

#FoodOnPlates | Policy Brief



WASTING GOOD FOOD SHOULD NEVER BE CHEAPER THAN FEEDING PEOPLE

Executive summary

- Right now, it is cheaper for farmers to waste good-to-eat food than get it to charities putting meals onto people's plates.
- France, which offers tax breaks for food producers, gets 6x more unsold food to charities than we do.
- Here in the UK, hundreds of millions of pounds in taxpayer subsidies are handed out to anaerobic digestion plants, meaning good-to-eat food is thrown into biogas digesters instead of going to hungry people. Even more is sent to landfill or ploughed back into the fields.
- 'Lifeline' government funding that helped farmers send their unsold food to charities has been axed – with calls to renew it rejected.
- Without this funding 53m meals worth of food a year will be needlessly wasted.
- **We are calling for a continuation and extension of this funding of £5m per year from Defra.**
- In the run up to COP26, this would demonstrate environmental leadership, and, at a time of urgent need, deliver thousands of tonnes of healthy, nutritious food to UK's most vulnerable families.

France, which offers tax incentives for food redistribution, diverts 6x more food to charities than the UK does.

About FareShare

FareShare is the UK's national network of charitable food redistributors, made up of 18 independent organisations. Together, we take good quality surplus food from right across the food industry and get it to nearly 10,000 frontline charities and community groups.

FareShare takes food from the food industry that can't be sold in shops, either because of packaging errors, a short shelf life or overproduction. That food, which is the same as the food you'd eat at home, is then redistributed through a network of nearly 10,000 frontline organisations, across the UK such as homeless hostels, school breakfast clubs, domestic violence refuges, older people's lunch clubs, food banks and hospices. We operate in every constituency in the United Kingdom.

Last year, we redistributed the equivalent of 128 million meals, **or 4 meals every second.**

Social problem

- **FareShare is not able to access enough food to meet demand**

from our charities, a large proportion of which are located in the UK's most deprived communities.

- Pre-pandemic, 8% of households in the United Kingdom experienced low or very low food security, as demonstrated by figures released in March by the DWP (2021).
- **The pandemic has exacerbated this problem**, with an estimated 4.7 million adults (9% of households) experiencing food insecurity in the six months up to March 2021 (The Food Foundation, 2021).
- An estimated 2.3 million children live in households that have experienced food insecurity over the same period (The Food Foundation, 2021).
- This is more than 10% of the UK population, many of whom rely on the charities we supply to access food, for example pantries, food banks, afterschool clubs, breakfast clubs.



Environmental problem

- **Over a quarter of all the food grown in the UK is never eaten. This 'wasted harvest' accounts for between 6% and 7% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions.** Just under a third is wasted before it even leaves the farm gate (Dimbleby, 2021).
- **Globally, if food waste were a country, it would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, behind the USA and China** (United Nations, 2011).
- More than 2m of the estimated 3.6m tonnes of food wasted across the food industry is still good-to-eat when it is discarded. This food may have been rejected for consumer sale for being the wrong shape or size, due to over production, or packaging and processing errors.
- Currently, getting this perfectly good, nutritious food to charities is the least affordable option for businesses. The government provides subsidies for all forms of waste disposal and recycling - from wastewater to incineration, AD and composting. In contrast, schemes to cover the costs to businesses of redistributing surplus food to charities receive no government funding.
- As a result of these subsidies, in some circumstances, when there is less food waste coming out of the waste stream than there should be, businesses can be inadvertently incentivised to send edible surplus food to AD along with the waste food.¹
- This undermines the government's accepted "food waste hierarchy" – which stipulates that surplus food that is still edible should first be redistributed to people.



With £5 million per year in government support, FareShare could be providing an extra 53 million meals per year.

Solution

FareShare received £1.9m from Defra in 2019-20 as part of the Food Waste Fund, launched by Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Defra, in 2018. The scheme helped to cover the extra costs to small-scale farmers, growers and producers of redistributing their good-to-eat waste food, rather than let it rot in the ground, use it for animal feed, or send it to landfill (FareShare, 2021).

That funding resulted in 85% more fruit and vegetables reaching frontline charities and community groups, and 280 more suppliers coming on board to redistribute their surplus. It almost doubled the amount of surplus food the network could access – over 4,500 tonnes, creating over 10m meals for vulnerable people.

A continuation and extension of the fund at £5m p.a. makes environmental sense, as it would:

- mitigate 124,378 tonnes of carbon per year, as opposed to 7,053 if the food went to anaerobic digestion or worse still, emitting 66,060 through landfill (Berners Lee et al., 2018)
- make redistributing surplus food cheaper than other income generating alternatives such as landfill, animal feed or anaerobic digestion;
- in doing so, make the environmentally friendly option more attractive to industry ahead of COP 26.

It tackles the social problem, because it would:

- save the charity sector £14m on their food bills, freeing up funds for their crucial services.
- enable the redistribution of an additional 22,250 tonnes of food,
- which would be the equivalent of an additional 53 million meals to those in growing need.

It benefits the government, because it would:

- deliver a £14 : £1 return on investment to government and taxpayers (FareShare/NEF, 2018).
- save taxpayers an estimated £72m/per year in costs avoided by NHS, welfare, education.
- enable farmers and growers in rural constituencies to do the right thing with their unsold food.



References

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End Notes

¹ WRAP estimates that 2 million tonnes of food waste goes to AD every year – just 5% of industry capacity and only 20% of the amount of food waste generated in the UK. In its most recent report, WRAP estimates that in 2020 the retail and manufacturing industry sent 165,000 tonnes of still edible food to waste or animal feed that could have been redistributed to those in food poverty. It is not clear how much of this went to each waste stream, however an old WRAP report estimates that 34% of this could have been sent to AD - around 55,000 tonnes. This, however, represents less than 0.55% of the 10 million tonnes of food waste generated in the UK, the majority of which still goes to landfill or incineration.

Over and above the estimated 165,000 tonnes of edible surplus available in retail and manufacturing, WRAP estimates that a further 2m tonnes of edible food is wasted on UK farms – the majority of which is ploughed back into the ground.



Contact

To support the campaign, or if you have any questions, please get in touch with:

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