

Tackling the Cost of Living Crisis Using England's Surplus Food

September 2022



Plain English Summary

This proposal shows how the government can source surplus food from England's farms, which would otherwise go to waste, and deliver it in a targetted manner to the people worst affected by the cost of living crisis. In doing so, the government would save itself money, prevent the wasteful emissions of greenhouse gases, and provide 100 million meals to people in need.

Key Points

- **The cost of living crisis is driving millions into food insecurity**, and it will get worse.
- Meanwhile, **millions of tonnes of food go to waste every year**.
- By spending **£25 million** a year, the government could deliver **42,500 tonnes of food**, the equivalent of **100 million meals**, to people worst hit by the cost of living crisis.
- This will save the government **£140 million in costs avoided**.
- It will prevent the wasteful emissions of nearly **70,000 tonnes of CO2e**.
- This can be achieved through FareShare, who have a large existing charity network, and ran a similar scheme for the government for its Covid-19 response. FareShare is the only organisation in the country who can deliver such a project at scale.
- It can be funded by using money from the Dormant Assets Scheme, or by diverting 3.3% of the subsidies given to the Anaerobic Digestion industry.
- It contributes to key government policy agendas, including the environmental strategy, net zero, levelling up, resilience building, and would help achieve multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
- The long-term solution to the systemic problem of food waste on farms could be solved by introducing a 'Surplus Subsidy', by including surplus food redistribution as part of the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

About FareShare

FareShare is the UK's largest food redistribution charity. It comprises 18 independent organisations that take good quality surplus food from farms and food companies, and delivers it to more than 9,500 front-line charities and community groups via 31 warehouses across the UK. FareShare operates in every constituency in the UK. Last financial year, FareShare redistributed 130 million meals, or 4 meals every second.

Inflation Is Driving Food Insecurity

Nearly 10 million people are now food insecure, including 2.6 million children, a figure that has doubled since 2020, with numbers rising particularly sharply this year¹.

Food insecurity is defined as not having sufficient food to facilitate an active and healthy lifestyle². Food insecurity leads to poor diets, and leads to a range of poor physical³ and mental⁴ health problems. Pregnant women⁵, the elderly⁶, and children are particularly badly affected, with educational attainment harmed by food insecurity⁷.

Inflation (CPI) is at 10.1% as of August 2022, which is the highest level in 40 years⁸. The Bank of England is predicting that it will hit 13% within the next few months⁹. The new energy price cap will see average annual energy bills of £3,549, with extreme rises predicted for January and April¹⁰.

As inflation rises even further, millions more people will be pushed into food insecurity because they become unable to balance budgets. Large numbers of people will turn to food charities because they are accessible, cheap, and immediate. In a survey of 1,200 organisations that FareShare supplies with food, 75% said they have already seen an increase for demand in their services over the last year¹¹. As the cost of living crisis deepens, FareShare will see significantly higher demand from the organisations that it supplies. FareShare is asking for support to enable it to meet this rise in demand.

Millions Of Tonnes Of Food Go To Waste

Over 2 million tonnes of the food that goes to waste each year is still edible¹², which is enough for 1.3 billion meals¹³. There is a significant surplus as a result of over-production at a farm level. Food is also rejected for consumer sale for being the wrong shape or size, or packaging and processing errors. Food waste in total accounts for between 6-7% of the UK's total GHG emissions¹⁴.

77% of voters are concerned with food waste¹⁵. Polling conducted by NFP Synergy for FareShare demonstrates only 15% of the public believe the government is doing enough on food waste at present, and 50% strongly agree with proposals to ensure all unsold food is given to people in need¹⁶.

1. Food Foundation (2022). *Food Insecurity Tracking*. Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

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5. Bell Z, Scott S, Visram S, et al. Food insecurity and the nutritional health and well-being of women and children in high-income countries: protocol for a qualitative systematic review. *BMJ Open* 2021;11:e048180. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-048180

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7. Aceves Martins, M., Cruickshank, M., Fraser, C., & Brazzell, M. G. (2018). Child food insecurity in the UK: a rapid review. *Public Health Research*.

8. Office For National Statistics (2022). *Consumer price inflation, UK: July 2022*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/july2022>

9. Bank of England (2022). *Monetary Policy Report - August 2022*. Available at: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy-report/2022/august-2022>

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11. FareShare (2022). *Running on Empty: FareShare survey highlights dramatic impact cost of living crisis is having on the most vulnerable in society*. Available at: <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/running-on-empty-fareshare-survey-highlights-dramatic-impact-cost-of-living-crisis-is-having-on-the-most-vulnerable-in-society/>

12. 2 million tonnes a year is the top end best estimate of edible surplus food along the supply chain, including pre-farm gate and post-farm gate, not including household food waste. We have agreed we can use this statistic with WRAP, although this is not a figure they have published. It is theoretically possible that this food could be redistributed, although much of this food would need to be processed to become edible.

13. This meals calculation estimate is done by using 420g as a meal size, giving 2,381 meals from 1 tonne of surplus, which is the standard calculation recommended by WRAP. Guidance available at: <https://preprod.wrap.org.uk/system/files/2020-09/WRAP-Expressing%20redistributed%20food%20surplus%20as%20meal%20equivalents%20%28WRAP%20guidance%29.pdf>

14. Dumbleby, H. (2021, 15 July). *National Food Strategy*. Available at: <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org>

15. New Food (2017). *Food waste worries more than 75 per cent of Brits, new survey reveals*. Available at: <https://www.newfoodmagazine.com/news/44114/food-waste-concern-75-per-cent/>

16. NEF Consulting (2018). *The Wasted Opportunity*. Available at: https://fareshare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/J3503-Fareshare-Report_aw_no_crops.pdf

Using Surplus Food From Farms To Tackle Food Insecurity

Cost is the main barrier to delivering good-to-eat surplus food from farms to communities in need. FareShare's innovative Surplus with Purpose (SWP) scheme covers the cost for British farmers to pick, package, and transport their surplus food, which FareShare then delivers to charities. This makes it cost neutral for farmers to give their surplus food to those who need it. This food would otherwise rot in the ground, be used for anaerobic digestion or animal feed, or be sent to landfill. FareShare already works with nearly 100 farmers across the country to redistribute their surplus food.

FareShare received a £1.9 million grant in the financial year 2019-2020, as part of a £15 million government-led trail project to tackle food waste¹⁷. Since this funding ceased, FareShare has continued running the SWP scheme through its own charitably raised donations, alongside small grants from devolved governments. During the pandemic, FareShare also received two grants from the UK government totalling £26.5 million, which it used to buy food from the industry to ensure there was an adequate supply to the charity sector. FareShare's experience shows that buying food directly from industry is approximately three times more expensive than obtaining food through SWP.

Whilst senior government ministers have repeatedly said that the government supports FareShare, it is not currently funding the charity to redistribute surplus food.

What The Government Could Achieve

£25 million in government support a year would allow FareShare to rapidly expand its Surplus with Purpose scheme, and help to meet the increased demand triggered by the cost of living crisis with, with food from England's farms. The government could achieve:

- **100 million meals worth of food delivered to people in need.**
- **42,500 tonnes of surplus food redistributed from England's farms.**
- **£140 million in costs avoided, for example through saving money on NHS spending caused by food insecurity¹⁸.**
- **Prevention of the wasteful emissions of nearly 70,000 tonnes of CO₂e¹⁹.**

How The Government Could Pay For The Scheme

Dormant Assets Bill: The recently expanded Dormant Assets Bill contains £880 million for social and environmental initiatives across the UK²⁰. This proposal is an environmental initiative (preventing wasteful carbon emissions from food waste) with a social impact (redistributing surplus food).

Anaerobic Digestions Subsidies: £750 million in subsidies is given to the AD industry every year, which encourages farmers to send good-to-eat surplus food to biogas digesters instead of sending the food to people to eat, because it's cheaper²¹. Diverting just 3.3% of these subsidies to surplus food redistribution would pay for this scheme.

17. Defra (2018). Action to reduce food waste announced. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/action-to-reduce-food-waste-announced>
18. NEF Consulting (2018). *The Wasted Opportunity*. Available at: https://fareshare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/J3503-Fareshare-Report_aw_no_crops.pdf

19. The Carbon Trust (2021). *FareShare Footprint Methodology Report*. Available at: <https://fareshare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Fareshare-Methodology-report-Final.pdf>

20. House of Commons Library (2022). *Dormant Assets Act 2022*. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9390/>

21. The Independent (2021). *150 million meals a year thrown away rather than given to hungry because of £600m government subsidies*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/food-waste-subsidy-anaerobic-digestion-b1872768.html>

How This Fits The Government's Policy Framework

Recommended by EFRA Committee: This committee has recommended that Defra fund FareShare's SWP scheme twice in the last two years²².

Levelling Up: The charities that FareShare supplies tackle the causes, and not just the symptoms of poverty. 87% of the organisations who would receive food from FareShare offer one or more support services in addition to food services, such as mental health and well-being support, education and training, access to resources and debt and financial advice.

Targeted Support: 75% of the charities who FareShare supply provide food to families with children. Other groups are the elderly, people on low incomes, and single parents. A full breakdown of is available on request. FareShare reaches many of the most deprived communities in the UK.

Resilience: The UK Government understands the importance of the role that volunteer and community groups play in building resilience following the COVID-19 pandemic²³. FareShare's work has been identified as building community resilience through 'food ladders'²⁴.

Sustainable Development Goals: FareShare's work helps the government achieve SDGs 1,2,3, 8,10,12 and 13, including SDG 12.3, which is to "halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses"²⁵. FareShare works with businesses to promote the WRAP-led Courtauld Agreement and Food Waste Reduction Roadmap to enable businesses to reduce food waste in their own operations and their supply chain²⁶.

Net Zero Strategy: The government repeatedly commits to achieving SDG 12.3 in its Net Zero Strategy, and this policy would contribute to that target²⁷.

Environment Plan: This policy is in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan, which commits to taking "action to support the redistribution of unsold edible and nutritious surplus stock from food businesses to individuals in need"²⁸.

Government Food Strategy: In this strategy, the government commits to reducing waste in the food system, which this policy achieves²⁹.

Food Waste Hierarchy: FareShare's work is line with the government's Food Waste Hierarchy³⁰.

Support for Farmers: This proposal benefits English farmers in rural constituencies, who would be the recipients of the funding via FareShare's SWP scheme.

22. Efra Committee (2021). Conclusions and recommendations. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvf-ru/1156/115607.htm>

23. Cabinet Office (2021). *Public Response to Resilience Strategy: Call for Evidence*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-resilience-strategy-call-for-evidence/outcome/public-response-to-resilience-strategy-call-for-evidence>

24. The University of Sheffield (2022). *Moving beyond food banks*. Available at: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research/features/food-ladders>

25. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2015). *Sustainable Development Goals*. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/1231/en/>

26. WRAP (2022). *Food Waste Reduction Roadmap*. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/taking-action/food-drink/initiatives/food-waste-reduction-roadmap>

27. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2021). *Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>

28. Defra (2018). *25 Year Environment Plan*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

29. Defra (2022). *Government food strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy/government-food-strategy#food-security-and-sustainable-production>

30. Defra (2021). *Food and drink waste hierarchy: deal with surplus and waste*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-and-drink-waste-hierarchy-deal-with-surplus-and-waste/food-and-drink-waste-hierarchy-deal-with-surplus-and-waste>

The Long Term Plan: 'Surplus Subsidy'

Pre-farm gate food waste (post-harvest losses) accounts for a significant amount of the UK's total amount of food waste³¹. Estimates put it at nearly a third of total food waste, at 3.6 million tonnes/ This represents an enormous loss of energy used to grow these crops, and pointless emissions of greenhouse gases; estimated at just under 1% of the UK's total GHG emissions³².

However, accurate measurements of pre-farm gate (primary production) food waste and the resulting emissions are not currently made. This hinders the UK's ability to properly tackle the problem. Although Defra acknowledge there is a problem³³, the government has yet to publish a specific plan or method to measure and reduce pre-farmgate food waste. Instead the focus is on post-farmgate surplus through planned mandatory food waste reporting, which won't include primary production.

The UK, to fully achieve SDG 12.3, needs to measure and tackle pre-farmgate food waste in line with the government's food waste hierarchy³⁴, as set out in the guidance that the UK has adopted³⁵.

FareShare proposes that Defra incentivises farmers to measure and reduce their food waste. This should be done by introducing a 'Surplus Subsidy', which would be achieved by including the measurement and redistribution of surplus food as an additional standard in the Sustainable Farming Incentive (subject to a trial), one of the new post-Brexit Environmental Land Management Schemes.

The ability to do this is a genuine benefit of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. This would not have been possible under the Common Agricultural Policy. FareShare has a full briefing on the proposed Surplus Subsidy, available on request.

Potentially, if such a subsidy was introduced, FareShare would not need direct government funding to source food, because farmers would be incentivised to redistribute their food to FareShare and other food redistribution organisations as a result of the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

Until then, FareShare asks for £25 million annually to deliver 100 million meals a year to those in need.

To discuss this proposal, please get in touch with:

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31. WRAP (2019). *Food waste in primary production in the UK*. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/food-waste-primary-production-uk>

32. This figure is calculated from 'Table 10: Emissions associated with UK food waste' on page 57 of 'UK Food System GHG', published by WRAP in 2021. Available at: https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/WRAP-UK-Food-System-GHG-Emissions-Technical-Report_0.pdf

33. Defra (2021). *Consultation on the Waste Prevention Programme for England: Towards a Resource-Efficient Economy*. Available at: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/waste-prevention-programme-for-england-2021/>

34. Defra (2019). *Food and drink waste hierarchy: deal with surplus and waste*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-and-drink-waste-hierarchy-deal-with-surplus-and-waste/food-and-drink-waste-hierarchy-deal-with-surplus-and-waste>

35. Champions 12.3 (2017). *Guidance on Interpreting Sustainable Development Goal Target 12.3*. Available at: <https://champions123.org/publication/guidance-interpreting-sustainable-development-goal-target-123>