unavoidable food waste, either by anaerobic digestion or by composting, would provide a sustainable method of extracting value and turning such waste into a resource.<sup>102</sup>

### Anaerobic digestion

108. Anaerobic digestion (AD) is the process of turning food waste into energy. It is a natural process that captures biogas (a mixture of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and methane). This gas is released as microorganisms break down rotting organic materials. AD also produces digestate (a nitrogen-rich fertiliser). The biogas can be used directly in some engines, burned to produce heat, or can be cleaned and used in the same way as natural gas or as a vehicle fuel. The energy produced can be fed directly into the National Grid. The digestate can be used as a renewable fertiliser or soil conditioner.

109. The Government has been supportive of AD. Defra and the Department for Energy and Climate Change made a commitment to increase energy produced from waste through AD in June 2011 in the ‘Anaerobic Digestion Strategy and Action Plan’. The plan stated that AD offered a “local, environmentally sound option for waste management”.<sup>103</sup>

110. In the last few years the AD industry has grown rapidly and there are approximately 107 dedicated waste plants in the UK.<sup>104</sup> Many of our witnesses supported anaerobic digestion, and recognised that it should be championed for food that is not fit for human consumption.

111. However, Bio Collectors told us that AD plants were under-used with many operating at around 50% capacity. They told us that AD was “widely accepted as the ‘greenest’ method of recycling unavoidable food waste” and as it came higher up on the waste hierarchy than incineration, there was “no reason that the huge capacity now available across the UK should not be utilised”.<sup>105</sup>

101 WRAP, “[Love Food Hate Waste campaign](#)”, accessed 20 April 2017

102 Veolia ([FOW0018](#)), Bio Collectors ([FOW0049](#)), ADBA ([FOW0042](#))

103 Department of Energy and Climate Change and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Anaerobic Digestion Strategy and Action Plan](#), June 2011

104 Bio Collectors ([FOW0049](#))

105 Bio Collectors ([FOW0049](#))

## Households

### *Separate food waste collections*

112. On 13 September 2016 WRAP published ‘A framework for greater consistency in household recycling in England’.<sup>106</sup> Among other things, this recommended separate collection of food waste to be sent to anaerobic digestion.

113. There are currently no legal requirements for separate food collections in England. The waste collection authority for an area (usually the local authority) takes the lead in recycling operations, and decisions on collection regimes are for local councils to make.

114. Food waste collection has one of the lowest capture rates in England (with about 10% of waste being recycled).<sup>107</sup> The Local Government Association’s paper on ‘Meeting EU recycling targets’, published in May 2015, stated that nearly half of councils in England offered a food waste collection together with garden waste, but it also stressed that “given reducing local authority budgets it is unlikely that enough councils will either be able to maintain or add collection of food waste unless it becomes more cost effective to do so”.<sup>108</sup>

115. We heard that local authorities could struggle with the costs associated with implementing separate food waste collections, and participation rates by householders could be unsustainable. For example, Luton Borough Council stopped its separate food waste collection in March 2013 as it was no longer financially viable to operate it, due to falling volumes of food waste collected.<sup>109</sup>

116. Between 2007 and 2009, WRAP provided funding and technical support to 21 local authorities to carry out trials of separate food waste collections. The studies found that weekly collections of food waste were more successful where residual waste (rubbish not able to be recycled, re-used or composted) was collected less frequently. However, the Local Government Association said that reductions of residual waste collections were not always popular.<sup>110</sup>

117. Dr Marcus Gover, Chief Executive Officer of WRAP told us that there were two factors impacting the rates of food waste recycling: “One is the infrastructure for recycling food, food waste collections, and the other is the use of them. You need both of them to increase recycling. Currently, 44% of households in England have access to a food waste recycling service, so half the households can recycle food. We could make that a lot better”.<sup>111</sup>

118. Access to food waste recycling services is far better in the devolved nations. In Scotland, local authorities are required to provide separate food waste collections in non-rural areas. In Wales, there are mandatory local authority targets for recycling, re-using and composting household waste (including food waste). 99% of households were provided with separate food waste collection services in 2015. WRAP noted that “In Wales, pretty much every single household can recycle food and they probably recycle twice as much food as England”.<sup>112</sup>

106 WRAP, [A framework for greater consistency in household recycling](#) in England (September 2016)

107 WRAP, [Final: Analysis of recycling performance and waste arisings in the UK 2012/13](#), January 2017

108 Local Government Association, [Meeting EU recycling targets](#), May 2015, para 3.3 ]

109 [Q482](#)

110 Local Government Association ([FOW0032](#))

111 [Q482](#)

112 [Q482](#)

119. The graph below illustrates how the provision of household waste collections across the UK has changed since 2008. It can be seen that a significantly lower percentage of households in England are provided with a food waste collection than in the devolved nations.

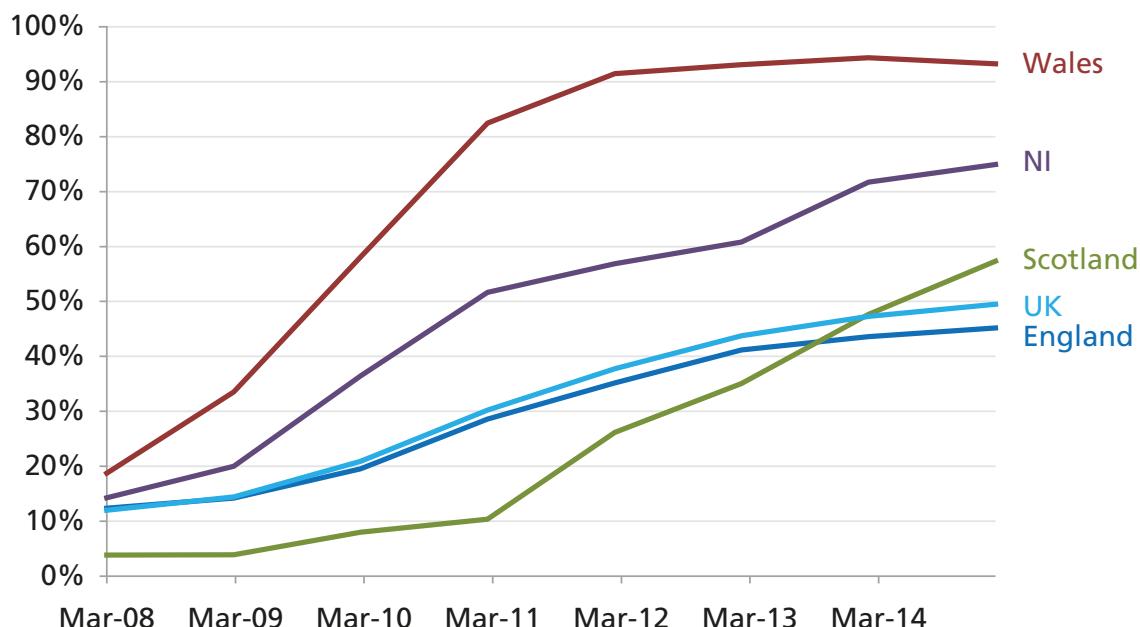


Figure 3: Percentage of households with a food waste collection (separate or mixed with garden) 2007–08 to 2014–15

120. WRAP told us that simple steps could be taken to improve the use of the existing systems. It had discovered that food bin liners had made a big difference to participation: “Where we have done trials and provided liners, use of it has gone up”.<sup>113</sup> WRAP had also found that providing stickers which said, “If it is food, use the other one” for the bins was a “quite effective” method in reminding people to use the bins correctly”.<sup>114</sup>

121. Hampshire County Council told us that only one collection authority in Hampshire currently collected food waste. It explained that the Council was committed to an integrated waste management system from the mid-1990s which gave the Council limited flexibility and cash to manoeuvre.<sup>115</sup> Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority said that the fact that only 50% of authorities were engaged with food waste collections was due to “existing contracts and, basically, finances”.<sup>116</sup>

122. Hampshire County Council told us that voluntary initiatives could only “achieve so much”, although it noted that the effect of legislation and/or mandatory targets could be limited:

Imposing food waste targets on local authorities [...] would be difficult as it would have the potential to conflict with recycling and recovery processes and may encourage the wrong behaviour.<sup>117</sup>

113 [Q482](#)

114 [Q482](#)

115 [Q306](#)

116 [Q306](#) [Andrew Bird]

117 Hampshire County Council ([FOW0007](#))

123. The Environmental Services Association supported separate food waste collections for local authorities and businesses, although it stated that local authorities were best placed to decide their collection service. If these were to be mandatory, it stated that these should be accompanied by a TEEP (technical, environment and economical practicality) requirement:

The design of waste collection schemes is complex and depends on factors such as the demographics, geography, housing stock and proximity to treatment facilities of a given local area. There is “no one size fits all” collection system which works most effectively in all circumstances, and so mandatory separate food waste collection without TEEP could therefore introduce significant burdens for some local authorities.<sup>118</sup>

124. Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority agreed that legislation had a role, but cautioned that it would have to be designed carefully to avoid perverse outcomes, for example, chasing recycling targets ahead of waste prevention and reuse.<sup>119</sup>

125. The Minister told us that she was “slightly disappointed” to hear that one of the councils, that undertook very limited recycling, had recently signed an extension of its contract to continue that arrangement. She told us that Defra could do more “in working with our delivery partner, WRAP, and the LGA” to improve household recycling.<sup>120</sup> She highlighted that whilst “the highest performing councils usually undertake a separate or combined food waste collection” even some of the lowest performing councils were taking steps to try and do so.<sup>121</sup>

126. In May 2016, Eunomia Research & Consulting Ltd (an environmental consulting company) published ‘The Real Economic Benefit of Separate Biowaste Collections’.<sup>122</sup> This looked at the comparative costs and benefits of different approaches to managing household biowaste. The study looked at different collection and treatment systems including schemes in which food and garden wastes were collected separately from one another and schemes in which they were collected mixed. The report concluded that collecting food waste separately at kerbside and weekly could increase the capture of food, would help keep processing costs for food waste to a minimum and was overall the more financially and environmentally attractive option.

**127. Across England there is considerable disparity regarding the waste services provided to households. Food waste is not consistently collected. Food waste that could be turned into energy through anaerobic digestion is being sent further down the waste hierarchy. We are sending waste to landfill that could help power the National Grid and could provide a good agricultural fertiliser.**

**128. On balance, we conclude that local authorities should remain responsible for addressing the specific challenges and barriers to increasing food waste collections that they face at a local level. However, guidance and best practice should be shared at a national level in order to move towards a standardised approach and to assist local authorities to improve their individual performance. The incoming Government must examine opportunities to incentivise local authorities.**

118 Environmental Services Association ([FOW0025](#)), para 10

119 Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority ([FOW0039](#))

120 [Q511](#)

121 [Q511](#)

122 Eunomia, [The Real Economic Benefit of Separate Biowaste Collections](#), May 2016

129. *We recommend that the incoming Government works closely with WRAP and Local Authorities to ensure that separate food waste collections are offered to as many households as possible within England. Local authorities must look at the opportunities to introduce separate food waste collection when new waste contracts are put in place.*

130. *We recommend that the incoming Government considers a national strategy to ensure a consistent collection of waste and recycling across England.*

## Food businesses

### Separate food waste collections

131. It is estimated that 3,415,000 tonnes of waste are disposed of in the food sector each year. Sending this quantity of food waste to AD would abate 3.86 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year.<sup>123</sup>

132. The provision of food waste collection for businesses is variable. For example, 19 councils in England provided a dedicated commercial food waste collection in 2015, with commercial and industrial waste chiefly processed by private companies. Commercial waste management contractors also offer food waste collections.

133. Some of the written evidence stated that the devolved nations were “leading the way” in developing policies to reduce food waste.<sup>124</sup> The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 introduced a requirement for food businesses to separately collect food waste, as did the Food Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. Both countries introduced these changes in two phases, targeting large food waste producers (over 50kg per week) first, before extending the legislation to smaller food waste producers (between 5kg and 50kg of food waste per week).

134. The overall waste strategy for Wales ‘Towards Zero Waste’, includes ‘The Food Manufacture, Service and Retail Sector Plan’ which sets out a co-ordinated approach to improve the resource management of both food waste and food packaging.<sup>125</sup>

135. BEIS said that the “biggest opportunities for dealing better with food waste” were in the hospitality and food service sectors.<sup>126</sup> It noted that the Scotland experience had shown that placing a clear legal requirement on businesses to separate food waste increased the amount of food waste captured from this sector.

136. ADBA told us that it encouraged the introduction of a statutory duty for businesses to segregate food waste. It said that a mandatory requirement on food businesses to separate food waste would significantly change the collection market for this material, and would likely enable them to make savings that were less likely to be achieved without legislation.<sup>127</sup>

123 ADBA ([FOW0042](#))

124 Viridor ([FOW0052](#))

125 Welsh Government, [Towards Zero Waste One Wales: one Plant; Food Manufacture, Service and Retail Sector Plan](#), September 2014

126 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ([FOW0023](#))

127 ADBA ([FOW0042](#))

137. On asking the Minister's view regarding the need for a mandatory requirement on businesses to separate food waste, Dr Coffey told us that she would be watching the impact of the legislation in Scotland "with interest".<sup>128</sup>

138. **The availability of the separate collection of food waste from mixed waste is an important part of diverting food waste from disposal. We believe that separate food waste collections from food businesses offer an opportunity to divert waste from lower down the waste hierarchy.**

139. *We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses and retailers to separate food waste. This should be done through a phased approach, applying first to businesses that produce more than 50kg of food waste per week, then applying to smaller food businesses that produce between 5kg and 50kg of food waste per week.*

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Food Waste hierarchy

1. The waste hierarchy exists to prevent and manage food waste and to minimise the impact on the environment. We are concerned at reports that the waste hierarchy, whilst widely acknowledged as necessary, is apparently not being enforced. (Paragraph 14)
2. *We recommend that the incoming Government works with the Environment Agency to enforce the waste hierarchy, for the benefit of all.* (Paragraph 14)

## Prevention

3. The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement. We were disappointed to hear that a large number of manufacturers had not signed up to its targets. We call on WRAP and the Government to re-double their efforts to increase participation in the Courtauld process by food manufacturers. (Paragraph 23)
4. *We recommend that there should be a national food waste target. An ambitious, formal target on food waste would influence the Government's approach to food waste, ensuring that there continues to be a focus on reducing food waste.* (Paragraph 24)
5. Householders have a key role to play in reducing food waste. We are disappointed that food waste reduction in households has stalled. This level of waste is unacceptable economically, socially and environmentally. The work to reduce food waste further will be hugely challenging and require a considerable investment of resource. (Paragraph 35)
6. A priority must be placed on awareness-raising work. We welcome the work that has been done by WRAP in the last decade, and strongly believe that the research, advice and information provided by the organisation is invaluable. (Paragraph 36)
7. *We commend the work that has been undertaken by WRAP to spur food waste reduction. We are concerned that, despite its significant achievements, Defra's funding for WRAP has reduced over recent years. It is essential that the Government provides WRAP with sufficient public funding so that, alongside investment from other sources such as trusts and charities, it has adequate resources to enable it to maintain its food waste reduction programmes. We urge Defra to increase the funding if evidence suggests it is necessary in the lead up to 2025.* (Paragraph 37)
8. *We believe that awareness of food and food waste should start at an early age in schools. We recommend that the Government examine how lessons on food and food waste can be incorporated as part of the school curriculum.* (Paragraph 38)
9. A large proportion of unnecessary waste in the hospitality sector is the result of large portion sizes and resulting waste left on customers' plates. The incoming Government must work with the hospitality sector to encourage it to examine ways

of preventing plate wastage, for example, by offering smaller portions, by providing clarity on the sides that arrive with a meal, reducing the amount of sides, and encouraging take-home service for leftovers. (Paragraph 47)

10. *We commend Tesco for publishing its food waste data from across the supply chain. Sainsbury's is moving in the same direction, but needs more transparency. The fact that no other retailers have followed their lead shows that a voluntary approach is inadequate. We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses over a particular size to publicly report data on food waste. This would create much more transparency.* (Paragraph 54)
11. *Retailers must work with WRAP to agree a consistent method of reporting, enabling comparisons to be drawn.* (Paragraph 55)
12. *We recommend that food businesses over a particular size are required to produce a Food Surplus and Waste Management Plan.* (Paragraph 58)
13. We believe that current date labelling on food products is potentially misleading and unnecessarily confusing to consumers. (Paragraph 66)
14. *We recommend that the incoming Government continues the current review with WRAP and the Food Standards Agency on food date labelling, with a view to issuing guidance to industry by the end of 2017. The review should specifically look at whether there is a need for 'best before' dates at all.* (Paragraph 67)
15. It is not always clear to consumers what the role of packaging is, nor how to use packaging to make food last longer. Retailers have an important role to play in raising consumers' awareness. (Paragraph 73)
16. *We recommend that retailers should make improvements to their packaging, such as increasing the use of split and re-sealable packets, to help consumers reduce food waste.* (Paragraph 74)
17. *Further, we recommend that retailers should make food storage instructions clearer on packaging.* (Paragraph 75)
18. *Retailers must work harder to explain to customers the role that packaging plays in reducing food waste.* (Paragraph 76)
19. Retailers have set unnecessary cosmetic standards for fruit and vegetables. The result of this is that these "wonky vegetables" are either not being sold or are being sold at discounted prices. Supermarkets' standards are contributing to England's food waste problem. (Paragraph 82)
20. *We recommend that retailers relax their quality standards and start selling "wonky vegetables" as part of their main fruit and vegetable lines.* (Paragraph 83)

## Redistribution

21. We welcome the will shown by retailers to redistribute surplus food. However, we believe that more must be done. There is a huge amount of surplus food that is currently not being redistributed. We urge WRAP to set retailers a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food they redistribute to charities and voluntary organisations and to agree this target, and the timescale over which it will be achieved. Retailers must ensure that the political will in their head offices is turned into action at a local level. (Paragraph 101)
22. It is concerning that current government policies and incentives designed to improve and manage food waste are actually encouraging the waste hierarchy to be ignored. (Paragraph 102)
23. *We recommend that Government intervention in particular industries, such as anaerobic digestion, does not discourage the best possible use of food waste, as set out in the food waste hierarchy.* (Paragraph 103)
24. *We recommend that the incoming Government takes steps to better communicate the current tax breaks or incentives that are available to companies, in order to support their efforts to redistribute surplus food.* (Paragraph 104)
25. *We recommend that the incoming Government undertakes an assessment of how it might further promote the redistribution of surplus food by additional fiscal measures.* (Paragraph 105)

## Recycling

26. Across England there is considerable disparity regarding the waste services provided to households. Food waste is not consistently collected. Food waste that could be turned into energy through anaerobic digestion is being sent further down the waste hierarchy. We are sending waste to landfill that could help power the National Grid and could provide a good agricultural fertiliser. (Paragraph 127)
27. On balance, we conclude that local authorities should remain responsible for addressing the specific challenges and barriers to increasing food waste collections that they face at a local level. However, guidance and best practice should be shared at a national level in order to move towards a standardised approach and to assist local authorities to improve their individual performance. The incoming Government must examine opportunities to incentivise local authorities. (Paragraph 128)
28. *We recommend that the incoming Government works closely with WRAP and Local Authorities to ensure that separate food waste collections are offered to as many households as possible within England. Local authorities must look at the opportunities to introduce separate food waste collection when new waste contracts are put in place.* (Paragraph 129)
29. *We recommend that the incoming Government considers a national strategy to ensure a consistent collection of waste and recycling across England.* (Paragraph 130)

30. The availability of the separate collection of food waste from mixed waste is an important part of diverting food waste from disposal. We believe that separate food waste collections from food businesses offer an opportunity to divert waste from lower down the waste hierarchy. (Paragraph 138)
31. *We recommend that the incoming Government requires food businesses and retailers to separate food waste. This should be done through a phased approach, applying first to businesses that produce more than 50kg of food waste per week, then applying to smaller food businesses that produce between 5kg and 50kg of food waste per week.* (Paragraph 139)

# Formal Minutes

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**Tuesday 25 April 2017**

The following declarations of interest relating to the inquiry were made:

**Wednesday 18 January 2017**

David Simpson declared a pecuniary interest in relation to the Committee's inquiry into Food Waste in England, namely: receiving a quarterly payment for services as an adviser to the Universal Meat Company.

**Tuesday 25 April 2017**

Members present:

Neil Parish, in the Chair

Chris Davies	Dr Paul Monaghan
Jim Fitzpatrick	Rebecca Pow
Kerry McCarthy	David Simpson

Draft Report (*Food waste in England*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 139 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[The Committee adjourned.]

# Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

## Tuesday 15 November 2016

*Question number*

**Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall**, broadcaster and campaigner, and **Tristram Stuart**, founder, Feedback

[Q1–61](#)

## Wednesday 30 November 2016

**Lindsay Boswell**, Chief Executive, FareShare, **Laura Hopper**, Chief Executive Officer, Plan Zheroes, and **Vera Zakharov**, Love Food Hate Waste Project Campaigner, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

[Q62–125](#)

**Jane Bickerstaffe**, Director, The Industry Council for research on Packaging and the Environment (INCPEN), **Dick Searle**, Chief Executive, Packing Federation, and **Ashley Munden**, Managing Director, EMEA, InSinkErator

[Q126–162](#)

## Wednesday 18 January 2017

**Tim Smith**, Group Quality Director, Tesco, **Louise Evans**, Director of Corporate Affairs, Sainsbury's, **Victoria Harris**, Head of Sustainability and Responsible Resourcing, Waitrose, and **Steven Butts**, Head of Corporate Responsibility, Morrisons

[Q162–257](#)

**Tony Sophocleides**, Director of Communications, Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers, and **David Bellamy**, Environment Policy Manager, Food and Drink Federation

[Q258–297](#)

## Wednesday 1 February 2017

**Andrew Bird**, Chair, Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee, **James Potter**, Assistant Director for Waste, Hampshire County Council, and **Stuart Donaldson**, Waste Strategy Manager, Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority

[Q298–342](#)

**Charlotte Morton**, Chief Executive, Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association, **Paul Killoughery**, Managing Director, Bio Collectors and **Jacob Hayler**, Executive Director, Environmental Services Association

[Q343–383](#)

## Tuesday 28 February 2017

**Marcus Gover**, Chief Executive Officer, Waste and Resources Action Programme, and **Andrew Parry**, Special Adviser Food and Drink, Waste and Resources Action Programme

[Q384–508](#)

**Wednesday 22 March 2017**

**Dr Thérèse Coffey**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, and **Chris Preston**, Deputy Director for Waste and Recycling, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Q509–527](#)

**Wednesday 19 April 2017**

**Dr Thérèse Coffey**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, and **Chris Preston**, Deputy Director for Waste and Recycling, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Q528–611](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

FOW numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 ADBA ([FOW0042](#))
- 2 ALMR ([FOW0037](#))
- 3 AMDEA—the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Appliances ([FOW0038](#))
- 4 Ask the Q ([FOW0004](#))
- 5 Association of Convenience Stores ([FOW0033](#))
- 6 Be Enriched ([FOW0009](#))
- 7 Bio Collectors ([FOW0049](#))
- 8 BioHiTech Europe Ltd ([FOW0069](#))
- 9 BIOTELos Ltd ([FOW0070](#))
- 10 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership ([FOW0051](#))
- 11 British Retail Consortium ([FOW0019](#))
- 12 City Harvest London ([FOW0074](#))
- 13 Company Shop ([FOW0034](#))
- 14 Coveris ([FOW0015](#))
- 15 Dairy UK ([FOW0064](#))
- 16 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ([FOW0023](#))
- 17 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([FOW0046](#))
- 18 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, supplementary evidence ([FOW0085](#))
- 19 Derby & South Derbyshire Friends of the Earth ([FOW0073](#))
- 20 Devon & Cornwall Food Action ([FOW0008](#))
- 21 Dr Christian Reynolds, University of Sheffield ([FOW0065](#))
- 22 DS Smith ([FOW0031](#))
- 23 Environmental Services Association ([FOW0025](#))
- 24 Environmental Services Association, supplementary evidence ([FOW0076](#))
- 25 Eunomia Research & Consulting Ltd ([FOW0060](#))
- 26 FareShare ([FOW0020](#))
- 27 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([FOW0047](#))
- 28 Feedback ([FOW0022](#))
- 29 Feedback, supplementary evidence ([FOW0077](#))
- 30 Feeding Britain ([FOW0003](#))
- 31 Food and Drink Federation ([FOW0041](#))
- 32 FoodCycle ([FOW0048](#))
- 33 Foodservice Packaging Association ([FOW0043](#))

- 34 Food Standards Agency ([FOW0017](#))
- 35 Foresight Group ([FOW0012](#))
- 36 Friends of the Earth, England, Wales & Northern Ireland ([FOW0035](#))
- 37 Greater London Authority ([FOW0062](#))
- 38 Groceries Code Action Network ([FOW0021](#))
- 39 Hampshire County Council ([FOW0007](#))
- 40 INC PEN—the Industry Council for research on Packaging & the Environment ([FOW0014](#))
- 41 Keep Britain Tidy ([FOW0055](#))
- 42 Knowledge Quarter Sustainability Network ([FOW0044](#))
- 43 Lambeth Food Partnership ([FOW0005](#))
- 44 Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University ([FOW0030](#))
- 45 Lindsay Southcombe ([FOW0006](#))
- 46 LINPAC ([FOW0002](#))
- 47 LINPAC Packaging ([FOW0013](#))
- 48 Local Government Association ([FOW0032](#))
- 49 Mechline Developments Ltd ([FOW0040](#))
- 50 Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority (on behalf of Merseyside and Halton Waste Partnership) ([FOW0039](#))
- 51 Mr Philip Sullivan ([FOW0068](#))
- 52 National Farmers Union ([FOW0011](#))
- 53 North London Waste Authority ([FOW0066](#))
- 54 Peter Collier ([FOW0067](#))
- 55 Plan Zheroes ([FOW0053](#))
- 56 Professor David Evans, Geography and Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, University of Sheffield ([FOW0036](#))
- 57 Ridan Food Waste Composters ([FOW0026](#))
- 58 Sainsbury's, supplementary evidence ([FOW0080](#))
- 59 Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd ([FOW0063](#))
- 60 Sarah Fawkes ([FOW0001](#))
- 61 Society for the Environment ([FOW0028](#))
- 62 Tesco ([FOW0058](#))
- 63 Tesco, supplementary evidence ([FOW0081](#))
- 64 THAW Technology Ltd ([FOW0027](#))
- 65 The Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association (ADBA) ([FOW0079](#))
- 66 The Bio-Based and Biodegradable Industries Association ([FOW0054](#))
- 67 The Food and Drink Federation, supplementary evidence ([FOW0078](#))
- 68 The Grocer ([FOW0061](#))
- 69 The Packaging Federation—written evidence ([FOW0010](#))

- 70 The Renewable Energy Association ([FOW0016](#))
- 71 Transition Falmouth ([FOW0050](#))
- 72 University of Northampton ([FOW0024](#))
- 73 Veolia ([FOW0018](#))
- 74 Viridor ([FOW0052](#))
- 75 Waitrose ([FOW0057](#))
- 76 Waitrose, supplementary evidence ([FOW0075](#))
- 77 Waitrose, further supplementary evidence ([FOW0084](#))
- 78 Wm Morrison Supermarkets plc ([FOW0071](#))
- 79 WRAP ([FOW0045](#))
- 80 WRAP, supplementary evidence ([FOW0072](#))
- 81 WRAP, further Supplementary evidence ([FOW0082](#))

# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

## Session 2015–16

First Report	Defra performance in 2015–16	HC 443 (HC 894)
Second Report	Greyhound welfare	HC 478 (HC 133)
Third Report	Farmgate prices	HC 474 (HC 561)
Fourth Report	Air quality	HC 479 (HC 665)
Fifth Report	Common Agricultural Policy: payments to farmers	HC 405– (HC 664)i
First Special Report	Defra performance in 2014–15: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 894
Second Special Report	Farmgate prices: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2015–16	HC 561

## Session 2016–17

First Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Environment Agency	HC 649
Second Report	Future flood prevention	HC 115
Third Report	Animal welfare in England: domestic pets	HC 117 (HC 1003)
Fourth Report	Future flood prevention: Government's Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 926 (HC 1032)
Fifth Report	Forestry in England: Seeing the wood for the trees	HC 619
Sixth Report	Post-legislative scrutiny: Flood and Water Management Act 2010	HC 990
Seventh Report	Feeding the nation: labour constraints	HC 1009
First Special Report	Greyhound welfare: Government response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16	HC 133
Second Special Report	Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2015–16: Common Agricultural Policy: payments to farmers	HC 664

Third Special Report	Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2015–16: Air quality	HC 665
Fourth Special Report	Animal welfare in England: domestic pets: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 1003
Fifth Special Report	Government's Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report	HC 1032