



WHERE'S THE FOOD?

Strengthening Communities Through
Surplus Food Redistribution



FareShare

fighting hunger,
tackling food waste

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FareShare UK has 34 warehouses across the country



Retailers Stores
Manufacturers Suppliers Distribution Centres



FareShare redistributes surplus food from the food industry...



...last year we provided enough food for nearly 134 million meals.



...with the help of an army of volunteers...



...for vulnerable people every week...



...to over 8,000 frontline charities and community groups...



...which turn it into nutritious meals...

Figure 1: How FareShare Works

Introduction: no good food should go to waste

Every year, food wasted in the UK adds millions of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere.¹

In the midst of a climate crisis, and with record levels of food insecurity, it doesn't make sense to be throwing away perfectly good food.

FareShare believes that with long-term ambition and quick, decisive action, the UK's food system can become a driver of positive social and environmental impact.

This Manifesto sets out a path for government, businesses, and charities to contribute to that change through redistributing good-to-eat surplus food.

The case for action

It is estimated that 25% of all food in the UK is wasted,² and that 4.6 million tonnes of this waste is edible food from the supply chain.³ Wasted food is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions worldwide: if it were a country it would be the third largest emitter behind the USA and China.⁴

Along with over 150 other countries at COP28, the UK has committed to including food systems in its climate action plans. We have also signed up to a target of halving food waste by 2030, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet the UK currently redistributes a lower percentage of our total surplus than other similar countries.⁵

Meanwhile, 11 million people in the UK are facing food insecurity, including 3 million children,⁶ with charities struggling to keep up.

There is a clear social benefit – and an environmental and economic imperative – for us to address food waste and redirect good surplus to people who can use it.

FareShare's Vision

This manifesto lays out measures to incentivise businesses to redistribute more of their surplus, proposals to support the redistribution sector and strengthen communities in the process, and a plan for a wider food system reset.

The proposals in this Manifesto were informed by international best practice and consultation with experts in the food industry, the redistribution sector, academia, and civil society.

By adopting these measures, we could decrease food waste and increase the amount of good food going to communities by tens of thousands of tonnes per year.

Investment in surplus food redistribution also pays back financially through the health and social impact of getting nutritious food to those who would otherwise struggle to access it. It supports the work of local organisations whose services strengthen communities and improve people's lives in so many ways.

Surplus food represents a massive environmental and social opportunity for the UK. By working together, government, the third sector, and industry can overcome the challenges to redistributing this surplus – and ensure more food reaches the people who need it.

Who we are

FareShare is the largest food charity in the UK, specialising in food surplus logistics to the wider charity and community sector.

We save good quality surplus food that would otherwise go to waste and redistribute it to charities across the UK. By doing this, we turn an environmental problem into a social good.

FareShare's food reaches over 8,000 local charities, which strengthen communities in every constituency in the UK. These charities range from schools, to gardening clubs, faith organisations, community centres, and everything in between. They provide a whole range of additional services that make a lasting difference, such as debt advice, mental health support, childcare, and education.

This work is powered via our network of 34 warehouses, over 26,000 volunteers and our industry-leading food redistribution app FareShare Go. Last year, we redistributed 56,000 tonnes of food – that's four meals every second – helping to build stronger communities in all four corners of the UK.⁷ In turn that prevented the needless waste of over 106,000 tonnes of CO₂e.⁸

Through over 8,000 charities and community groups, we reach nearly 1 million people, boosting their health and wellbeing in the process.

Figure 2: 1 in 6 struggle with food poverty



A word from FareShare's CEO

This year, the UK is set to see an astonishing 4.6 million tonnes of edible food go to waste – enough to feed everyone in the country three meals a day for almost two months.⁹ Our food waste accounts for 6-7% of our total greenhouse gas emissions. Globally, the emissions from food waste alone are four times that of the world's entire aviation industry.¹⁰

At the same time one in six people in this country (15%) are facing food insecurity.¹¹ One in four of the charities we work with tell us that they are not able to keep up with demand to support the people who use their services. They need more food.

Despite our environmental commitments under UN SDG 12.3 and the COP28 Emirates Declaration, the UK lags behind other countries in the percentage of our surplus food that we redistribute.¹² But there is an opportunity to work together to transform the way we deal with this problem.

In this Manifesto, we've set out the means to do it – through a combination of simple measures that will encourage more businesses to redistribute their surplus food, empower communities to make use of it, and contribute to progressive policymaking in our food system.

To be clear, we do not see surplus food as the solution to poverty. We recognise and endorse the work of others such as the Trussell Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and IFAN in their proposals for structural solutions to address poverty, which often drives people to the charity sector. We support measures to permanently improve the lives of people at risk of food insecurity and end the need for food banks once and for all.

While no one should be forced to rely on charitable food aid, we firmly believe in the positive power of the community sector for helping people, and the many wider benefits of bringing people together around food. We should build a future where people engage with charities by choice, not necessity.

Through supplying community groups who provide a wide range of services, we can achieve lasting benefits. Of the charities we supply food to, 90% provide wrap around services – addressing needs in education, isolation, homelessness, employability and a range of other social priorities. This strengthens communities and improves people's lives, creating a profound ripple effect that starts with bringing people together around good quality food.

Whilst preventing food waste should always be the top priority, when surplus food cannot be prevented we must make every effort to get it to people. Not only have we seen the social impact that this has, but making good use of food that cannot be sold is an environmental necessity. By preventing this food from going to waste we also prevent vital resources – on average, two tonnes of CO₂e and 2.66 million litres of water per tonne of food¹³ – from being used in vain.

We have achievable proposals that can improve lives and promote a more sustainable food system. These changes do not cost the earth. They are backed by experts across the sector – by businesses, charities and food redistribution organisations alike.

But we all need support from those with the power to act.

Our next government has that power. As a general election nears, political parties must grasp this challenge, and commit to the policies that will help close the gap between the UK's surplus food and those who need it.

George Wright
FareShare CEO



WHERE'S THE FOOD? Strengthening communities through surplus food Redistribution

Every year an estimated 4.6 million tonnes of edible food goes to waste in the UK, harming the environment while people could make good use of it.

The Government has acknowledged the problem and has taken some welcome steps towards tackling it. However much more is needed if we are to deal with the challenges of wasted food and enact lasting solutions.

The Government should shape to encourage businesses to redirect their surplus to people and bring the UK's food system in line with Government's own guidance on food waste.¹⁴

We need to build on the success of the recently announced £15 million 'Tackling Food Surplus at the Farm Gate Fund', by supporting those who are working to redistribute unpreventable surplus food to the people who need it most. This effort must be guided by a clear long-term vision.

There are three key areas where the government can make a difference.



1

Incentivise businesses to redistribute more surplus food

1.1 Pilot a surplus subsidy for farmers

Expand the budget for Environmental Land Management Schemes to allow surplus food redistribution to be classed as a 'public good' – removing a financial barrier that too often means farmers are unable to redistribute their surplus.

1.2 Restructure corporate tax regimes

Following the majority of G20 countries, recognise the social value of surplus food redistribution by allowing businesses to offset the cost of food donations and the associated logistics in a similar manner to how cash donations are treated.

1.3 Make food waste reporting mandatory

Implement plans to require medium and large businesses to report their food waste in a central database, with fines for non-compliance going to support surplus food redistribution charities

1.4 Clarify legal protections for 'Good Samaritans'

Develop clear guidance to support businesses that donate surplus food in good faith, so they can understand how to donate food in a safe way.



2

Strengthen communities by supporting the redistribution sector

2.1 Provide grant support for surplus redistribution

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of £15 million for farm level redistribution, the government should invest £25 million per year in dedicated ring-fenced funding, to ensure food gets to the people who need it.

2.2 Harness technology to improve cross-sector collaboration

The government should collaborate with technology companies, redistribution organisations, and the food industry to develop a nationwide digital platform that facilitates cross-sector collaboration, reduces inefficiencies, and maximises the redistribution of surplus food.

2.3 Expand apprenticeships to improve skills

Introduce more flexibility to the Apprenticeship Levy, so it can be used helping to fill skills gaps in the food redistribution sector and wider food supply chain, and enable more people to get started in the workplace.



3

Make Surplus Food Part of a Wider Food System Reset

3.1 Develop a UK-wide plan to end the need for charitable food aid

Recognise that food banks and food aid are not a lasting solution to food insecurity or poverty, and work to develop a plan that would end the need for charitable food aid.

3.2 Deliver a comprehensive national food strategy

The government must provide vision, leadership, and consistency in food policy, recognising the importance of the food system to the UK's climate goals and the key role of reducing waste and redistributing unavoidable surplus.

3.3 Set up a supply chain taskforce

Put in place a taskforce to review supply chain needs across the food sector, making it stronger and more resilient to shocks, while ensuring it is environmentally sustainable and delivers maximum social value.

3.4 Support local authorities and Metro Mayors

Provide funding, resources and guidance for local authorities and Metro Mayors, enabling them to integrate the national food strategy into local plans.



Action plan for the government

All of the proposals in this Manifesto should be easily achievable for the Government. Even in a time of financial constraints, these proposals are not only affordable, but they provide significant return on investment through social, environmental, and economic impact.

Research shows that for every £1 invested in surplus food redistribution via FareShare, nearly £6 is generated in social return on investment for the UK. To realise the benefits, there are key actions that must be taken across the next five years, with some requiring more urgent attention.

In the first 100 days....

- Commit to extending ring-fenced grant support to ensure surplus food from farms can be redistributed to people.
- Design a pilot scheme to test corporate tax amendments encouraging businesses with surplus food to donate it to food redistribution charities.
- Set up a central database to enable mandatory food waste reporting to begin.
- Produce clear legal guidance to support businesses wishing to donate food they cannot sell.
- Expand the rules on apprenticeships to address skills shortages and allow more people to be trained in key roles across the food supply chain.

In the first parliament...

- Pilot a subsidy under the Environmental Land Management Schemes to support farmers who donate surplus food for redistribution and assess the scheme's suitability for a wider roll-out.
- Begin a programme of work to create an integrated digital platform for the food sector to co-ordinate surplus food redistribution efforts.
- Draw up a national plan of action to tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity, aimed at preventing the need for charitable food aid in the future.

Within a five-year term...

- Support the completion of a portal to enable the food industry and redistribution organisations to use their collective resources in the most effective way.
- Deliver a national food strategy that includes surplus food redistribution amongst efforts to reduce waste and encourages adherence to the food waste hierarchy, with the goal of achieving UN SDG 12.3, and halving food waste throughout the entire food system.



Figure 3: FareShare's social return on investment

At FareShare, we work with incredible partners who recognise the value of surplus food, and who make a huge impact by redistributing unsold food through our network.

But we are still seeing an estimated 4.6 million tonnes of edible food wasted each year across the supply chain.

Prevention of food waste must be the top priority and FareShare supports initiatives to this end, such as the Target-Measure-Act approach recommended by the UN¹⁵ and the Courtauld Commitment spearheaded by WRAP.¹⁶ However, evidence shows that voluntary progress in this area is slowing, and showing signs of regressing, with food waste volumes actually increasing since 2018.¹⁷

The Government should not rely on a purely voluntary approach and must introduce further policy to ensure that when food surplus cannot be prevented, businesses are able to do everything possible to minimise its negative environmental impact and maximise its social value. It's clear that getting that food to people is the best way to achieve this.

Current UK policies aimed at reducing food waste rely on the goodwill of businesses actively choosing to redistribute their surplus. We know that more businesses want to play their part. Yet too often, faced with the costs of redistribution and uncertainties about the legal ramifications, many are put off. Indeed, in some cases food businesses are being paid to put their good, edible surplus food into biogas digesters.¹⁸

Incentives that recognise surplus food redistribution as the most sustainable option, together with new reporting requirements, and better guidance and support, could make a major impact on efforts to reduce food waste throughout the sector. In countries with incentives to redistribute surplus, like France, Spain and the USA, a higher percentage of their surplus food reaches people who need it – we now need to see this model adopted in the UK.¹⁹



1.1 Pilot a surplus subsidy for farmers

It's estimated that nearly 3 million tonnes of edible food waste, almost a third of the UK's supply chain total, happens before it leaves the farm gate.²⁰ WRAP estimates that some 360,000 tonnes of this could be redistributed each year - enough to provide over 850 million meals.²¹

Statutory guidance from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) sets out a clear hierarchy of approaches for dealing with surplus or waste food and drink. The priority is, rightly, to prevent such waste in the first place. But where this is not possible, the guidance clearly shows the next best option is to redistribute surplus food to charities and other organisations who can ensure it reaches people who need it.

Currently, there are few incentives for farmers to donate their surplus food for redistribution and cost is a significant barrier.



A survey of farmers carried out amongst Farmers Weekly readers showed that less than 20% distributed their excess food to charities.²³ Meanwhile 40% sent food to be used as animal feed, with a similar number rotavating surplus crops back into the ground. Yet this same survey showed that if all the options were cost-free, nearly half would choose to distribute their surplus food to charities.

Farmers stand ready to play their part. But they are facing well-documented financial pressures, and they need to know that doing so will not leave them out of pocket.

Ongoing post-Brexit changes to the UK's farming subsidies offer an opportunity to address this challenge. Defra's new Environmental Land Management Schemes aim to make farming more sustainable – creating incentives for good land management and environmental stewardship, using the principle of 'public money for public goods'.²⁴

Under this model, the redistribution of surplus food that cannot be sold could be classed as a public good, based on its environmental and social impact. Expanding the payments made under the Sustainable Farming Incentive would allow farmers to cover the costs of harvesting, preparing, packaging, processing and distributing this food.

This should not replace other payments already being used to support farmers through the scheme. But adding this incentive – set at a fair level to guard against overproduction of surplus food – would provide the financial security that farmers need to be able to redistribute their surplus in the most ecologically sound way. This would ensure that sustainable food production is put at the heart of the Environmental Land Management Schemes.

What would it cost?

Surplus food production is affected by a range of factors including weather conditions and fluctuations in consumer demand. This means that exact costs would vary by year – but if implemented in full, the measure would be expected to average just £47 million per year, as calculated for FareShare by the Andersons Centre.²⁵ This would be less than 0.2% of the current £2.4 billion budget for farming schemes.

Before committing to widescale implementation, we are calling on the government to undertake a small trial of the scheme, with the comparatively modest cost of £3 million.

The current corporate tax regime disincentivises food businesses from donating their surplus, distorting the food waste hierarchy. Inconsistencies make anaerobic digestion (AD) more financially attractive than donating surplus to charities.²⁶

This is at odds with Defra’s UK Food Waste Hierarchy, which prioritises redistributing surplus food to people, while listing AD under ‘Recycling’ as the fifth of eight options for dealing with waste.

Under enhanced capital allowances schemes (ECAs), businesses can offset 100% of the costs of certain energy-saving technologies, including AD, against their tax bill.²⁷

In contrast, businesses who choose to donate their surplus food must shoulder the costs of harvesting, packaging, storing and transporting it, making this a less appealing option.

The ECAs have the laudable aim of reducing businesses’ environmental impact. But in effect, they create a financial incentive to send food that could be eaten to be incinerated for biofuels instead.

In addition, many AD companies are now paying farmers for their crops, a practice known as ‘negative gate fees’. This means farmers are sometimes selling edible food to AD companies, as well as growing crops specifically for AD.²⁸

This imbalance must be addressed, and a small amendment to the UK Corporation Tax Act could help to achieve this.

Currently, the Act offers businesses that donate money, equipment, or trading stock to charity a small amount of tax relief. However, there are no specific tax deductions or credits for donating food. We propose an amendment to the Act that would reward businesses that choose to donate their surplus food to charities.²⁹

There are international examples to draw on when designing such an amendment, with over two-thirds of countries investigated by the Global Food Donation Policy Atlas at Harvard Law School having policies to this effect.³⁰ For example, in the USA, businesses can offset food donations and follow a clear formula to determine fair market value for the items they donate.³¹ This means businesses are fairly compensated, while the total amount they can offset is capped to guard against abuses.

The Government should evaluate how such a policy should be implemented for business of differing sizes.

This small amendment would help to level the playing field, ensuring businesses that donate, rather than incinerate, their surplus food are not penalised financially for doing so.



Figure 4: The UK’s food waste hierarchy (simplified)

What would it cost?

Work is ongoing to design a scheme that would best fit the UK.

Our preliminary estimations indicate that, if the UK were to adopt a similar policy to the USA, the cost to the Exchequer to redistribute an additional 375,000 tonnes of surplus food would be £55 million. This would be the equivalent of approximately 900 million meals. Our most recent evaluation demonstrates that FareShare generates an average value of over £4,000 per tonne of food redistributed through reduced costs in areas such as health and welfare. If even half of this value were maintained as distribution scaled up, the resulting social return on investment would be over £700 million, approximately £14 for every £1 invested by the Government into this policy.

1.3 Implement mandatory food waste reporting

The government must implement mandatory food waste reporting, following advice from the food industry and environmental scientists – and in line with long-promised action from Defra.

A potential scheme for large and medium-sized businesses to report on their food surplus and food waste was first announced six years ago.³² But since then, there has been little progress.

In 2022, there was an overwhelmingly positive response to Defra’s consultation on the plans. Along with emphatic backing – with 99% of respondents supporting the scheme – there was strong support across the food industry, with four in five retailers, nearly three quarters of hospitality services and two thirds of farmers in favour.³³

But conflicting announcements from Ministers have led to uncertainty about its future, and to date there has been no commitment to introduce mandatory reporting.

While an existing voluntary scheme is delivering important benefits, data from 2021 showed just 261 food companies had joined, with 60% of major food businesses yet to take part.³⁴

We know that reporting works. WRAP’s latest progress update revealed that retailers who were part of the scheme had reduced their food waste by 8% between 2018 and 2022, preventing 60,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.³⁵

The UK has made a commitment under UN SDG 12.3 to halve its food waste by 2030. Yet progress is slowing, and the UK’s measurement of this progress does not currently include pre-farm gate surplus food, contrary to its pledge as a member of the Champions 12.3 coalition.³⁶ At COP28, the UK committed to including food systems in its climate action plans, and this measure would be a step towards meeting that commitment.

Voluntary reporting measures alone are not producing results quickly enough. A mandatory scheme, along with the wider measures outlined in this manifesto, would place the UK on a clearer path to meeting its environmental goals.



What would it cost?

Defra has calculated this proposal to be cost-neutral, with the £318,000 annual cost of running the scheme fully covered by registration fees.

What’s more, its impact assessment shows that a mere 0.25% reduction in food waste would balance out the costs of the scheme for companies, with each £1 invested by businesses generating a £14 return, as reported by Defra.^{37,38}

While many businesses have embraced the opportunity to donate their surplus food for people to eat, some have voiced concerns about the potential legal implications of doing so. Food safety laws still apply when food is donated, and a perception that businesses could be open to legal action may be a barrier for those who would otherwise donate their surplus.³⁹

This has led to calls for a 'Good Samaritan' law to protect organisations that donate food in good faith. Similar laws exist in some countries, such as the USA and Italy – but so far there is limited evidence about whether they encourage more businesses to donate their surplus. Others argue that existing laws may be enough to protect organisations that are acting for social good.⁴⁰

Current food standards are governed by a range of different laws and regulations, and there is some disagreement about how they would be interpreted in a case involving donated food. For example:

- Under the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food Safety Hygiene (England) Regulations, business owners who do not take reasonable precautions to ensure food is safe can be fined or held criminally liable.
- The Consumer Protection Act 1987 imposes 'strict liability' for harm when food producers' and suppliers' goods are defective – even if they have taken reasonable precautions – although some defences may apply.
- However, other laws require courts to take a wider context into account, including whether businesses were acting for the benefit of society when considering claims for negligence.

Our experience and consultation ahead of this manifesto suggests that confusion over the current state of affairs may be enough to prevent businesses from committing to donate surplus food that is fit to eat.

As a first step, the cabinet should task the appropriate government bodies, alongside relevant sector and legal stakeholders, with producing clear, up to date guidance. By helping businesses understand their responsibilities and how to protect themselves, this guidance could be an important tool for encouraging surplus food donations and reducing waste.



What would it cost?

This task could be undertaken within the normal remit of the Government's work, requiring no new funding.

The more than 8,000 frontline charities and community organisations we work with are rooted in communities across the UK. Operating in nearly every constituency, they benefit from FareShare's efficient supply chain, and the communities in which they operate gain value from the food as well as the care, companionship, and support that these groups foster. Redistributing surplus food supports these organisations in their efforts to build more sustainable, resilient, and caring communities.

They are not only addressing an immediate practical need for food but often provide routes into employment, advice, social connection, and other critical wrap around support for people facing a range of complex needs. These groups strengthen and enrich the social fabric of British society. FareShare's work helps fuel these improvements to health and wellbeing, which have long-term benefits to the economy. Every £1 spent redistributing surplus food through FareShare provides £5.72 in social value.⁴¹

The work they do relies on an effective redistribution sector that can get surplus food to those who can make use of it. But there is an urgent need to improve the way this supply chain works, making it more effective and efficient.

By supporting farmers to redistribute their surplus, enabling redistribution organisations to collaborate and learn from each other, and allowing more people to develop vital skills needed within the sector, we can further strengthen our communities.



The UK lags behind other countries when it comes to the percentage of total surplus that we redistribute: the USA redistributes three times more, while France and Spain manage twice as much.⁴² All three governments provide support for food redistribution organisations, along with other measures outlined in this Manifesto. If we are to replicate their success, the UK government must enshrine similar measures.

In February 2024, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced £15 million in funding for redistributing edible surplus farm produce. The move followed a multi-year campaign by FareShare and London partners The Felix Project, which gained cross-party, public and industry support.^{43,44}

However, while this funding is extremely welcome, it is a one-off commitment. To ensure continuity for this vital work, the government should increase, extend, and protect this grant support.

We already have a model for success to build on. In 2019-20 the £15 million Defra Food Waste Fund, a pilot designed to help with the cost of harvesting, storing and transporting food that would otherwise have been wasted, was enormously successful in achieving its aims.

As part of this pilot, FareShare put a £1.9 million grant to use for our Surplus with Purpose scheme, delivering 4,447 tonnes of food to charities across the UK. The scheme was particularly successful at preventing fresh fruit and vegetables from going to waste, not only reducing emissions but helping communities across the country access nutritious, healthy food.⁴⁵

The trial enabled us to redistribute enough food to supply 10.5 million meals to people who needed them. Thanks to FareShare's incredible supporters, the Surplus with Purpose scheme has so far been able to continue, with self-raised funding of approximately £3 million a year.

Ring-fenced government funding for a sector-wide programme like this would ensure the long-term sustainability of these schemes. Charities across the surplus food redistribution sector are already collaborating, which will ensure funds are put to use within a collective sourcing strategy that will prevent overlap and streamline processes. We believe this approach will provide the government with the best value for money while delivering the most food to those in need.

Beyond the recently announced £15 million in funding, £25 million a year would enable surplus food redistribution organisations to deliver 42,500 tonnes of surplus food – enough to provide 100 million meals – to communities in need across the country. And with the infrastructure, knowhow and relationships with food businesses and charities already in place, we could deliver quickly and scale over time, with the ultimate aim of redistributing all unpreventable farm level surplus.

There is clear economic and social value to be gained from this policy. In areas of high deprivation, where the majority of FareShare's charities operate, fresh fruit and vegetables can be particularly hard to access.⁴⁶ FareShare's proven ability to get fresh, healthy food to where it is needed most leads to significant improvements in health, and savings of over £50 million for the NHS and other key services.⁴⁷

Through the charities and community groups who put this food to use, each extra meal can mean a life transformed – whether it's an isolated older person needing one less trip to the GP, or someone facing addiction being able to seek help. This is a policy with popular support: 88% of people believe surplus food should be donated and 78% think the Government should do more to help charities access food.⁴⁸

What would it cost?

FareShare is calling for £25m per year for this scheme.

Reduced costs in areas such as health, welfare and justice add up to a return on investment for taxpayers at an average of over £4,000 per tonne of food redistributed.⁴⁹

With more people in the UK facing food insecurity, there are now many organisations working to provide surplus food to people who urgently need it. These organisations, which include food banks, charities, community groups, and app developers, are doing excellent work. In 2022, they collectively helped increase the amount of surplus food that was redistributed by 27% from the previous year.

Yet competition and overlap create inefficiencies, while many charities are struggling to access the food they need to be able to meet demand. There is a clear need for a more strategic approach, and there is support across the sector for a more joined-up, collaborative way of working.

The USA provides a potential example: the Feeding America network is able to map sources of surplus food across the country against local food pantries and other community groups who can put that food to use. These organisations are allocated food according to their needs, and are able request specific types of food, based on the local need and the ability to transport and store it. This co-ordinated approach helps to reduce further food waste within the redistribution sector empowers charities to provide their communities with the food they need.

The government should work with NGOs, the food industry and redistribution organisations to create an integrated platform to co-ordinate the redistribution of surplus food that is fit to eat. This should:

- Act as a portal for community organisations and charities across the UK to redistribute food that can no longer be sold – including food from retailers, manufacturers, distribution centres and farms – enabling surplus to be redistributed in the most efficient way.
- Co-ordinate logistics including food safety, distribution, warehouse management and allocation of food to charities.
- Include a best practice hub for organisations to share lessons learned and exchange ideas, supporting the sector to continually improve.



What would it cost?

Conversations about feasibility and costs are at an early stage between technology companies, food businesses, and the charity sector.

The Government should be actively involved in these discussions and be a partner on this project. In doing so, the Government can provide legitimacy and strategic direction for this ambitious and important initiative, ensuring buy-in from key players in the food and technology industries. This has the potential to entirely transform the surplus food redistribution sector's ability to get food that would otherwise be wasted to the people who can use it.

The challenges of skills shortages in the UK's food supply chain are well-known. It is less well understood that these shortages also compound the problem of food waste by creating bottlenecks and stoppages in the supply chain.^{50,51,52}

Businesses are losing out on £1.1 billion a year of unspent Apprenticeship Levy funds – money that companies are often unable to use because of inflexible apprenticeship rules.⁵³

Changes to the Apprenticeship Levy could not only help fill these gaps, but would offer more people the support and training needed to get started in the workplace.

We propose that the Government could expand the scheme by:

1 Allowing businesses to use Levy funds to cover apprentices' wages, or to backfill their roles while apprentices are away on off-site training. Inability to use the Levy to cover these costs poses a barrier when it comes to involving charities like FareShare in apprenticeship schemes. Despite businesses being willing to forge such partnerships, charities are prevented from offering placements without incurring additional costs. This change is backed by the British Retail Consortium and the public services union UNISON.^{54,55}

2 Enabling Levy funds to be used for training schemes that cover a wider range of skill levels. This should include high quality pre-employment courses for people who are not yet ready to take on a full apprenticeship, offering them a foot in the door.

3 Including apprenticeships with shorter training periods as part of the scheme, recognising the diverse nature of potential roles. As an example, the HGV industry has a driver shortage of thousands, but the 8-10 week training period limits companies' ability to use apprenticeship funds to fill those gaps.^{56,57}

Examples from Employability at FareShare

At FareShare, our employability programmes have shown that shorter, flexible schemes can be hugely successful at helping people into work and plugging skills gaps in areas of high need. With over 50 different employability programmes across 18 locations, FareShare and its partners support over 1,000⁵⁸ people across the FareShare network every year. The projects are tailored to support the needs of each local community. For example, the New Horizons programme at FareShare Merseyside supports a wide range of people through accredited learning, 1-2-1 coaching, wellbeing support and practical on-site work experience. This approach has enabled over 60% of participants to move on into secure employment or formal education.⁵⁹


The adaptability of our schemes is crucial to reaching people who have not yet found success in traditional routes to employment. Our work has shown the potential that can be unlocked with greater flexibility, an approach that our suggested changes to the Apprenticeship Levy would build on.

Updating the Apprenticeship Levy would not only prevent funds from being lost but would mean more opportunities for people to get into skilled employment. For example, the British Retail Consortium estimates that its members could have offered 12,000 more apprenticeships in 2023 alone under a reformed scheme.⁶⁰

This change would also provide added social value for the surplus food redistribution sector. Each additional apprenticeship role provides nearly 1,500 hours of support a year to frontline operations at organisations like FareShare.⁶¹ And crucially, by plugging skills gaps across the food supply chain, apprenticeship schemes could play an important role in reducing food waste.

What would it cost?

This proposal would be cost-neutral: between May 2019 and March 2022 an estimated £3.3 billion that businesses had paid into the Apprenticeship Levy scheme went unspent due to the current system's inflexibility.⁶² Reform would simply allow businesses to put these funds to the use for the purposes for which they were intended.

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, seen from the side, feeding a baby in a high chair. The baby is looking towards the camera. The background shows a kitchen with a microwave and a stove. The entire image has a purple tint.

For too long, the problem of food waste in the UK has been dealt with in a piecemeal way. The food sector is vast and complex, which has led to a situation where solutions created for one part of the system are sometimes contradicted or undermined by policies governing another. There is a need for these policies to be joined up, with a clear long-term strategy underpinning them.

The cost of living crisis has laid bare the urgent need to tackle the underlying drivers of food insecurity and poverty. While charitable food aid is providing vital support to those in crisis today, it must not be seen as a long-term solution.

If we are to tackle these problems in a sustainable way that creates lasting change, we need robust policies to support this effort, and a long-term strategy to guide it. Policies that cover the many different elements of the system need to be joined up – from the way land is used, to the way our supply chain works, through to our approach to food insecurity and the wider delivery of surplus food to local communities.

Many people in the sector are working hard to reduce food waste, support those in need and become more sustainable. The government must work with the sector to develop the holistic vision and long-term policies that will support them.

Severe food insecurity in the UK is near record levels. The proliferation of food banks and other charitable food aid is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as the UK.

FareShare and its network have a unique reach and while people struggle to afford food, we will always continue to support affected communities. This model helps to both meet people's immediate need for food and support them to make the most of their resources, while also providing wrap around support to help with other issues they may be facing.

However, the redistribution of surplus food is not a lasting solution to food insecurity, as it does not address the economic and structural factors behind poverty. The government must strike a balance in preventing the institutionalisation of the food bank model whilst maintaining and nurturing the social benefits that the community sector brings through food.

People should engage with the charitable food sector through choice, not necessity. The UK Government should:

- Develop a UK-wide plan to end the need for food banks and other forms of charitable food aid. This should build on the plan recently published by the Scottish Government that encompasses action to prevent emergency situations, as well to ensure effective and dignified responses to food insecurity.
- Pilot and embed local 'cash first' approaches as part of this plan, working with food redistribution charities, and front-line advice and anti-poverty organisations.
- Consider reforms to social security payments such as an Essentials Guarantee as outlined by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Trussell Trust.⁶³
- Continue to support a wide range of community food settings, recognising their broader contribution to health and wellbeing, and their ability to combat social isolation and meet specific community needs.



What would it cost?

Developing a UK-wide plan could cost from £70,000 for an internal government team over six months, to £390,000 for an external team working for over a year. To enact the ideas set out in the Scottish plan, it would cost £498 million per year, with £197 million of that going to store cards or cash alternatives to emergency food parcels. This cost could reduce if other measures to address poverty are successful. An Essentials Guarantee would cost the UK Treasury £19 billion a year.⁶⁴

While there have been recent attempts to produce a national food strategy, the role of surplus food redistribution has so far been overlooked in this discussion.

Our food system touches so many parts of our economy and our society that such a strategy must be wide-ranging. Setting out a comprehensive vision covering the entire food chain, from field to fork and beyond, is not an easy feat. This is precisely the reason that any strategy must be ambitious and must include all parts of the food system, including surplus food redistribution.

The 2021 National Food Strategy, commissioned by Defra and led by Henry Dimbleby, included the environmental impact of food production and the challenges of food security within its terms of reference. However, the resulting recommendations included little focus on the role of surplus food redistribution in tackling these issues.⁶⁵

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan highlights the need for surplus food redistribution. Defra's guidance on dealing with surplus food likewise recognises the important role of redistributing food that is still fit to eat.⁶⁶ It's vital that our National Food Strategy is aligned with these and other policy documents.

Recent events, including global instability, the changing climate and the rising cost of living only serve to emphasise the need for a fully joined-up, comprehensive national food strategy to be in place.

We urge the government to revisit this work, updating its strategy to be more ambitious, bringing together policy in related areas and including a clear role for surplus food redistribution.



What would it cost?

This work would form part of the Government's day-to-day business, requiring no extra funding.

In recent years, the UK has seen a series of shocks to its food supply chain, threatening the country's food security. Energy and labour supplies are both key to a healthy food supply chain, but since 2020 disruption from Brexit, Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine have all fuelled inflation, soaring food prices and shortages of certain foods.

We face further risks. In particular, the impact of the climate crisis means the world is already dealing with more frequent and extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts and floods, all of which threaten food production.

Meanwhile, many farmers are struggling to make ends meet, prompting some to leave the sector altogether and use their land for other purposes. For each farm lost, the country becomes ever more reliant on imported food.

There is real concern that more turbulence could lead to further food shortages and blockages in the supply chain, stifling economic growth and adding to the problem of food waste.

FareShare has a proven track record of response to crisis, notably during the Covid-19 pandemic. As demand for our services soared, we were able to rapidly scale up our work and deliver food to the community sector as part of the Government's Covid-19 emergency response. We doubled the amount of food we redistributed even in the face of extra logistical challenges.⁶⁷

There were clear lessons to be learned from this period. FareShare's ability to mount an effective response depended on our strong, pre-existing relationships with central and local government, the food industry, and hyper-local charities who understood their communities' specific needs.

Covid-19 showed that joined-up working is vital, and the Government must support the sector to allow it to withstand future crises.

It's clear that politicians are aware of the dangers. To date, we have seen multiple parliamentary inquiries focusing on food security and the sustainability of our farming sector.⁶⁸ We now need urgent action to stabilise the UK's food supply chain and protect the country from future challenges.

The government can achieve this by setting up a supply chain taskforce, charged with reviewing the urgent needs of key sectors including food. This taskforce would help to build a more sustainable, resilient food system, while ensuring every link in the chain works to achieve net zero emissions targets and maximum social value.

With a focus on our domestic supply chain, the taskforce should also ensure that the UK has a healthy agricultural system where food grown in the country is used to feed people. This should include an efficient way of getting surplus food to charities – reducing waste and strengthening the communities those charities serve in the process.

Such an initiative would command support from across the sector: farmers, manufacturers, and retailers alike all back measures to strengthen the food supply chain.⁶⁹ Crucially, it would result in a food system in the UK that is fairer, greener, supports local communities, and is resilient to future shocks.

What would it cost?

This should be led by the Cabinet Office. It would fall under the remit of business as usual and would not require additional funding.

Local authorities and Metro Mayors are key for connecting national policy with local delivery that addresses the specific needs of the UK's varied regions and communities. If they are to deliver the National Food Strategy in a cohesive way, the government must provide the resources and guidance they need to implement it in their local contexts. This should include:

- **Strategically allocated funding**, with a targeted approach that takes the unique needs of each region into account. Funding should allow authorities to support infrastructure development – such as food processing facilities and distribution networks – and to offer grants for ‘first of a kind’ projects on food waste, food security and healthy eating.

For example, local and regional governments can help tackle food waste and food poverty by partnering with local charities to redistribute surplus food in their communities. For example, in London the Felix Project is working with local government to redistribute an extra 6.9 million extra meals to families with children during the school holidays.

- **Knowledge sharing** via an online portal that offers local authorities and Metro Mayors access to the latest research and best practice. This should be backed up with training opportunities to help build the skills needed to successfully deliver initiatives.
- **A collaborative network** to enable local authorities across regions and across the country to work together on shared challenges and projects. This should also support informal partnerships across the sector, including with charities, community groups, and the farming and food industry.
- **Customised local food strategies**, with local authorities encouraged to develop an approach that best fits their area. This must go hand in hand with community engagement, with local residents involved in setting priorities, and developing and implementing strategies to ensure they are effective and sustainable for the long term.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning**, with a framework set up to track progress against the National Food Strategy's public health, environmental and economic goals. Feedback should be targeted, supporting the sector to continue learning and improving.

To support this work, the Government should set up a cross-sector national steering group with representatives from central and local government, as well as public health bodies, charities, the food industry, and academia. This group should be tasked with helping oversee, facilitate, and co-ordinate progress.

What would it cost?

Based on previous successful projects with local governments, £23 million per year in funding would have a significant positive impact through local authorities in communities up and down the country.

The cross-sector national steering group would require no additional funding.



Conclusion

There is broad agreement that food waste is a serious problem in the UK – and that redirecting surplus food to the people who most need it is the best solution when surplus cannot be prevented. Yet today, too much of that surplus still goes to waste. It is within our means as a nation to rise to this challenge and radically change the way we deal with surplus food. With the right policies in place, the default option will be to get all unpreventable surplus food to the communities who can do so much good with it.

The transformation must be system-wide. It will include operational changes, technical policy measures and financial incentives designed to rebalance the way we deal with surplus food in line with wider environmental policies and social priorities. These policies cannot be implemented by one organisation alone, nor should they be tackled in isolation. A national, co-ordinated effort is needed.

We believe this vision can be achieved with government, industry, and the charity sector working together. We can use these policies to build on the recently announced £15 million in funding and demonstrate global leadership in this space. We hope this Manifesto will act as a catalyst for this effort.

At FareShare, we are committed to working with the government to transform the future of surplus food redistribution. We welcome the chance to discuss these proposals, and the actions needed to make them a reality. We are looking forward to continuing to engage with government, media, academic and industry stakeholders.

We are hugely grateful to all those in the sector who fed into the consultation that helped to develop these proposals – including local authorities, businesses, trade organisations, charities and academics. And we owe a debt of gratitude to the incredible supporters, volunteers, and partner organisations who make our work possible every day.

Together, we can bring to life our vision of a country where no good food goes to waste.

For more information on this Manifesto, contact publicaffairs@fareshare.org.uk





Appendix 1 – Surplus food volumes

Global food waste

Across the world a staggering 1.3 billion tonnes of food goes to waste each year – that’s one-third of all food produced for human consumption.⁷⁰

Not only does this food waste account for 10% of all carbon emissions globally – four times that of the world’s entire aviation industry⁷¹ – but it would be enough to feed every person on the planet one meal each day for more than a year.

Food waste occurs throughout the supply chain and in people’s homes, with the balance of where this waste happens varying from country to country.

Surplus food in the UK

Here in the UK, a quarter of all food grown is never eaten, with this wasted harvest making up around 7% of our total greenhouse gas emissions.⁷² Across our supply chain, 4.6 million tonnes of edible food are wasted each year – the equivalent of 10 billion meals, enough to feed everyone in the country three meals a day for seven weeks.

This waste is made up of:⁷³

- 2.9 million tonnes from UK farms
- 0.8 million tonnes from the hospitality sector
- 0.7 million tonnes from the manufacturing sector
- 0.2 million tonnes from the retail sector

An estimated 500,000 tonnes of surplus food from across the supply chain could be suitable for redistribution for people to eat.⁷⁴

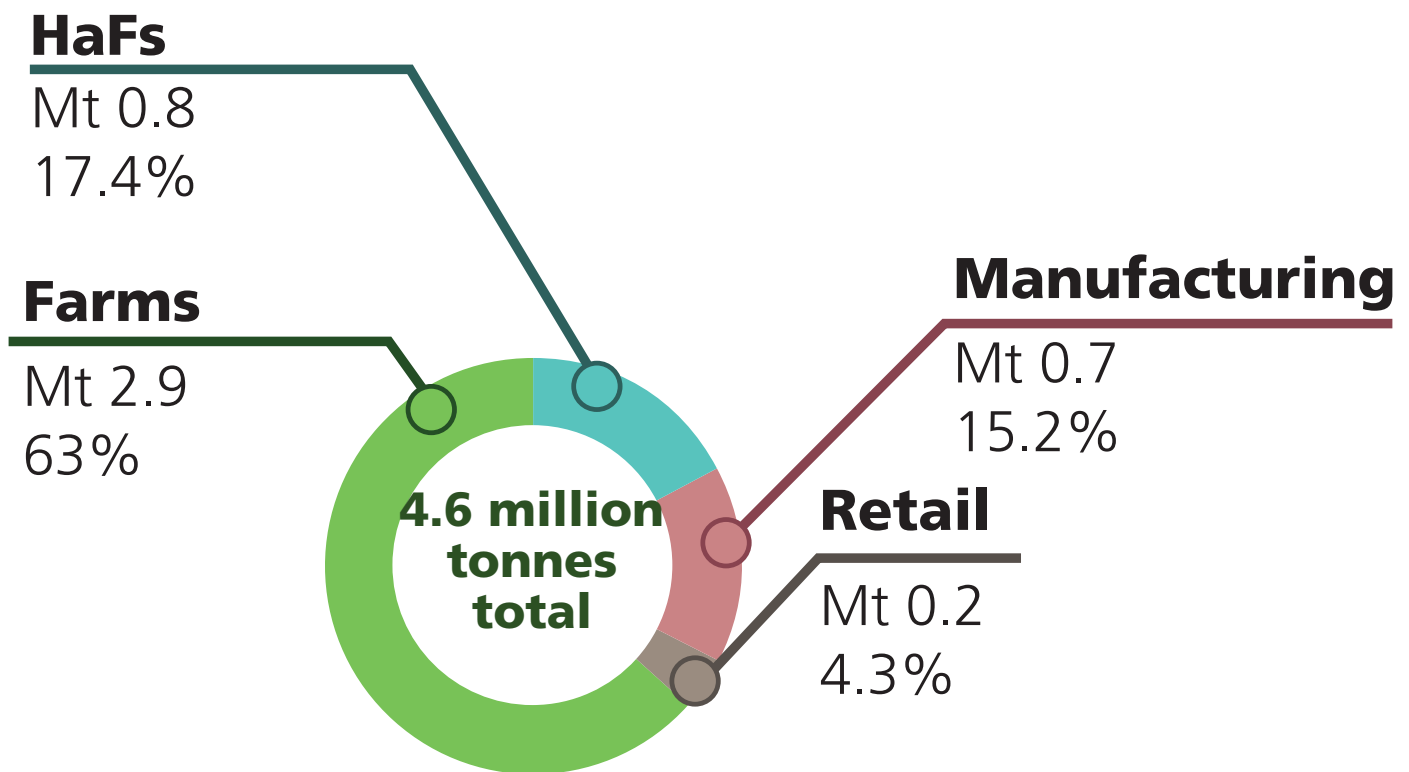


Figure 5: Supply chain food surplus



Appendix 2 – Food insecurity in the UK

Food insecurity and food poverty – which is defined as being “without reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious, healthy food”⁷⁵ – is having a devastating impact on people across the UK.

And the problem is on the rise: in 2023/24, 86% of the charities that FareShare redistributed food to told us they had seen increase in demand for their services over the previous year.⁷⁶

As well as the obvious physical health impacts of not being able to meet the basic human need for food, research has linked food insecurity to poorer overall mental health and wellbeing. Studies have shown that people who experience food poverty are also more likely to experience isolation, depression, shame and anxiety.^{77,78}

Who is affected

In January 2024, a total of 11 million people – an estimated 8 million adults and 3 million children – experienced food insecurity.⁷⁹ That’s nearly one in six people.

Households with children are more likely to experience food insecurity, with one in five (20%) affected. The poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend half (50%) of their post-tax income on food to afford a healthy diet (as defined by the Government’s Eatwell Guide). This compares to 11% for the richest households.⁸⁰

Specific groups are disproportionately likely to experience food insecurity:^{81,82,83}

- Disabled people
- People from Black and minority ethnic communities
- Households with five or more people
- Households with children, especially those with lone parents
- People in receipt of benefits or Carer’s Allowance
- Households whose members have lower levels of education
- People who rent their homes
- People experiencing homelessness
- People seeking asylum

The House of Commons research briefing Food Poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals has more background on the impact of food insecurity in the UK.



International Tax Policies:

Country	Tax incentive(s)	Food valuation	Cap	GFN Rating (N/A where not GFN member)
Argentina	Certain food donations can receive a tax deduction of up to 5% of net taxable profits . However, taxpayers must pay full VAT credit on donated food but not discarded food.		5% of net profits	Weak
Australia	Tax deductions and credits are available for food donations to food recovery organisations. These are often the same or less than deductions for discarding food, and do not cover transport/storage costs.	Deductible up to the lesser of either the market value of the stock or the amount paid for the stock.	10% of revenue	Moderate
Brazil	Corporate taxpayers may deduct up to 2% of profits from income tax if they donate food to civil society organisations.	Typically market value per the donor	2% of profits	Limited
Canada	Tax deduction/credits are available to business making in-kind food donations to food recovery organisations. However, a low cap and a complicated process negate the economic incentive for many businesses.	Fair market value can be claimed but process is prohibitively complex	5% of revenue	Limited
China	Businesses can deduct food donations that meet 3 conditions : 1) are for charitable activities; 2) are made through the government or an eligible charity; 3) They have an invoice proving the fair market value of the goods.	Fair market value: either matching price of similar good on active market or (where there is no active market) undergoing 3 rd party valuation.	12% of revenue. Excess can be carried over for up to 3 years. Donations for poverty alleviation fully deductible.	Strong
France	Business can get deductions on donated food for up to 60% of its value. This is capped at 0.5% of company turnover but may be rolled over for up to five years.	60% of value of food may be claimed.	0.5% of turnover, benefits can be claimed for up to 5 years.	N/A
Germany	In-kind donations of food are tax deductible for donors up to 20% of corporate income or 0.4% of a company's yearly sales, wages, and salaries.		20% of corporate income	N/A
India	No tax incentive specifically for food donations, just monetary donations.	NA		No policy
Indonesia	No tax incentives for food donation.	NA		No policy
Italy	Italy offers reduction on municipal waste tax proportionate to the volume of food donated.		TBD	N/A
Mexico	Donors can make an annual deduction for the total value of food donations up to the 7% cap. Donors of food and basic goods can also claim a monthly deduction of up to 5% of the market value of the donation. Tax relief for destroying unsellable food is contingent on donors first offering this food for donation.	Market value	7% of the donor's taxable profit	Moderate
South Africa	Businesses can receive a tax deduction for donations of food to registered public benefit organisations (charities). The deduction is subject to evidence of a certificate provided by the recipient organisation.	Livestock & produce = Fair market value. All other products = lower fair market value or at cost	10% of taxable income	Moderate
United Kingdom	The UK does not offer tax deductions for food donations.	N/A	N/A	No policy
United States	The USA has enhanced tax deduction policies to incentive food donation by businesses, raising the benefit cap deductible by most corporations to 15%, up from the usual 10%.	Businesses can deduct the lesser of: a) Twice the basis value of the food; b) The basis value of the donated food plus half the food's expected profit margin (if the food were to be sold at fair market value).	15% of taxable income	Strong



Appendix 3 – International statistics and policies on surplus food redistribution and food waste

How much surplus food is redistributed to people?

FareShare is the UK's largest food redistribution charity. We redistribute the equivalent of 130 million meals each year – 0.8% of national food waste, excluding food waste from households. But we aim to grow this to 500 million meals, or 3.1% of waste, over the next five to seven years, bringing us closer to what our counterparts in other countries are able to achieve.

How other countries' policies support surplus food redistribution

France

The 2013 National Pact to Combat Food Waste introduced a collective commitment to 16 ambitious measures designed to halve food waste by 2025. To support this goal, key legislation includes:

- Law No 2016-138, which established an anti-food waste hierarchy that prioritises prevention of food waste, donation to charities and alternative uses such as animal feed or composting. The law requires supermarkets over a certain size to work with charities to donate their surplus, and prohibits them from destroying surplus food that is fit to eat. Ordinance No 2019-1069 extends these requirements to the mass catering and food industries.
- Law No 2020-105, which included tougher penalties for destroying edible surplus, and introduced a requirement for products to be coded to make them easier to redistribute efficiently.

In addition to France's extensive policies on food surplus redistribution, charities such as Restos du Cœur offer support, with redistribution centres open year-round where people can pick up food.

Spain

A series of laws and policy incentives have been put in place to actively tackle food waste, including:

- A recent bill requiring companies that produce, sell or distribute food to develop plans to prevent food waste.
- Legislation requiring restaurants and supermarkets to donate surplus food to charities, with bars and restaurants required to offer 'doggy bags' for leftover food.
- The Draft Bill on the Prevention of Food Loss and Waste, which sets out rules for implementing the EU's Common Agricultural Policy – including regulations and sanctions covering food production and marketing.

The largest food redistribution organisation in Spain is the Spanish Federation of Foodbanks (FESBAL), a non-political and non-denominational network of 54 food banks across the country, which help to redistribute food among charities.

USA

The USA's strategy on food waste is the result of a collaborative effort spearheaded by the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration. The draft strategy, published in December 2023, emphasises the prevention and reduction of food waste, and recycling of organic waste, with policy frameworks to support these efforts. It focuses on:

- Optimising harvests and food processing.
- Consumer education.
- Incentivising donations of surplus food.

Researching the drivers of food waste.

Proposed legislation has also been put forward to protect individuals and organisations seeking to redistribute surplus food, including:

- Proposals in the Farm Bill to reform date labels and reduce confusion about whether food is fit to eat.
- Amendments to strengthen the Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.



Appendix 4 – The impact of FareShare’s work

At FareShare, we have a vision of a UK where no good food goes to waste.

In our work to strengthen communities through food we are guided by our Theory of Change

1. The problem

Every year, millions of tonnes of good to eat food is wasted across the UK’s food industry, releasing greenhouse gas emissions, despite millions of people facing food insecurity.

2. What we do

FareShare turns this environmental problem of food waste into social good.

By working with the food industry and with the support of our national network of partners, funders and volunteers, we ensure the food goes to the people who need it most.

We work across the UK with charities and community organisations that help tackle the root causes of poverty and provide wrap around services, from domestic violence centres and homelessness shelters to hospices, community centres, pantries and after-school clubs.

3. The difference we make

We strengthen communities by distributing good to eat (surplus) food to charities and community organisations.

We enable those organisations to:

- Increase access to nutritious and affordable food.
- Reach more people and expand their services.
- Build their capacity by saving time and money they can reinvest in their services.

As a result, individuals accessing these services experience:

- A variety of new and healthy foods leading to improved diets.
- Reduced financial strain.
- Reduced social isolation.
- Improved health and wellbeing.
- FareShare volunteers experience:
- Increased confidence, skills, physical health and mental wellbeing.
- Reduced isolation.

We help the environment by:

- Reducing UK food waste.
- Preventing the waste of CO2 emissions and water embedded in the food.

Analysis of FareShare’s socio-economic impact found that our work creates a social value of £205 per individual reached, for a total of £108m in savings to individuals and £118m in savings to the state. This is thanks to the long-term costs we avoid by enabling charities to reduce the food affordability burden, improve diets, and reach more people, among other outcomes.⁸⁵

4. Our vision

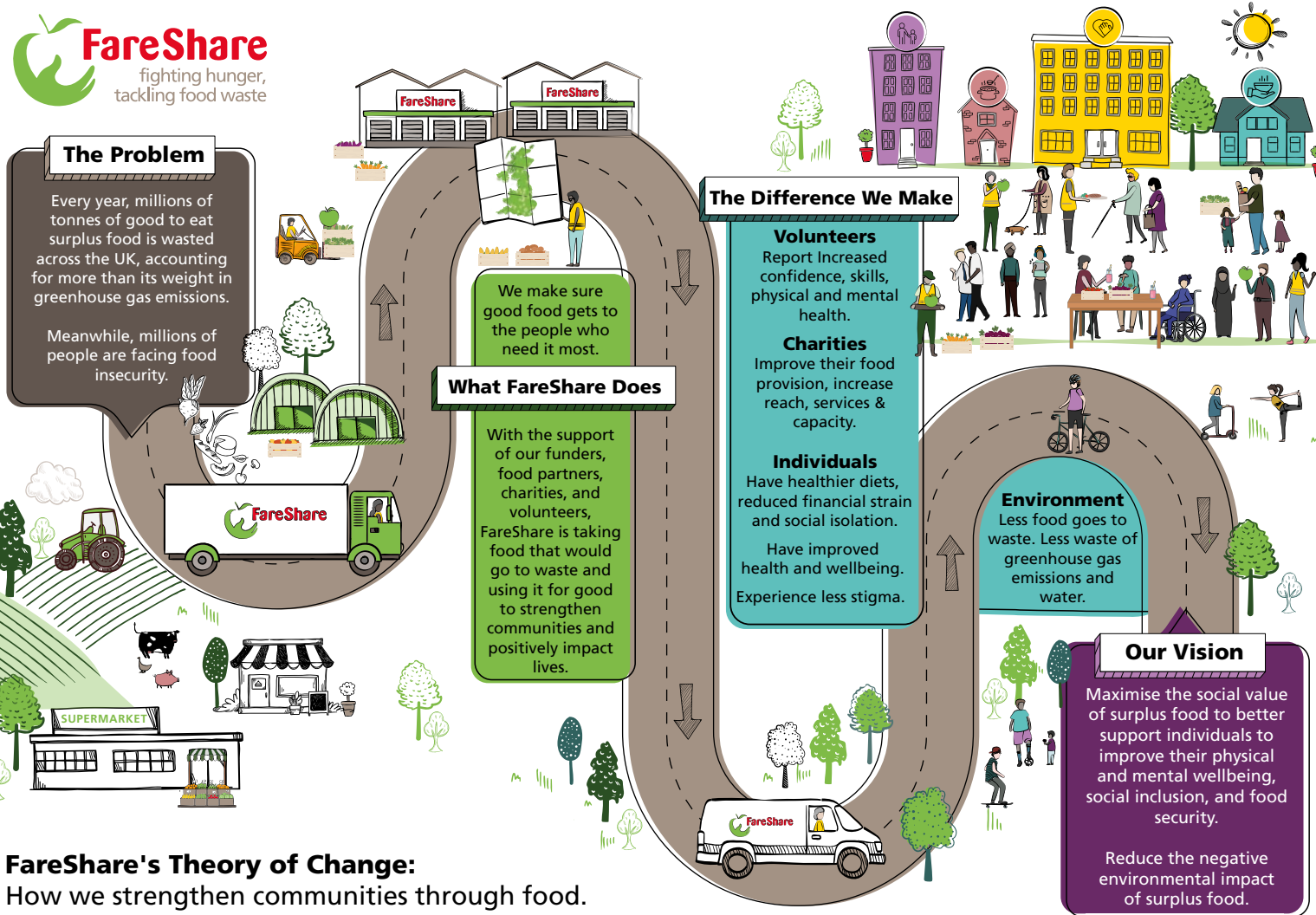
Maximise the social value of surplus food to better support individuals to improve their physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, social inclusion and food security. Reduce the negative environmental impact of surplus food.

We aim to achieve these goals by prioritising organisations that:

- Provide additional support and activities alongside their food services.
- Serve communities in areas of higher deprivation.
- Reach beneficiaries who are most vulnerable as defined by local need.
- Our impact

In 2023-24 we:⁴

- Redistributed 56,000 tonnes of food – the equivalent of four meals every second – helping to strengthen communities and improve people’s lives across the UK.
- Supported over 8,000 charities and community groups, with 90% providing wrap around care as well as food.
- Reached nearly 1 million people experiencing a range of challenges – helping improve diets, reduce financial strain and social isolation, and boost health and wellbeing.
- Prevented the waste of over 100,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions (4.5 times more than the emissions caused by our operations), and 141 billion litres of water.
- Delivered an estimated £225 million of social value – helping the people accessing food services and taxpayers avoid £5.72 in long-term health and social service costs for every £1 we invest.




FareShare's Theory of Change:
How we strengthen communities through food.

Figure 6: FareShare's Theory of Change

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