

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Food Waste in England, HC 429

Tuesday 15 November 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 15 November 2016

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Chris Davies; Jim Fitzpatrick; Simon Hart; Kerry McCarthy; Rebecca Pow; Ms Margaret Ritchie; David Simpson; Angela Smith.

Questions 1-61

Witnesses

I: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, broadcaster and campaigner; Tristram Stuart, founder, Feedback

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Tristram Stuart - Feedback](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Tristram Stuart.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming; it is most appreciated. We are starting our food waste inquiry today. You are our first witnesses. Hugh, you are actually a constituent of mine, as you well know—your premises certainly are, so it is nice to have you here.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It is nice to be here.

Chair: That's not the reason you're here, of course; you are here to give some very excellent evidence. Again, Tristram, thank you. Probably, we all know who you are, Hugh, but would you just like to introduce yourself quickly, and then Tristram? Then we will fire away.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: My name is Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. I am a chef, journalist, television presenter and at times a campaigner on environmental issues. So far, I have made three one-hour documentaries about the problem of waste in the UK, majoring in food waste. We expect to make more of these documentaries in the years ahead.

Tristram Stuart: I am Tristram Stuart. I am the author of the book "Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal", which was published in 2009. This is an issue I have been campaigning on for the best part of my life, most recently as the founder of an organisation called Feedback, which campaigns on food waste globally.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. The first question is fairly straightforward. How did you first become involved in campaigning against food waste?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I was aware of the issue of food waste for a number of years, and as a maker of television programmes I looked at it intermittently with the possibility of making some documentaries. We were ultimately successful in persuading the BBC to commission some documentary films about the problem of waste. I guess that first conversation probably happened nearly three years ago. Pretty much the first person I called when our programmes were green-lit was Tristram, whom I had met before and whose work I knew a little bit—and now I know it a bit better.

I think it is important for me to stress at this early stage of the proceedings that I am not a big expert on the problem of food waste. There are some areas that I now know quite a lot about, and quite a few that I do not. But it is the nature of these kinds of programmes that we are able to work with people like Tristram and many others who I hope you will be seeing in due course, and find out about the work that they have been doing for the past few years and perhaps highlight some of the most potent stories within the world of waste and put them into our documentaries.



One of the things that we were most mindful of is that the legacy of those programmes should be the acceleration of solutions so that, in an ideal world, the work of people like Tristram would become easier and, indeed, the discussions of Committees such as this one might become productive on a more rapid timescale than has hitherto been the case. If we achieve that at all, I think it is because we can shine a light on some of these issues on behalf of the public; we can put these things in a prime-time television programme, which surprised us by getting such a big audience. If only the subject of ivory seemed to be as appealing to the viewing public, but that is for another day. But we got a very substantial audience and a lot of positive feedback. I think this is something that is in the public eye, and it is here until solutions are found.

- Q3 **Chair:** I know you grow quite a lot of vegetables. You then bring them through your restaurants. You have got your chickens. You are trying to do a holistic approach. What is your view on the catering side of things? It is not the biggest culprit on waste, but there is still waste there. How would you see that being tightened up?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I hope my view of the problem of food waste is not rose-tinted through the lens of River Cottage. I also run restaurants, and there are, as you say, practical problems of dealing with waste on a daily basis. You need to address them in the culture of your kitchen. You need your chefs to understand that there is no shame whatsoever in reworking certain elements of certain foods into new dishes. One thing that you cannot do in the restaurant culture is take food off people's plates that they have not consumed and rework that into your menu. But the leaves and other elements, and un-served dishes, can often be rethought for a second outing.

- Q4 **Chair:** What can you do? This is an interesting thing. Parents today sometimes allow their children to have a little bit of this, but they do not want that, so they try them with something else. You cannot really say, as they are coming into your restaurant, "Those children should eat that, because it is perfectly good." I just wonder how we could change this culture that says, "Let's give them something different all the time." We were not really given that choice, and I do not think it did me a lot of harm. I don't think our children had that choice, if you see what I mean. We almost give them too much choice now.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: When it comes to avoiding food waste in a restaurant kitchen, being River Cottage gives you a certain advantage, because people are ready to expect the unexpected. We can create dishes like deep-fried fish skeletons, which are actually rather tastier than they sound. We can recycle things like lemon peel and orange peel by sorting them down and using them as citrus pickles. There is a lot that can be done creatively, and I think more kitchens should do that.

But we did actually address the problem of restaurant food waste with a very specific and modern bit of kit, made by a company called Winnow.



It is a tablet that you put on the waste bin in your restaurant kitchen that measures, by weight, everything that goes in, and records back to you exactly what has gone in. This enables you to identify dishes that are perhaps oversized or that keep coming back under-eaten, or certain ingredients that are producing a lot of trim, by-product or leaves, or whatever. You may rethink whether there is an opportunity to use that. It is a very useful bit of kit. It enabled us to reduce our food waste at the River Cottage Canteen in Winchester by over a third and learn from that across the group.

Q5 Chair: Thank you very much. Tristram, I am aware that I have not invited you to say a few words yet. How did you become involved with the campaign against food waste?

Tristram Stuart: It started when I was a teenager, and I was keeping pigs and chickens at home. They were my little enterprise to earn pocket money. I did the most natural and cheap thing, which is collecting food waste from my school canteen, and the local baker, the local greengrocer and the local farmer, who could not sell potatoes because they were the wrong shape or size. Before I knew what was what, everywhere I was looking in the supply chain there was waste being haemorrhaged out in huge quantities. Most of that food was perfectly fit for human consumption.

I had always been an environmentalist, since before I could remember. I knew what resources were going into growing all that food. This struck me as just a total absurdity in an era when environmental degradation is probably the biggest global challenge we face, and when there are nearly 1 billion hungry people in the world who do not have enough food to eat. Even in this country there are millions who do not have enough food to eat. This struck me as both a huge scandal and a great opportunity, because solving it, unlike many of the other big problems we have to solve, is relatively simple, and by and large delicious and nutritious. It is about eating food and enjoying it, instead of chucking it in the bin.

Moreover, it struck me as a symptom of what was really wrong with our food system—not just insofar as it creates waste, but insofar as it mines natural resources, produces food that is not particularly well designed for the enhancement of public health and very often is exactly the reverse. It seems only to need to be profitable to be justifiable, which is not actually what we want from a food system. We want one that provides for public health, environmental sustainability and, of course, profitability. But those three all need to be taken account of.

One of the things that is laudable, and needs to be encouraged more, is the cross-departmental thinking on how to tackle this country's food problem. If you look at the crossover between the causes of obesity and the causes of food waste, there is an awful lot to be gained by looking at these as two symptoms of one big problem. We have nearly twice as much food available in our shops and restaurants as is required by our population. Inevitably, we are going to eat more than we need, and then



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the gap between what we actually eat and what is provided is where the waste is. These are really two symptoms of one very big and critical problem.

Q6 Chair: I do not know if I want to get into whether I eat more food than I need—I probably do. It is about making sure, too, that we do not actually waste it. How aware are consumers of the amount of food they waste? If you look at the graph, over half the food probably is wasted in people's homes. That is the more difficult one to drill down on. We, as politicians, do not want to preach, but we do need to draw their attention to it.

Tristram Stuart: There is one very specific thing in the framing of that question that I would contest. Indeed, I would insist on the bogusness of the data that suggests that half of food waste happens in the household. I will preface what I am going to say by saying that of course household food waste is a massive issue. We all waste an awful lot more than we should. Awareness around that is one of the critical things.

But if you think about the way in which the data has been generated to give you the impression that half of it is at a household level, what we did in the UK was a global-standard, leading study on household food waste. We forensically raked through the rubbish bins of 2,000-plus British households. We analysed what was edible and what was not edible. It was a ground-breaking study, commissioned by WRAP. It was excellently done. All of the food waste caused by households was captured, inevitably, because all of your food waste goes into your bin. They even went and subsequently counted what people were pouring down their drain.

Now, let's look at the industry side. No one has ever forensically looked into the bins of supermarkets, ever, commissioned by Government in a transparent way. No one has done that for manufacturing. We rely on their self-generated data, which is not audited in any way. No one has measured the waste of food on farms in the United Kingdom. The world's first systematic on-farm food waste measurement programme is being launched in the UK now, but the data has not existed previously. No one even thinks about including all of the fish that are wasted at sea, which Hugh exposed so well in "Fish Fight" years ago on Channel 4. No one measures the waste of edible offal in slaughterhouses.

Critically, for a country that imports net by value more than half of the food we eat, no one is including, on the side of the industry, all of the waste that is generated overseas. I have now, as part of my work with Feedback, visited banana plantations in Colombia, orange plantations in Peru and Kenyan bean growers. I have been all over the world, and it is supermarkets here that cause them to waste up to half of their crops, not a gram of which is counted in the calculation that says more than half of the food wasted is at a household level. There is a very good reason this fact is constantly repeated: it deflects attention from the supermarket



supply chains, which is, I am hoping, something that we are going to talk about.

Q7 Chair: One of the reasons you both are here this morning is that you are the first to come in; the supermarkets, the food processors and others will be here. It is very useful to have this information, because we will actually use that as we go forward.

Tristram Stuart: Yes. Good.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I am so struck by what Tristram has just said. I have heard him say versions of it before. He said it particularly well today. It makes me wonder—I do not know whether Tristram or anyone else has an answer to this—where on earth the figure of “more than 50%” or “almost two-thirds” actually came from. How on earth was the estimate done that allowed anyone to balance the fairly approximately but reasonably accurately known quantity of domestic food waste against the completely unknown quantity of farm waste, supply-chain waste and back-of-store supermarket waste, which, as Tristram so rightly says, has never been formally measured? It makes you wonder.

I think there is something rather telling about this “more than 50%” figure. It is such a blindingly obvious way to deflect the problem, as Tristram says. As long as the problem is more than 50%, it suggests that “most” of our energy, or “most” of our efforts, should go into telling people at home to be less wasteful of food in their fridges and larders. If we could establish formally that that was actually somewhat less than 50% of the problem, it would immediately become obvious that the real area we need to focus on is the supply chain.

Tristram Stuart: Of course, they aren’t mutually exclusive.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Of course they aren’t.

Q8 Chair: Your view is that it is the dastardly supermarkets that are creating this message of “more than 50%” at home. Is that what you are saying?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I am saying that I do not know, but to me it seems a little mysterious where this figure comes from. But, like Tristram, I think that we must acknowledge the problem of waste caused at home, and we must help people to deal with it. There is a useful website called Love Food Hate Waste, which has had some penetration. It would perhaps be more effective if it had more and we found ways to do that.

The other thing, of course, is not to forget that the retailers are also complicit in the problem of domestic food waste, because of the way they sell us food, and because they are very good at making us buy quite a lot more than we need. They do it through advertising. They do it through “buy one, get one free” offers. It is not simply lack of education about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the thrifty use of leftovers that is the reason we are throwing away a lot of food at home.

The culture is to a large extent dictated by the supermarkets and the way they market food to us. Principally, they market it to us as something that is cheap, readily available, inexhaustible and for which, if we are lucky enough to be able to have more than we need, there is no real cost. That is the implication. At least, there is no acknowledgement of that cost or that problem. This is coming latterly. This has now become a political acknowledgement, but it is not really acknowledged in the culture of the way food is grown, sold or marketed. It is now being acknowledged because people are demanding that it is acknowledged, saying, "Look, this is a problem that we have to deal with."

Tristram Stuart: I would just like to add something constructive about how the United Kingdom has tackled household food waste. As we acknowledged, it is a big problem and it does require tackling. The UK has achieved more than any other country in this field. We have had a 21% reduction in household food waste. Speaking as somebody who works most of the time overseas, the rest of the world looks at what has happened in the United Kingdom and wants to know how we did it. Analysing how that was achieved in the United Kingdom is well worth it. Love Food Hate Waste has contributed enormously.

Q9 **Rebecca Pow:** Apologies; I have to leave after this. It is great to welcome you and to meet you. Hugh, I must just say that I came to your cookery school at River Cottage. A friend sent me a text saying, "Did you leave the oven on?" because the day afterwards it burnt down.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It was you! The culprit has been found at last.

Rebecca Pow: I didn't leave the oven on, and it was a wonderful experience. I want to ask you about how successful you think the Love Food Hate Waste campaign has been. Before that, though, on the supermarket issue you are raising, do you think the supermarkets at slightly at fault in leading the consumer to believe that they can have any food at any time, and that that is their right? Does that affect waste?

Chair: There is no season.

Rebecca Pow: There is no season. You have to have it all, all the time.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Globally speaking, there are now no longer seasons. In a British supermarket, you can have whatever you want, whenever you want it. That is definitely a problem. Perhaps a more alarming version of the same problem is: "You can have it inexhaustibly, because we will make sure that the shelves never run out. We will keep restocking our shelves, because we do not even want it to look like we have only got three left. We want you to feel like if you come to us the supply is not only all year round of everything you want,



but always there. You will never find anything missing. You can depend on us wholeheartedly.”

That is a very difficult culture. That is a culture that is destined to produce waste. This is nothing to do with the supply-chain waste, which we will come to. Once the food is in the supermarket, if supermarkets are over-stocked, which they are, they will have excess. That excess will become waste, unless they are extremely smart in diverting it at exactly the right moment to a better use than anaerobic digestion or disposal in any of the other non-eating ways.

- Q10 **Rebecca Pow:** It is wonderful that you have run your campaign, Love Food Hate Waste. It is quite sad that it falls to you to raise it, through your television programmes. Do you think the campaign, and what you have done, really has made a difference?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I don’t know the extent. It would be pretty difficult to tease out the difference that our television programmes have made alongside the work of Love Food Hate Waste. That was not our project. That project predates our programmes and has been run by WRAP. In that sense, it does have Government support. As Tristram has pointed out, its success has been measured in changing habits in the home. We featured that aspect of the problem in our shows, and we showed people clever and delicious ways to be more thoughtful and thrifty in the way they shop and cook. It is very hard to measure the effect of that.

- Q11 **Rebecca Pow:** They are going to roll out this campaign a bit further. Tristram, what do you think is going to cause a step change to make people really address the issues that you are talking about?

Tristram Stuart: I think Hugh is underselling himself. It is something I do want to talk about—not specifically that but just generally how we have successfully tackled household food waste in the United Kingdom. Love Food Hate Waste has been absolutely critical. Every pound put into that by the UK Government has been remunerated 12 or more times over, in terms of saved grocery expenditure on the part of the UK households, which are no longer having to buy the food and then chucking it in their bin because they have wised up to the problem.

There is a lot more that needs to be done. A 21% reduction in household food waste is massively impressive. Indeed, if you look for environmental mass behaviour change success in any field anywhere in the world, it is difficult to beat the level of mass behaviour change that we have achieved in the United Kingdom. It has been a huge success.

There has only been one real study to try to evaluate and audit the success of public awareness campaigns around food waste in the UK. It was commissioned by WRAP. It found that, of the 21% reduction in household food waste, 40% could safely be attributed to awareness-raising. That is great, and it feels about right. It is at least



HOUSE OF COMMONS

40%, I would say. The rest can be attributed to other factors. There was, in this same period, a rise in food prices and an increase in economic hardship, which is going to hit people's budgets. There are other factors that you have to allow for.

But within public awareness-raising, it is not just Love Food Hate Waste. Indeed, I would contextualise Love Food Hate Waste in a much wider social movement around food waste in the United Kingdom, of which Feedback, my organisation, and my campaigning is part. Just over in Trafalgar Square, we fed 5,000 people with food that otherwise would have been wasted. It is a model that has raised awareness and gained headlines all over the world. There are grassroots organisations tackling this problem left, right and centre.

Most importantly, by making food waste a cool, ethical issue, that is the context in which the BBC is wanting to commission a hero like Hugh. We have also worked with Jamie Oliver, of course. He has now done three series—he is about to do a fourth—on food waste. That is when it becomes something that is of public interest. When the heroes of the food world get involved, people really start to get excited.

It is not about finger wagging. It is not necessarily about being told to eat bubble and squeak on a Sunday evening. It is about thinking, "Yes, this is obvious. This is cool. This is something we can all do. We are going to save money, protect the environment and do a bit of social good." That is when a culture really shifts. It is not just when Government wag their finger.

Q12 Rebecca Pow: Does it need more funding, though? The Government have put funding in.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Definitely.

Tristram Stuart: Absolutely. But what I am really saying is that when it comes down to funding, the British Government could be wiser. When we have worked in other parts of the world, people in government understand that a two-pronged approach to tackling this problem makes sense. It should be two-pronged in every sense. When it comes to tackling supermarket waste, it is not just the friendly, voluntary, hand in fist. I am sure we are going to talk about the Courtauld commitment.

It is also the bad cop, like what Feedback does. It means campaigning on the outside, and the exposing of supply-chain issues that they do not even want you to know about, and that sort of thing, hand in hand with the WRAP-style work. It is the same with consumers. Get them the kinds of recipes that tell them how to make bubble and squeak with their leftovers and do information campaigning. But get the likes of Hugh involved. Make it an issue that is not just, "We should all stop wasting food", but "This is cool", and we can change our culture.

Q13 Rebecca Pow: On the pig issue, which I applaud you for, my son did



HOUSE OF COMMONS

just the same: keeping pigs to re-engage with the countryside. But we hit the point that you cannot use food waste now for a lot of that. Are you going to get back on that case? Again, I apologise for having to leave.

Tristram Stuart: I am hoping that you are going to ask me some further questions about that. We are on it. The Pig Idea campaign is something that you might want to look at. It is one of our campaigns, precisely on this issue.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It is a very good idea.

Chair: We are going to talk a little about food waste and whether we can feed it to pigs in a minute. Angela has a supplementary.

- Q14 **Angela Smith:** Hugh's point about the psychology of supermarket sales, and having the shelves full all the time, is interesting. Of course, online grocery sales are going up all the time as well. I have just looked at the research from April this year. One in ten now do all their grocery shopping online. A further 12% do most of their shopping online. In the younger age group, 25 to 34-year olds, 36% of that group are now shopping online. I just wonder whether you think that could actually, in the long term, change that psychology. Of course, you have not got the shelves in front of you.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I do not know enough about the algorithms by which groceries are sold online, but I imagine that they can be a little bit smarter and a little bit leaner than the algorithms that determine the restocking of supermarket shelves. But that is just an instinct. What I also do not know is whether people who buy food online are more or less likely to over-shop than those who go to the supermarket. Those are two relative unknowns.

- Q15 **Angela Smith:** It's going to change the supermarket supply chains and everything. I just wonder how we factor that in.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It will change the culture. I would imagine that the stocking algorithm should be a leaner one, partly because the problem of overfilled supermarkets is one that just scales up, retailer after retailer, location after location, all around the country. It scales up to an enormous problem.

Chair: The only danger with online shopping is when people do a repeat order week on week, if they are not careful. It is fine if they actually go through and make sure, realising, "We aren't using as much of that."

Angela Smith: I go through mine.

Chair: I think that is the only risk, but that can probably be dealt with.

- Q16 **Angela Smith:** Did Tristram want to come in?

Tristram Stuart: I could add a couple of things. First, the supermarkets, when they are selling stuff online, replicate a lot of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

tricks that they use in store. When you are just about to check out, it says, "Have you remembered to get this nice little treat that we know you bought six months ago? We will give you a 10% discount on it. Don't you want this treat?" It is a bit like having all the sweets in the shopping aisles. Your kids are there. They are bored in the queue. They start nagging you. Of course they use all of those tricks to prompt you to buy; they want us to buy more than we need because that is their profit margin.

I want to take a step back on this issue, because I am excited by online sales, not just because of the way the supermarkets might or might not be persuaded to do it. If you think about what we are in this whole game for, food waste is a big issue, but it is not just food waste, is it? It is the fact that our entire farming and food system is really just, as I mentioned earlier, mining nature, eroding soils, causing greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss and leaving a whole load of people hungry while overfeeding a whole lot of other people. We need to reshape our food system if we are going to tackle that.

I have only just begun to be persuaded that it might actually be possible to take on the supermarket system of grocery sales. You can think about what has happened with Airbnb, which is, for anyone who hasn't used it, a global site. Instead of going to the Hilton Hotel in New York, I can find very easily, and cheaper, some accommodation of someone who lives in New York but is away on holiday and their flat is empty. I can hire it from them. That distributed model of sales, essentially, is something that could happen within food. The advantages of that, if we can compete on price and convenience with a supermarket, are that you could have a distributed food supply system that provides local, seasonal and easy-to-access food for you to buy online, potentially from multiple producers, and have it delivered to your door. You can compete on convenience and price.

The advantages of such a system in terms of protecting the environment are that, at the moment, it is basically impossible, in a country such as the United Kingdom, to be a small producer of a variety of different foods, unless you have a niche like River Cottage does. Supermarkets want to buy all their carrots from one producer, so any small carrot producer is out of it because they cannot sustain their farming. All of our farmland therefore goes over to agro-industry. That entrenches the industrial agricultural system, which entrenches the supermarket system, which entrenches all these other problems that we are talking about. What you are talking about—an online sales distribution system—actually opens the door to the possibility of reshaping that entire system for the good of public health, the environment and the tastiness of our food.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Small producers have been very quick to take that up. They have actually been among the pioneers of selling food online, looking for access to different markets, even if at the moment those markets are, as Tristram indicates, sometimes a bit niche.



Angela Smith: I have used very small local retailers online before. It is very difficult for them to survive at the moment. It is an infrastructure that needs to develop. I think that is the point. It is very hard to develop it.

Q17 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Good morning, gentlemen. Tristram, you have covered at least part of the answer to this. How can consumers' behaviours to food and food waste be changed? You have mentioned heroes. You have mentioned campaigns and awareness. Are there other things that can be done? We want to move on to date labelling in a minute, as a separate item. But are there other things that we can be doing, in terms of getting consumer awareness even more focused, and higher?

Tristram Stuart: Yes. There are two things I would say about that. First, when we go out and talk to consumers about food waste, I want to remember it is not just an opportunity for reducing food waste in the home; it is an opportunity to get people on a journey towards a more sustainable food system—and system generally.

You cannot talk only about, "You have to stop wasting food." You can do that successfully, and they might in fact be saving money, but you need buy-in to the whole sustainability paradigm. There has been a recent update to a paper on what is called the rebound effect, which is: "If I save money by not wasting food, what am I then going to spend the money on?" If it is spent on a flight to Barbados, environmentally speaking that eats 60%, on average, of the carbon saving of not wasting the food, according to a study that was just published. Let's think about food waste reduction in a holistic way, as part of the many things that we all need to do to make our food system more environmentally friendly. That is the first thing I would say. We should really think about it holistically.

The second thing I would say is that I believe—this is the way in which we have always campaigned—that it does not work just to tell consumers to stop wasting food, because they are perfectly well aware that the supermarkets from which they are buying their food are putting into their rubbish bins daily 100 times what any individual household is doing on a weekly basis. It therefore makes sense to communicate these two changes that are required together. That is what we have always done.

Yes, we all need to take responsibility for reducing our food waste, but you must also become an active citizen in the food supply system that you are buying into. Go to your supermarket and ask them if they are donating the surplus at the end of the day. Ask them why all the apples look the same, and what happened to all the wonky ones. Ask them why there is a best-before date on a pack of bananas, which is totally unnecessary. Become part of the change, not just in your own homes but up there, in the supermarkets and in their supply chains.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think communicating holistically about the entire supply chain, about not just one issue but the whole issue, is the way we can both reduce food waste most effectively and use food waste as the lightning-rod issue, the open window, for people to get on to a much bigger journey about reforming our food system.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Having exposed the issue of food waste both in the home and in the supermarket supply chain, we asked people to take a pledge to be less wasteful in their own homes, in order to be part of the conversation with supermarkets, and they were also asking supermarkets to be less wasteful in their supply chains. It is entirely right, as Tristram says, that those two conversations should not be separated. They are essentially a dialogue between the consumer and the supermarket.

Q18 Jim Fitzpatrick: Can we take into account date labelling of produce? There have been some changes and there are more coming in. What can be done to labelling to cut down waste? Can you also just cover that which does go from supermarkets to redistribution charities, and the complications there with dates, and some of the charities not accepting it because they do not want to be seen to be taking what looks like cast-offs and giving it to more vulnerable people?

Tristram Stuart: Yes, that is a really critical question. If someone funded our organisation to work on date labels, the first thing I would do is go after what is a very interesting piece of the EU food labelling directive, which is what governs date labels in this country. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the regulatory framework, what we do in the United Kingdom is governed by the EU food labelling directive. One of the things in the food labelling directive is that it says it is illegal for a food company to confuse customers with date labels.

The vast majority of the population of the United Kingdom, and, indeed, all other EU member states, is confused by date labels. There is an argument to say it is not the food businesses that are confusing customers; it is just the fact that they do not understand and they have not troubled themselves to find out. But there is also a very strong case, and there are some very specific examples, where businesses are very clearly confusing customers with date labels. That is already illegal. I would go after them in court, if I had the resources to do that.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Will you give us those specific examples?

Tristram Stuart: Yes. There are a couple of examples. We all know that there is a best-before date and a use-by date. The use-by date is the one that governs food safety, and the best-before date is just about quality. The purpose of the use-by date is to inform customers when that food is likely to become a hazard to health. But if you go and talk to a manufacturer of pork pies or any of those cold meat products that are rightly use-by-date-type products, and you say, "How have you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

calculated your use-by date?", they will tell you that the date is not the date on which they think the product will become microbiologically hazardous, or anything near that; it is the date on which they think the pastry is no longer going to retain its ultimate crispness.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: They have essentially used the use-by date as if it were a best-before date.

Tristram Stuart: They have used the use-by date as if it were a best-before date. That is an abuse of what the use-by date is there for. It confuses customers. It makes people believe they have to throw away food, because that is what the use-by date says, when in fact by no stretch of anyone's imagination is it a risk.

Q19 **Chair:** Do we need the best-before date? That's the question. Surely we only need the use-by date.

Tristram Stuart: There is certainly a very strong case for getting rid of best-before dates on an awful lot of products that currently bear them. For fresh fruit and vegetables, are you kidding me? For a pack of bananas that has a best-before date on it, in my view it takes another week for those bananas to be ready to eat.

Chair: I like them nice and ripe.

Tristram Stuart: I like them ripe. My mum likes them green. I like them beginning to go black. It is flabbergasting, but many people genuinely just see a best-before date and think, "I have got to chuck it." At least £1 million of food is wasted in the home in the United Kingdom every year as a result of that phenomenon. Again, that is a confusing use of a date. It just is not best before that date; in most cases it is best after that date, according to me.

Chair: It is best for taste as well, isn't it?

Q20 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Why do you think it has never been tested, given that there is a law on it, by somebody like Which? or one of the other consumer organisations?

Tristram Stuart: It is a good question. I do not know.

Q21 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** What is the redistribution dimension?

Tristram Stuart: That is a policy privately made and well within the rights of organisations such as FareShare. There is a bunch of organisations, among which FareShare is the best known, that will not handle food after their best-before date, even though they can. I respect their decision to do that, but I would encourage them not to have that policy. For example, there is a company called Approved Food, which sells cheap food that is very often past its best-before date. More of that is definitely a good thing. I have been in correspondence with the FSA on this. It is about communicating very clearly to food redistribution organisations that food past its best-before date can be redistributed,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

because there is nothing wrong with it until it is actually stale or off. It is fine.

I think getting rid of the best-before date on a lot of food is definitely a step that should be taken. We are doing a lot of work in the USA at the moment, where there is no federal law governing date labels. It is even worse than here, because no one can work out what any of the labels mean. However, the USDA is looking at making a list of foods that have to carry the use-by date, and nothing else can carry a date.

That gets around the two problems that I have talked about. First, it gets around putting dates on things that do not need them. Secondly, it gets around putting the wrong date on different foods, which is the third area that I want to highlight. The use-by date does get used on a lot of products like yoghurt, milk and meat, none of which actually requires a use-by date. They should be best-before date products. Everyone thinks meat is a use-by date product. Raw meat is not. You zap it in the cooker. You are going to kill off everything. Unless it stinks, it is going to be fine. Even then, some meat is actually better.

But the point is that a lot of foods are carrying use-by dates that do not by law require it. We should be clearer, at least in guidelines if not in legislation, about what foods should carry what dates, so that the abuse, which is both confusing and causes unnecessary food waste, can be addressed.

Jim Fitzpatrick: That is very interesting. Thank you.

Q22 **Simon Hart:** You have reminded me of a constituent whose first job in a big supermarket in Cardiff was disposing of three pallet loads of pork chops a day, which, for some reason, had fallen foul of the labelling system. But that was not my point. My point is that we have often had supermarkets in front of this Committee, where you are sitting, on a variety of issues. It is always quite a frustrating experience for us; I do not know about them. All sorts of barriers are put in our way.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: We could spend the rest of this session telling you what the supermarkets are going to say when they sit here. Hopefully we can do more constructive things than that.

Q23 **Simon Hart:** It is about levers. We often look at the options for certain things. The milk price would be an obvious one we have looked into. We look at whether we should legislate, whether we should go down the route of voluntary co-operation, whether we should use the Groceries Code Adjudicator or the Food Standards Agency, as you mentioned, or whether we just rely on public and media pressure from you guys in order to influence purchasers' buying habits.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I certainly do not think relying on journalists and campaigning television programmes would constitute policy. The commissioning of such programmes is at the whims of all kinds of trends and all the rest of it.



- Q24 **Simon Hart:** But I think we do. We are a little bit reluctant to do these other things. Which levers do you think we need to pull to get out of the labelling situation, which is, in everybody's estimation, crazy?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: We are going to talk about levers to pull in a number of other areas. Specifically on the question of labelling, I think Tristram has explained very well that this is a complicated area that needs clarity and reform. You need to start with that core number of products, where the public needs genuine protection from the development of a biological hazard if the food should turn. But it is a very small number of products.

- Q25 **Simon Hart:** In the end, is it about us legislating, in order to achieve those changes?

Chair: Or is it about education? Which is it?

Tristram Stuart: These two categories are not mutually exclusive. That is how the United Kingdom is tackling food waste at the moment, through a combination of voluntary, awareness-raising and regulatory approaches. Is there a case for beefing up the regulatory approach in certain areas? Of course there is. You have just mentioned the Groceries Code Adjudicator. Would I be welcome to address a very immediate and specific issue surrounding that particular issue, and how it can be used to tackle food waste? Is now a good moment?

Chair: Please do.

Tristram Stuart: Everyone has heard about the law in France banning supermarket waste. It does not actually do anything of the sort, but if you read the newspapers, it is great that journalists are doing this awareness-raising. They do it in an awfully simplistic way. No such law exists. But there is a law that governs supermarket waste in France. Everyone talks about that.

But the single biggest piece of legislation that has helped to tackle waste in a systemic way in the world happened here. It happened in 2013. It is the Groceries Code Adjudicator Act. It is not a piece of waste legislation; it is a piece of competition law. But the reason it was so effective at tackling food waste is that the Competition Commission, for anyone who read the 2008 groceries market report, identified that it was the concentration of power in the hands of the five supermarkets that control over 80% of grocery sales in the United Kingdom that gave rise to an imbalance of power in the supply chain. There are these very powerful retailers, and then thousands and thousands of producers who are in a relatively powerless position and have to play by the supermarkets' game, or else they just do not get any custom and their business folds.

This culture of fear allows the supermarkets to dictate terms of business, some of which the Competition Commission identified as simply unfair. Some of them they identified as being a moral hazard, including, in



particular, the issue of order cancellations and last-minute forecast amendments. A producer would produce according to a verbal forecast, such as, "Please could you produce 1,000 tonnes of carrots to deliver to us every month during the summer?" You produce those carrots. Come the day before the carrots are due to be delivered, they say, "Actually, we only want 60% of what we said. That 40% surplus is on your hands. The cost of it is on your hands. Because I am not paying the bill, I am not incentivised to make my forecasts more accurate."

The Groceries Code Adjudicator Act says that you can no longer do that. If you do that as a supermarket and you cause your supplier to incur a financial cost, you are in breach of the Groceries Code, and that can result in fines of up to 1% of your turnover. It is a mega piece of legislation. The punitive power of the GCA, although never exercised, creates a culture of fear in the supermarkets, and regulates that every effectively. It is a hugely transformative piece of legislation, but it only protects direct suppliers of supermarkets. Guess what? Most producers are not direct suppliers of supermarkets. All you need to do if you are a supermarket to get around the legislation is one of two things. The first is to put the middleman between you and the producer, and get the middleman to do the dirty work. You get off scot-free.

The second thing you can do, which Christine Tacon, to her credit, has attempted to resolve directly, is put into your terms and conditions, which are blanket terms and conditions, essentially what boils down to a loophole within the code, which is that you are not allowed to screw over a farmer unless you agree beforehand that you are allowed to screw over a farmer. The terms and conditions say, "We are allowed to cancel orders, amend forecasts, and do all of this. That is just an agreement that is in there. Therefore, you have agreed to it, and we have not done anything that we did not agree to beforehand."

There are two things. There is a consultation, which is now open, on reviewing the framework of the Groceries Code Adjudicator. It is my strong opinion that what needs to happen is that indirect suppliers need to be directly protected by the Groceries Code Adjudicator, no matter how far down the line of supply they are. It is the same principle that was applied in the Modern Slavery Act, and that works for the anti-bribery laws: you cannot wash your hands of malpractice just because it was your supplier who did it to another supplier. That needs to happen.

The evidence required to bring a case against a supermarket should be able to come from an indirect supplier. We speak to Kenyan farmers who are not being paid because an order was cancelled. They have spent their year and their money and their savings, and got into debt, growing a green bean crop that they then have no market to sell into, because no one in Kenya buys them.

Q26 Chair: I think you were there when Julian Sturdy had that meeting that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

included the Kenyan green bean growers. I do not know if you were, but they were the ones who were particularly affected by that.

Tristram Stuart: We have been working closely with Traidcraft, which brought them over. We have been working in Kenya since 2013, by invitation of the United Nations Environment Programme, talking to exactly those producers. Feedback and Traidcraft have created an alliance called GCAN, which includes both the National Farmers' Union and Traidcraft, and all these other organisations that are concerned with it.

Q27 **Chair:** On this one, you are pushing an open door as far as we are concerned. We do actually want the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator increased, and also her ability. You make an interesting point about whether we could tie it up in the contracts that the retailers have with the processor, so that we can cover it. It is an interesting point.

Tristram Stuart: Hugh is going to come in on this. I just want to make absolutely clear the two or three things that need to happen under this review. First, we need to cover indirect suppliers, as I have mentioned. Secondly, every single supplier of fruits and vegetables into UK supermarkets we talk to will testify that one of the things that happens to them is that product is rejected on the grounds that it fails to meet the quality standards that are set before suppliers. "I am not going to buy these carrots. They are too wonky. They are too twisted. They are too fat. They are too thin." They do not comply with their quality standards. You could argue that it is fine for supermarkets to have private standards and say, "This is what we require our products to look like." Hugh is going to talk about this. We want to campaign to relax those cosmetic standards. Of course we do. But it is not illegal to have them; you can have them.

The thing that is against the principles of the GCA—this is where I get to my point—is that a supermarket will decide to reject or accept produce according to how much demand it has versus how much supply. In a year when there is a glut market of oranges, it will start saying, "We do not want those oranges. Look at this clause in our agreement that says that you cannot have an orange with a 1mm long blemish on the skin. We may have taken them last year, but this year we are not going to."

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It could even be last week.

Tristram Stuart: It could be last week. But in a year when there aren't many oranges, or the orange price is very high, they will just say, "Give us what you have got; we will take everything." They are therefore using cosmetic standards effectively to do what the GCA bans, which is cancelling orders when it is an issue of their demand or risk.

Chair: You make the point well. I am mindful that Hugh wants to come in. We have lots of questions. We are getting great evidence but we just have to be a little bit tighter on time, because otherwise we will not get



through.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Tristram really has said the most important things about this. There are these loopholes, which make it incredibly hard for the Groceries Code Adjudicator to do her job. We saw it very graphically in the case of our parsnip farmers, who were at the wrong end of these cancelled orders on a weekly, if not daily, basis. You do not have to go far to find this happening. Both things that Tristram has highlighted were problematic for them.

Yes, they had signed an agreement, which made it very hard for them to make the case. Yes, the supermarket they were supplying was regularly, if you like, abusing the concept of cosmetic standards simply to modify the quantities that they would or would not take, according to demand. This problem of passing off a cosmetic standards issue by having these far-too-fluid cosmetic standards, when actually the issue is one of supply and demand and hard business, has to be addressed. That is ultimately what will put farmers out of business.

I think the other thing that Tristram has spoken about is one that every supplier they have talked to has had an issue with at one time or another. The flip of that is that hardly any of the producers of fruit and vegetables in this country would step up and talk about this on camera. That is the experience we had. We found one third-generation parsnip farmer who was at the end of his tether. He was so fed up that the way he had been treated down the generations was getting worse and worse, the price was getting lower and lower and the excuses of cosmetic standards were getting more and more blatant. He had had enough. They felt they were probably going to go out of business, and they gave it one last angry shout.

But against the background of that, you have thousands of producers in this country who are frightened to speak up. The supermarkets will sit here and tell you that, actually, they have fantastic relationships with their suppliers. They will say, "How could we possibly do business if we did not have good relationships with our suppliers?" Of course, they will also be able to point to suppliers who will also say, "Yes, we have a pretty good relationship. We feel these guys hear us."

But the way in which supermarkets have done business with their suppliers, and the culture of that, has changed down the years. You see it in the history of this one family. It was explained clearly in our show. People used to visit, pick up the phone, discuss problems when they arose, and say, "What can we do? We have too many parsnips," or, "What can we do? You seem to have a problem." That kind of dialogue has gone out of the window. Communication happens by diktat and by printed messages coming through. Any sense of dialogue over solving the problem seems to have disappeared from the culture of supermarkets dealing with their suppliers.



Tristram Stuart: Hugh has just touched on a third policy that should change. I do not see a huge amount of hope in it doing so. As you will probably remember if you read the report, the Competition Commission called for an ombudsman to govern the Groceries Code. What we got was an adjudicator. That was a massive success. But the key difference is that an adjudicator can only adjudicate on an issue that has been brought to her. An ombudsman can proactively decide to go and investigate. In the case of farmers who are too scared to voice their concerns, what you really need is an ombudsman, who can take responsibility for going in proactively and finding out what has happened.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: That is such a good point. Why do we think that is not something that can be done? The framework is there. It is a step-up of the powers and the structure, but it seems to me to be a great possible gain.

Chair: I assure you that your point is well made. We have taken that, and we will pursue it. We are pursuing it generally on the Groceries Code Adjudicator as well, across the piece. Thank you very much to both of you for that.

Q28 **Angela Smith:** The Courtauld commitment, of course, is a voluntary commitment as it stands at the moment. Should the Government have a mandatory waste food target? Of course, what we have now is a voluntary approach. Should the Government be decisive about this, and to some extent force the issue by having a mandatory target?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: That is a very big question. Also, one of the many questions that come down from that is: were the Government to have mandatory targets, would it be about overall figures of waste for a supermarket? Alternatively, would they be more specific, to do with certain types and levels of production? Tristram, what is your view on this?

Tristram Stuart: I think that targets are good. The problem with the Courtauld commitment at the moment is that the vast majority of manufacturers are not signed up to it. It has been relatively easy for WRAP to get the retailers to sign up, because they have a public-facing brand and there is a lot at stake. They know they will have a yapping dog, in the form of Tristram and his Feedback crew, biting at their heels if they have not signed the Courtauld commitment, and that will damage their brand.

Unfortunately, we do not have that level of power over manufacturers, many of whom have pretty invisible brands, or brands that are very secondary to the public eye. Getting them into an agreement with a meaningful target, in and of itself, has been a big barrier.

Are mandatory targets the solution? I think that England should have a national target for food waste reduction, in the way that Scotland does, in the way that the United States of America does, and in the way that



many of our European counterparts do. Although this is not the case for any of those targets, I would like that to be a bit like the Climate Change Act. I would like it to be legally binding. To bind the Government to achieving a national target across the supply chain would drive innovation into the areas that are the biggest possible wins. We would stop scraping around on relatively minor sources of food waste, because they are high-profile, and really go after where the big levels of food waste are. That would be the advantage of such a target.

But within the framework of what should be mandatory and what might or might not be, when looked at through the lens of political feasibility, I do think a national target is just about feasible. But much more likely, and very powerful, is for there to be mandatory reporting of food waste by supermarkets, both covering their own businesses to begin with and also ultimately in their supply chains.

That is not just my opinion. I would like the opportunity to make the case for mandatory reporting, if the Committee is interested in hearing my reasons for it, but it is not just me. It is also Mike Coupe, the CEO of Sainsbury's, who now publicly advocates for a law saying that this should be a matter of obligatory transparent reporting by supermarkets, and Dave Lewis, the CEO of Tesco, which was the first supermarket globally to adopt this measure.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Yes, transparency is absolutely key, for so many reasons. We started this conversation today by looking at that 50% figure Tristram pointed out and where it came from. It was very quickly clear that we do not know how much food is being wasted in the supply chain, in the field and by the supermarkets. Only if we achieve transparency can any other policy elements, whether mandatory or voluntary, be properly assessed. The fact that two of the biggest supermarkets have now signed up to it makes it fairly urgent for them that they do not have a disadvantage. But it is great, in terms of putting that argument across, that both Tesco and Sainsbury's are voluntarily transparent about their food waste.

It needs to go further, and I am sure Tristram would support this idea too. It needs to be transparent to a very high level of detail. It needs to be transparent so that the supermarkets themselves take responsibility for reporting how much food is being wasted on the farms, certainly by anyone who supplies them exclusively. We need transparency across the board in all areas in which the supermarkets are complicit or directly involved in wasting food.

Q29 **Angela Smith:** That includes manufacturers as well. I was really interested in Tristram's point about reporting. Surely if we develop a mandatory food waste reduction target, the evidence base needs to be there to support that before it is achievable. The reporting therefore becomes a very necessary part of the evidence base.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tristram Stuart: There are two different things there. There is measuring and reporting, and reporting transparently and publicly. As you no doubt will know, under the Courtauld commitment the supermarkets and the signatories to Courtauld report to WRAP supposedly how much food they waste. It is self-generated data. We do not know exactly how reliable it is, but it is there and it is reported. But it is kept secret. The reason why this information never gets into DEFRA's hands is because the likes of me would put in a Freedom of Information Act request to get it. That is why the data was only ever to be held by two or three individuals at WRAP, who then aggregate the data.

It was a big achievement. It was Feedback that convinced Tesco to report transparently. We thought all the other supermarkets would follow suit. They went one step towards it. They now report, as a result of that initiative, their food waste data, but just the back-of-store stuff that happens in their own supermarkets. But they report it publicly in aggregate, not business by business, which is what we really want, and not product by product.

You could have a mandatory target. That obviously requires measurement. That does require reporting to somebody, but it does not necessarily mean that business-by-business data would be publicly available. That is where the real power lies. When you can compare businesses on their wastefulness, they will compete with each other to be the least wasteful, because it will be very publicly available.

The reason why they do not want to do that is because if they learn how to halve their food waste, such as their sandwich waste, all of their competitors will be looking over their shoulders, saying, "How did they do that? They have saved a bit of money there." They do not want to lose a competitive advantage. That is why this needs to be mandatory. What we are saying is that, by making it mandatory, everyone can learn off each other how to be least wasteful. No one gets the competitive disadvantage, because everyone has to do it.

Angela Smith: I hate to think how the House of Commons would measure, by the way, Chair.

Tristram Stuart: It could be Lords versus Commons.

Angela Smith: Lords versus Commons would be amazing. I think the Commons would probably come off worse.

Tristram Stuart: There would be a big public competition. You can imagine it. Who wastes more? That is how the supermarkets operate as well.

Chair: Perhaps we can put that challenge in our report. We will think about that one.



Tristram Stuart: I think that would be something to go away with.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Can I put in a request for permission to film that challenge taking place in our follow-up documentary that we are just planning at the moment?

Chair: I will see what we can do.

Q30 **Angela Smith:** For targets within the supply chain, you would target some areas of the supply chain more heavily than others, presumably. Do you believe that public support for that approach would be stronger if the data is transparent? In other words, the public will not buy into these targets unless they see the need for them.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I do not see how you could get public support for it if there was not transparency. Off the back of transparency, there are many things you can do. We have discovered from other documentary work that we have done, on tuna labelling, for example, and on the sustainability of fishing methods, that once you have the opportunity to independently rank a business and how well it is doing in a particular area of environmental policy, it generates extraordinary behaviour change. Nobody wants to be bottom of that list. Nobody wants to be the most wasteful supermarket.

There are so many things that we demand transparency of our food producers about, and rightly so. We want transparency on the health implications of the food and what is in the food, for a start. Why wouldn't one extend that to their wastefulness, in a world where we know that the price for that is one that we all have to pay, as members of the public? We all have to pay that environmental price.

As we have touched on several times today, but we have not perhaps said as blatantly as it needs to be said, every time food is wasted it is not just the ability to feed people with that good food that goes down the pan. It is the entire environmental footprint of the production of that one third, 40% or half of whatever it is that is being produced. It is the whole environmental cost, in energy, manpower and everything else that went into its production, that is wasted with it.

Q31 **Kerry McCarthy:** I actually met with the House of Commons authorities a few years ago, when I was doing the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill. They assured me that they were actually pretty good on food waste. I think a lot of the preparation is done offsite. The waste that you might get at that stage does not happen here. They do come up with some pretty weird salads. They always put sausages in the pasta salad, which I think is left over from breakfast.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: That must not be so popular with the vegetarians.

Q32 **Kerry McCarthy:** This is why I notice it and get annoyed by it. But they insist they are pretty good on it. I think we are the second largest



caterer in London, after Wormwood Scrubs. I think the SRA told me that. There is a huge number of people, all on one estate. I am sure you could make a pretty good programme about it.

Tristram, you mentioned back-of-store waste by supermarkets. This is something that I have come across quite a lot, when people tend to think of food waste with supermarkets as being the stuff that is on the shelves at the end of the day that then gets put in skips around the back, or whatever, whereas, as you will now tell us, and as you have told me in the past, a lot of it never actually leaves the warehouse. Some of that is not classed as supermarket waste, because they have the right then to send it back to the manufacturers, and it is deemed to be their waste. Could you just say a little about how we tackle that? It is about things like promotions where they do not sell enough. This is about auditing throughout the supply chain.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It is not just at the warehouse. One step back from that is what is wasted on the farm. But the overarching problem here, and again it is a cultural one and a convenient one for retailers, is one of deliberate and considerable oversupply. The leeway in the cosmetic standards that we have been talking about allows issues like working out how many strawberries you think you are going to sell, because it is raining and the forecast says that people are only going to eat this many.

The oversupply allows that culture, but it also allows the culture that we have touched on of trading off one producer against another and of being able to absolutely put the screws and the frighteners on a producer. You know that, if you push them so hard that they go out of business or they refuse to supply you, there is always enough sloshing around. Someone over here is not doing what you want, not responding to the supposed issue of cosmetic standards. Someone over here can suddenly have their cosmetic standards relaxed, to allow that produce to come through.

The whole system is based on oversupply at the moment. That rattling oversupply occurs at every stage. We have established that it is the excess that is back-of-store, because of those overfilled shelves. It is the excess knocking around in the warehouse, that may or may not be called up to the retail outlets for sale. It is the excess on the farm that is left rotting in a pile. But it has the potential to feed all of the problems, and indeed all of the cynical successes of the retail system that depends on oversupply.

Q33 **Kerry McCarthy:** Are there figures for what would be wasted at the distribution warehouse? I know you say it is not audited, and you have not done surveys. My understanding is that the back-of-store waste is tiny compared with what never makes it on to the shelves.

Tristram Stuart: I just want to disaggregate two things here. There is the back-of-store waste. There is the waste from the distribution depots that belong to the supermarkets themselves. Of course, there is also the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

waste on the part of their suppliers, manufacturers and farmers, who can fall into the same category. Everything we have been saying about fresh fruit and vegetables wasted on farms also applies to manufacturers and manufactured products, who suffer the same consequences of inaccurate forecasts and last-minute order cancellations, and rejection on the grounds of quality standards and the rest of it.

As you say, Kerry, the amount wasted in the back of store is a tiny percentage of what is wasted in the supply chain. The whole point is that supermarkets have used and abused their power to offload waste and its costs on to their suppliers, because they can and because that saves them money and creates the economic environment that we have just heard Hugh describe so eloquently.

What should we do about this? There is a waste hierarchy. It is enshrined in law. At the moment, that is not implemented in these cases. FareShare has a number of different policy solutions that it has advocated for. But one of them was a novel idea and quite a good one. I know it encouraged you to put it into your Bill, Kerry.

In the construction industry, if you produce waste, you have to show as a business that you have been through the steps of the waste hierarchy. You go for recovery if you can. Only if there is absolutely no other option available can you send your waste to landfill. You have to audit this and account for any instance of waste creation. Food manufacturers should be required to observe the waste hierarchy with any particular arising of food waste, so that they are obliged to show both that they are wasting food and the causes behind it, and why it could not be given to a charity or sold through a secondary market.

You would start to see that actually the cause of it is that they have an exclusivity clause with a supermarket. What we need to do is get rid of them. They cannot give it to a secondary business such as Approved Foods to sell online cheaply, because they are not allowed to. That would help you develop a whole set of further policies around it.

There is something called the Circular Economy Package. We are still part of the European Union, so amendments to the Circular Economy Package are still things that our MEPs will be voting on. We at Feedback have a position document on that policy area. I can submit that to the Committee, if you would be interested. It is a whole set of things that ought to be happening, and can happen, and that would be legally binding for the rest of Europe, and which hopefully would then get imported into the United Kingdom at another time.

Chair: Thank you. This is great evidence, but we just have to try to be a bit quicker.

Q34 **David Simpson:** I was quite interested in the analysis that you used with the oranges, in relation to supply and pricing. It would be interesting to do an analysis, I assume, of who actually stands the cost of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

all this lot. Is it the primary producer? It is certainly not the supermarkets—they will pass it on to someone else. Is it the consumers themselves? The analysis is that 20 tonnes of product is wasted in one depot or one store per week. Who pays for that?

Tristram Stuart: I can give you a very vivid answer to that question if you would be interested to know. This happens on distressingly regular occasions, but I will describe a particular one in Kenya. I can safely say that I have never felt more ashamed of who I am, as a British, European consumer, than when I have spoken to a bunch of women who were in the act of destroying an entire crop of basil that they had grown in a polytunnel, not a single leaf of which had been picked.

These women were day labourers. They get paid less than \$2 per day, typically. On this day, they were not paid anything. They described, on film—I can submit it to the Committee, if you would be interested—that this meant that that day they were certainly not going to be able to send their kids to school, probably not going to be able to feed their family adequately, and that it put them at risk of losing their homes.

These are the people least able to bear the risk in the market, and they were bearing the entire cost of it. The cost of it was incurred by an order cancellation from a European supermarket, for whom they were buying through a number of different chains of supply. But ultimately, as you say, it gets passed down and down and down, until the least powerful, the least able to bear the cost, bears it. The consequences for them are, as I have said, not a matter of a little bit of profit margin, but going into debt, with long-term consequences.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: That was a cancelled order. That flowed from a cancelled order.

Tristram Stuart: It was an order cancellation. All the other phenomena that we talked about have those effects. It gets passed down to the least powerful. The reason why the GCA got through is because it creates a lack of willingness to invest on the side of the producer, because it is such an insecure market to be in. That polytunnel cost those people a lot of money to build. Are you going to build another polytunnel, if you going to risk going through that process all over again? You probably will not. It is not good for the industry on the production side.

Ultimately, it adds cost to the whole system of production, which is something that presumably consumers bear at least some of. It is both a rip-off for consumers and a disincentive to progress within supply. That is why the Groceries Code Adjudicator, despite intense lobbying that we will incur from the supermarkets, got through.

Chair: Thank you. We have got the point. David, I want you to ask your actual question now, please—you are as bad as the witnesses.

Q35 **David Simpson:** You may have touched on this, as we have touched on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a lot of subjects. Do you believe that England lacks policy leadership when it comes to reducing food waste, compared with the devolved nations?

Chair: Compared to anybody, I suppose.

Tristram Stuart: By policy, you mean Government policy.

David Simpson: Yes.

Tristram Stuart: Yes.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: We have had a number of conversations about what policy change might look like under visible, tangible, appreciable leadership. There is a long way to go. Yes, some part of Government has to own this problem in a more visible way.

Q36 **David Simpson:** What do they need to do?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: We have talked about many of the things that they need to do. They need to work towards mandatory transparency with the supermarkets. That really is the first point. So much flows from that. So much of that makes it possible for both Government and commentators alike to hold the whole food industry to account, because finally we have visibility. There is nowhere for the supermarkets, or anyone else, to hide on these issues. At the moment, as we established right at the beginning, we simply do not have clear sight of the problem. That is the first thing that leadership can and should deliver up for the public and for Government: clear sight of the problem.

At the moment, we are still running around. I can tell you right now that we are going to be making at least one more programme about this, and we are looking for storylines. The fact that these storylines are often hidden potentially makes them more interesting television. But having dragged them into the public gaze, it becomes very clear that, with the right kind of action, we would see change. That change comes from leadership. For me, transparency is the first point, from which many other things flow.

Tristram Stuart: Like I said, many of the policies that Feedback and I advocate have been touched on already. We have developed a package of national policies that we would like national Governments to adopt. Again, if the Committee would be interested, I would be very happy to put that on paper and send it to you. It is something that we are hoping will be on the table at the United Nations Environment Assembly in December next year, to get it adopted as a protocol by UNEP. But I would be very happy to put it forward to you. It includes most of the things we talked about, such as national targets, mandatory transparency and beefing up the Groceries Code Adjudicator. I do think more leadership is needed.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I do want to acknowledge, however, that on many issues the UK, compared with other countries, has done more than anyone else. One of the most exciting things as a campaigner that works internationally is that a lot of the lessons that are learnt here have impact not just in the United Kingdom but by being replicated overseas. The Europeans are now interested in a GCA for the whole of Europe, or for individual member states. When I went and spoke to the House Committee on Agriculture in Washington DC, the first thing they asked me about was the Groceries Code Adjudicator and whether it was possible to build up a piece of legislation called PACA over in the US. We have a degree of leadership. Obviously, there is a lot of room for improvement.

Q37 Ms Ritchie: Gentlemen, whose fault is it that vegetables are not sold for cosmetic reasons: the supermarkets' for not selling them, or the consumers' for not buying them?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: That is a great question. Of course, there are going to be responsibilities on both sides. As far as I can say with some degree of certainty, historically, if you look at how this culture has come to where it is now, the supermarkets have an awful lot to answer for. It didn't used to be a problem for any member of the public to buy a slightly curved carrot or a slightly wonky parsnip.

What we have seen between the supermarkets is an arms race in pursuit of appearance and cosmetic perfection that has nothing to do with the food value of the products they are selling—I mean nothing. It is irrelevant to how these things will cook or taste; it is purely about perception. The supermarkets will fight a war wherever they can. Wherever they think they can gain a competitive advantage, they will go to war with their rivals. Unfortunately, they have chosen the cosmetic standards and the appearance of their fruit and vegetables to fight one of those battles.

Q38 Ms Ritchie: In view of that, what changes need to be made to address the waste that occurs for those reasons? How do you change this psyche or position of the supermarkets, so that they are not involved in this supermarket war, which they probably will be? How do you change that?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I don't mind telling you what we hoped might happen as a result of our programmes.

Q39 Ms Ritchie: You have called for retailers to normalise vegetables with cosmetic defects.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: I have certainly called for supermarkets to use some of the amazing clout they have at successfully marketing all kinds of things to successfully find a market for the fruit and vegetables that are perfectly edible but are currently ending up in rotting piles on farms not just all over the UK but, as Tristram has reminded us several times, all over the world. They are obliged to find a solution to that problem, because it is a problem of their making.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q40 **Ms Ritchie:** Should they be sold at discounted rates?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Maybe some of them should. I think the normalisation argument is a good one on a number of fronts. It would certainly reduce waste. But it would also eliminate this cynical practice of pretending that the reason you are refusing to take an order is for cosmetic reasons, when actually it is a supply and demand reason, if everyone had an understanding of where there really were limits. But what we were hoping would happen is that one of the supermarkets would break ranks and show a high degree of commitment to solving this problem, and bring their customers with them on this. But it does seem that they are frightened to step into that space. They need incentivising.

Q41 **Ms Ritchie:** Tristram, what should the retailers be doing to help their customers reduce food waste?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: They could certainly start by selling them less perfect vegetables and bringing them with them on that journey.

Tristram Stuart: Yes.

Q42 **Ms Ritchie:** I think the consumer would be quite happy to buy them as well. What should retailers be doing to help their customers reduce food waste?

Tristram Stuart: Do you mean of all sorts?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: There are ways in which they can educate their customers about being more thrifty, but maybe we should thrash out a bit more on cosmetic standards.

Q43 **Chair:** Before you answer, could I just drill down on Margaret's question? Hugh, you made an interesting point. In a way, it would be better if the supermarkets would accept slightly more defects in the vegetable and sell them all as the same. If you are a consumer, you are going to go into that shop and you are going to expect a discount on a wonky vegetable, or you are not necessarily going to buy it.

Tristram Stuart: No, not necessarily.

Q44 **Chair:** Perhaps Tristram disagrees. Somehow or other, it would be better if the supermarkets were not so fussy with the overall buying of the vegetables. Once you start to identify the different ones, why would you necessarily buy a wonky vegetable for the same price? It is fair enough if it is just wonky, but if you start to peel a misshapen potato, or whatever, you are going to lose more of it. Let's get down to the basics. The housewife, househusband or houseperson will understand that as well—I shall get myself into huge trouble here if I say "housewife". There are some real practical issues here as well.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Just before I hand over to Tristram, who I know has some very strong policy ideas on this, I just want to take



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a second to look at this term “wonky vegetable”, and how it has been used. Some of the publicity that has been done around wonky vegetables slightly misrepresents the problem as being one where there are all sorts of gnarled and twisted vegetables out there that are actually perfectly good to eat, even if they are a little bit harder to peel or whatever.

Indeed, the supermarkets’ response to that in many cases has been, “Let’s show that we are doing something about it, by bagging up the three-legged carrot and the comedy parsnip, and selling it at a discount to show that we, as a supermarket, care.” Some supermarkets are sending people around the farms, or round the factory floor, looking for the comedy vegetables to put into the wonky-veg bags.

Meanwhile, exactly the same cosmetic standards are being applied at the high end of the product, and the same 20% or 30% of almost perfect carrots, with just a couple of spots on or a very slight curve, are going through the production line and ending up in a tip or bin outside, rotting. We have to be clear that the vast majority of these so-called “cosmetically imperfect” vegetables lies very close to perfection. It is not out on some limb of great split potatoes or twisted carrots.

Q45 Chair: It does not need to be identified as different. That is my argument.

Tristram Stuart: Indeed, people do not notice. That is right.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: The supermarkets are deluded, in terms of what they think people will and will not buy. The supermarkets could all reduce their cosmetic standards by mutual agreement, or even not by mutual agreement. They could reduce them by 10%, 15% or whatever margin, and continue to bag things up. Nobody would even notice. It would not dent their business in the least tiny bit.

But because they have started the process of competing over cosmetic perfection, like all arms races there is a danger of there being no end. Because they are working within a system where there is an oversupply, they can get away with it. It does not hurt the supermarket to insist, even more than the next supermarket, on the straightness of the carrot. They are all at it, and it has become a crazy kind of arms race that has actually become removed from reality. It has certainly become completely removed from the reality of what good, edible food is.

Q46 Ms Ritchie: What, therefore, should retailers be doing to help their customers to reduce food waste?

Tristram Stuart: I will answer that question first, before being tempted to stray into the cosmetic standards. For supermarkets, and indeed all big food retailers, not just supermarkets, the single biggest thing they could be encouraged to do, if not obliged, is measurement. It is not just measurement of their own food waste, but going and measuring, and financing the independent measurement, ideally, of their customers.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I will tell you why I think this is particularly interesting. I have recently been in strategic conversations with food retailers that are not supermarkets, like Blue Apron and HelloFresh. These are the kinds of businesses that bring groceries to your door in the form of ready-to-cook meals. An example would be three carrots, an onion, a piece of strip beef or whatever, and with a recipe to cook a particular thing. Blue Apron, which is a US-based company, decided to measure, across its supply chain, from plough right through to customers' plates. It found that its retail supply chain was vastly less wasteful than the average supermarket food waste.

Q47 **Ms Ritchie:** What was the reason for that?

Tristram Stuart: It is kind of common sense. They are able to talk to their farmer about what products are in glut and design the menus according to what is there on the farm. They are able to tell their customers, "This is what you should be eating right now because it is in season, it is locally abundant, and we do not want our farmers to waste the food." They are able to design the menus around what is available and send all of it to their customers, ready to turn into recipes, so you do not end up with half an onion because Jamie Oliver's cookbook says "half an onion" and you do not know what to do with the other half. It is all designed. What comes to your home is exactly what you need to cook for a meal for the size of family you are. You do not need to do all that thinking that busy people do not have time to do. You finish everything, because it has been a well-designed meal for your family.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Presumably, you have also filtered out any danger of there being over-perfect vegetables, because people have bought into it and they are going to take whatever they get.

Tristram Stuart: There is certainly a lot of manoeuvre for doing that. What interests me is that, if we got all those big businesses to measure, you would start to be able to see that, for example, "Waitrose customers waste so much more food than Tesco customers. That means that there is something going on in Tesco's business model that is working, such as the way they are informing customers about how to use up leftovers, or something. Maybe I will not go to a supermarket anymore at all. I am going to my local community-supported agriculture system." Measurement, across the supply chain, right down to plate, is the thing, if I were going to name one, that they should do.

Q48 **Ms Ritchie:** That will involve being more strategic on all the parts of the supply chain, and also being more inclusive. Would you agree with that as well?

Tristram Stuart: Like I have said, there is a degree of accountability that comes with measurement across the supply chain.

Q49 **Ms Ritchie:** Then, do you have to go back to the retailers? They are very good at selling and promoting their particular produce, thereby



HOUSE OF COMMONS

encouraging the customer to buy more than they need.

Tristram Stuart: If we could see that as a public phenomenon, and I could see, "If I am a Morrisons consumer, I am going to waste 30% of my groceries week after week. But if am a Tesco consumer, I am only going to waste 10%," that would be a good reason not to go to Morrisons and to go to Tesco instead. It would thereby incentivise those businesses to do whatever it takes, and avoid encouraging customers to buy more than they actually end up eating.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It is another chart that you do not want to be at the bottom of, if you are a supermarket. Whereas, at the moment, the supermarket whose customers waste the most has got a lot to cheer about, because they are selling food. They are being rather successful in out-selling what they actually deserve to sell, if you like.

Tristram Stuart: Supermarkets could be obliged to do this, or the Government could fund independent research to go and look at consumer food waste. They could look at not just consumers in general, but consumers who buy in different sorts of retail outlets. That would be very interesting data to generate.

Ms Ritchie: Thank you.

Q50 **Chris Davies:** It has been very interesting so far, I must say. Thank you, gentlemen. I have listened intently. As we are going to move on from the supermarkets, in your opinion, are the supermarkets really the Devil incarnate?

Tristram Stuart: They are the ones that are in the position of power to solve this problem, more than any other stakeholder. Rightly, policy, campaigning and public awareness should make them as accountable as possible. They are not the only stakeholder that has power, but they can impact food waste more than any other individual stakeholder. They can impact it, obviously, in their own business. They can impact it, as we have discussed, in their supply chain. As I would argue but has yet to be proven, they can impact it in their customers' homes.

Q51 **Chris Davies:** Out of interest, I represent a very large rural seat. We have some excellent high street traders, such as butchers, if I may say so. You go into the local butcher. They know their customer. Their trays are empty by the end of the day, because they have sold out of the particular product, which I am always pleased to see. They buy their meat locally. You can see many of my local butchers in the local market a month before. The beef, the sheep and the lamb will be on their shelves over the next month. They can tell you where that product has come from, and they can sell out of that product. Why can we not change that culture? I still see people buying meat in the local supermarket, and sometimes more expensively than that excellent local meat that they can buy in the local butcher. What can we do to change that mindset?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tristram Stuart: The high street is dead. The high street is dead because there is no longer, despite Neil's politically incorrect use of the term, something called the housewife who can be relied on during the day, when the high street is open, to go to the butcher, the greengrocer and the rest of it. That is why we need to think not just about how we preserve traditional high streets, but about how we create retail interfaces that compete with supermarkets not just on cost but on convenience.

It is awfully convenient. If you work in an office until 6pm, the high street is closed by then. The one thing that is still open is your supermarket. You pop in and you do your buying. You might instead be the kind of person who goes and does a weekly shop, and buys everything but just in one shop. You have kids screaming. You just want to go in, get everything you need for the week, get yourself home and get it in the fridge. That is why high streets are so massively out-competed.

What interests me is interfaces such as Hubbub, if you have heard of it. It is a one-stop shop online, where I can go and buy all of the products in my local high street, and somebody else goes round, picks it all up and dumps it on my door. I have got access to that, with just the level of convenience, but I am supporting local businesses. That is how I would go for protecting that kind of business.

Q52 **Chris Davies:** Do you live in the centre of a city, or do you live 10 miles from your local high street?

Tristram Stuart: I currently live in Hackney, but I moved from the middle of the Ashdown Forest, where I was six miles from the nearest shop. I didn't even have a car. I have experienced both ways of living throughout my life. Why do you ask, if I may ask?

Q53 **Chris Davies:** I represent people who live, sometimes, 10 miles from their local high street. I am afraid these are great names, Hubbub and companies like that, but I have never heard of them and neither have my constituents.

Tristram Stuart: They do not currently exist for them. You are right. This is it. We do not have the infrastructure to out-compete the supermarkets on price and convenience at the moment. I am beginning to believe that such a thing might be possible.

Q54 **Chris Davies:** I agree with what you have said, but please do not give up on the high street. I think it still has a future.

Tristram Stuart: Hubbub is precisely the way of preserving it. We need to preserve the high street for so many reasons, but we need to think outside the box about how to do it. Getting people to go on the high street in working hours is not necessarily going to work.



Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: One thing that small independent high street shops can always out-compete the supermarkets on is transparency and personal service. Perhaps one of the best examples of both those things is actually at a farmers' market. You are talking to the person or somebody from the farm who has actually produced the food.

The high street is just one proxy away from that, where the grocer or the butcher is in contact with a family of different suppliers, all of whom they know intimately. They can give you that reassurance. They can also give you the service. They can prepare things for you. They can give you the right advice. People in that line of business need to be more flexible in their working hours. They need to cluster together. You can offer those things within a short walk. Sometimes people forget that in a good high street, the distance between the butcher, the grocer and, indeed, the pharmacy is shorter than you might have to walk if you were inside a megastore.

There are some places where that scale of shopping is having a resurgence. I spend a lot more time in Bristol at the moment, because we have a Bristol office. You see small, independent retailing thriving in Bristol. It is having a kind of resurgence. It is very exciting to see. A lot of that is in the café or coffee shop area. But I am seeing it also in small-scale food retailers, grocers, butchers and the like as well.

Tristram Stuart: The other thing to do with this question, of course, is what kind of farm system you have. A farm system, particularly with the European incentives, that essentially favours large industrial farming, to the disadvantage of small distributed farming, is one that will also lend itself to supermarketisation. A small butcher buying a couple of sheep a week is just not going to sustain a small farming business, unless there are lots and lots of butchers doing that.

We have at the moment a chicken and egg situation. We have a supermarket system that entrenches an industrial farming system, and an industrial farming system that entrenches the supermarket system. You have to look at the ability for small, varied producers and small retailers to survive in a policy context that favours the large monocultural industrial farming system as a whole, I would argue.

Q55 **Chris Davies:** We have talked about misshapen vegetables. We know that it is sometimes about getting the mindset of the consumer to buy differently. What more can we do to get those misshapen vegetables, and vegetables per se, into schools, prisons, hospitals and other places where the consumer does not see them but the quality is still needed?

Tristram Stuart: Some of the most successful work that we have done as an organisation is precisely to engage the retailers not just with the idea that they have to sell, visibly, as fresh produce those wonky fruits and vegetables, but with the principle that they should take responsibility for the food that is being produced for them, and ensure that it finds a market somewhere. That might be on the shelves as "ugly fruit and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

vegetables" with relaxed standards, or it might be sending it to their pie manufacturer, so that the carrots can go into shepherd's pie, or it might be helping their producer access a market such as mass catering or institutional catering, so that one way or another that produce ends up in somebody's belly, through one or other market system.

I wanted to get this across earlier. For example, when we worked with Tesco on their banana supply chain, they went to a whole-crop purchasing principle, where they guarantee a market for the entire crop. As I say, they use the bananas that they can. They send off to Giraffe the bananas that are misshapen, for smoothie making. They have two or three potential outlets. They have just done the same for their potato supply chain. Branston now send their reject potatoes off to the pie manufacturers who supply Tesco with pies.

There are ways around it. Again, it is about getting the supermarkets to take responsibility to ensure that the food that their producers are growing gets to market one way or another, rather than just saying, "We will have this lot, and you are on your own with the rest of it."

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: But it is a way that ultimately will only succeed if there is a genuine reduction in oversupply. Oversupply is oversupply. There is just too much food out there. This is why we have ended up with the problem of the over-gratuitous use of anaerobic digestion. Anaerobic digestion is just not an appropriate end-use for food that is still good to eat. It is as simple as that. It is inappropriate every way you look at it. But in the end, it is a very inefficient form of energy recovery. It recovers only a small percentage of the energy available from good food, a tiny percentage relative to the energy recovered by eating it. Being eaten by a human is first choice. Being eaten by livestock is second choice. In terms of energy recovery, being consumed by anaerobic digestion is way, way, way down. It just does not make any energy sense.

Talking about being resourceful, and diversifying, and clever ways of using up "wonky veg", we visited one of the biggest carrot producers in the UK, big enough to invest in the kind of machinery that will slice and dice the less perfect carrots, and transform them into other products, and make juice. But even at the end of all that process, doing everything he can in a creative and diversified way, he is still left with so many not-quite-perfect carrots that he cannot do anything with that he is about to put in an anaerobic digester on site.

From the moment that happens, we are then in a crazy world where farmers, in order to deal with the problem of oversupply that everybody demands of them, are growing more than they need with a view to a fixed and regular percentage of that, be it 10%, 20% or 30%, going straight from the field into their own anaerobic digester.

Tristram Stuart: That is Poskitt Carrots. I visited Poskitt's myself, when I wrote my book, in 2007 or 2008. That was where I had my eyes



HOUSE OF COMMONS

opened. He showed me the carrots that I assumed were his premium brand carrots. He said, "No, those are the rejects." At that time, and still, the rejects that he cannot sell go to sheep or horses. Why is he now building an anaerobic digester? I have not spoken to him about his economic decision, but I can tell you it is a national phenomenon.

The reason is because of the economic incentives that are given for energy produced through anaerobic digestion. You will all remember, I am sure, when Joan Ruddock brought in the double renewable obligation certificates for AD. AD gets twice as much of the incentivisation for renewable energy as any other renewable energy source. The reason given for that at the time by Joan Ruddock was that it was a double-whammy. It produced renewable energy and it got rid of waste.

The reason why it was necessary to put money into getting rid of waste is because the National Audit Office had just declared that the United Kingdom was at risk of missing our landfill directive targets, which could have resulted in fines of up to £500,000 every single day. We had to come up with policies to pull waste out of landfill. AD incentivisation has done a relatively good job of that.

The number of applications for AD plants has just skyrocketed, because it makes economic sense. It makes economic sense because of the double ROCs. That is great where AD is using waste that would have otherwise been incinerated or gone to landfill. The problem is that this policy was created without considering how it was going to distort the market further up the waste hierarchy. What is very worrying is that we now have a situation where it is more economically attractive, as a result of the double ROCs, to send stuff to AD than it is to use it for higher purposes in the hierarchy, like feeding to livestock, as Mr Poskitt used to, or like redistributing to charity.

The question is: what should we do about it? Should we get rid of the incentivisation? No, that is not the answer, because then we get rid of that mechanism for lifting stuff out. This is a very specific policy recommendation that has precedent. When the renewable heat incentive was brought in, they had cottoned on to this problem. One of the exclusions is that you are not allowed to grow a food crop to put into your AD producer to produce renewable heat. You do not get the RHI if you have grown maize.

What needs to happen for ROC is there needs to be that clause. You get your double ROCs, as long as you are not using a food crop or food that could have been used in a rung higher in the hierarchy. The clause needs to be lifted from RHI, put into the double ROCs and extended to include not just food crops, but food that could be used for a higher purpose. It is a very simple tweak.

Q56 Chair: I agree with you. Give us a little bit in writing on that, because it is not just food waste, of course. It is the fact that people are growing maize, fodder feed and all sorts of things that are never going into cattle



at all. They are going straight into anaerobic digesters. It is a double subsidy. That is a different issue.

Tristram Stuart: I can give you case studies of farmers who have lost their tenancy, after 40 years of growing food for people to eat, to contractors who can pay a higher rent because they are going to grow maize and stick it straight into an AD plant. It is bonkers policy.

Chair: We will look at that, definitely.

Q57 **Chris Davies:** Hugh, you spoke at the beginning about River Cottage, and what you are doing to reduce food waste in a restaurant environment. The hospitality sector in Britain is vast, of course, from McDonald's to Roux at Parliament Square, and everything in between. What more can be done by the hospitality industry to reduce food waste?

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: It is a very good question. It is one that I might be able to answer better if we look into that in our next programme, which is definitely on the cards. But you have got some very difficult and wasteful cultures in the hospitality industry globally. We certainly share aspects of them here in the UK.

The breakfast buffet is one of the big nightmares. It is a little bit like the supermarket shelf that we were talking about. It must always be inexhaustible, and always full, and always look perfect. It must look like that when the first guests come down at six-thirty in the morning. It must still look like that when the last guests go on their way at ten o'clock. You can imagine what happens to the food of the still-perfect-looking breakfast buffet in business hotels all over the UK and all over the world a few minutes after the last person has finished their breakfast and walks away from that. Probably, at best, that is going to end up in anaerobic digestion, and that is going to be a daily thing.

Again, it does require a culture change. We have all been to hotels where they explain about the laundry issue, and they say, "If you want your bathrobe or your towel washed, of course we will do that. Chuck it in the bath. But if you are happy to reuse it and save the environment as a result, then hang it up." We need forms of communication like that with members of the public on the issue of routine food waste. "You just have to accept that in our group of hotels, if you get down at nine o'clock, you will see a diminishing buffet. That is because we care." There should be enough people out there who will support that kind of initiative. We need to change the conversation. We need to change it in hospitality. It goes back to what we were saying about the supermarkets.

We need to engage with the customer: "We asked for your custom because we are doing really well at this difficult issue, not just because we are constantly offering one version of perfection that we say is better than our nearest rivals'." What about being one better in the area of the environment, in the area of doing the right thing? The "doing the right



thing” communications are under way in the world of commerce and in the world of food. I think they have probably gained traction.

They already have traction in the area of hospitality, because there are people who will only buy free-range chicken or only buy dived scallops rather than dredged scallops, who want their fish to be sustainable. That conversation about doing the right thing environmentally is already there in the hospitality industry. It has to be extended, as rapidly as possible and in a creative way, to the issue of waste. That should not be hard, because that particular sector is highly motivated and highly creative at developing those kinds of conversations with their clientele.

Tristram Stuart: There are some really good examples of that. If you look at AccorHotels, they have a company-wide global food-waste-reduction target that they are committed to. They are doing measurement and reporting food waste transparently. Nordic Choice hotels have introduced a lot of these initiatives, where they prompt customers. They use smaller plates at the breakfast bar, so people take less. They say, “Just take what you want. Do not take more. If something has run out, ask for it. We can always cook it.” They have done a lot of innovative work. They have massively reduced their food waste as a result.

What is the policy that could change this? Then, really ramp it up. Extend it across all the businesses. There should be transparent food waste reporting on the part not just of supermarkets, not just of big manufacturers, but of the big hospitality sector, particularly where there is competition. AccorHotels, Nordic Choice and Hilton are all competing with each other. Encouraging them to compete, as Hugh has just said, on environmental criteria, by insisting on transparency, is one of the things that will drive a lot of change.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: The AD take-up is a problem here. AD is greedy for all this kind of waste. If that becomes the easiest short-term or short-hand solution, that could be really damaging.

Chair: It almost drives the situation in wrong direction.

Q58 **Chris Davies:** Tristram, you go around the world on food waste in particular. You have said that Britain is one of the leading countries for sorting out its food waste. But what are other parts of the world doing? Can you give one example of where the rest of the world is doing better than us? What system can we introduce over here?

Tristram Stuart: Redistribution of surplus food is an area that the United Kingdom has virtually no good policy around, and other countries have a lot. I am not saying this would be appropriate for the United Kingdom, but you have asked for examples of where there is a big difference. With redistribution in the US and France, if you are a company that donates food to a charity, you get a tax break on the part



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of the value of the food that you have donated. It is massively strongly incentivised vis-à-vis other things.

In the US and in Italy there is something called good Samaritan law, which protects a company that has donated food in good faith from any liability claims against them if somebody gets sick. In fact, no one has ever sued anyone successfully for getting sick from donated food, anywhere in the world. The University of Arkansas just did a study to prove that. In France we now have legislation surrounding supermarkets having to have an agreement with a charity to receive food. There is a whole set of policies.

There is no necessary, definite one that I think the UK should adopt. But there is one really good policy that I think is feasible, and that is to say you only get an environmental permit to operate by your local health authority if you have a relationship with a local charity to collect your surplus food. That would be feasible.

Chair: Thank you. That is an excellent answer.

Kerry McCarthy: I am laughing because I had a whole host of questions I was going to ask you, and then you kept answering them in your evidence.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: He is very good like that.

Q59 **Kerry McCarthy:** Particularly on the financial incentives to try to move up the food waste hierarchy, you have been very clear on the fact that there is a disincentive to send things to landfill, but there is an incentive for AD. Could you just say a little bit more about what could be done? You mentioned tax breaks. Where are the good examples of financial measures to encourage people to observe the hierarchy?

Tristram Stuart: I have just mentioned one of the financial measures. There are a couple more. Then, if you will allow me, I will give you a bit of a personal view on those financial measures. Tax breaks are the biggest financial lever. They are very successful. If you look at why the US and France have much bigger redistribution systems than the UK, compared with the size of their grocery markets, that is probably the first and foremost thing.

The problem with tax breaks is that essentially the public purse is paying for big businesses to clear up their act. I have always wanted big business to redistribute edible surplus food because that is the right thing to do, rather than because they are necessarily going to save lots of money by doing so or, as France has taken the attitude more recently, because they are actually obliged to. Laws, at their best, are a codification of a set of principles or morals that the society in which those laws exist holds. I believe it is the case in the United Kingdom that people think that supermarkets wasting food on the scale that they do at the moment is wrong and should not be continuing. How should we deal



HOUSE OF COMMONS

with that with policy? Shall we give monetary hand-outs to people to comply with that basic principle? Or should we just say, "You have to do it." I would prefer the latter.

There is one area of financial incentivisation in the US that I do think would be worth looking at. It is not the company that produces the food and donates the food getting a tax break, but haulage companies getting a tax break for agreeing to transport food from X to Y. As we all know, one of the really big missing links in redistribution concerns who should bear the cost of taking the food from where it is to where it is needed. We are led to believe that 25% of trucks on UK roads are empty. Using a tax lever to encourage haulage companies to do the job of food redistribution for charitable purposes would not incentivise over-production, but it would get over one of the missing links between supply and demand.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: He is on a roll. I fully support that. Tristram's point that this is a moral issue has arguably come a bit too late in the session. Wasting food on the kind of scale that we are seeing it being thrown away at the moment is an ethical difficulty. That is why we should not be scared of legislating in ways that the public would get behind and which would solve the problem.

Q60 **Kerry McCarthy:** There is an overarching ideological discussion to be had about whether a voluntary approach is working. It is DEFRA's approach. They say, "We are making progress. We are getting places. Consumers are starting to respond." But that is very slow progress, as opposed to regulating and making things happen much more quickly. On the Circular Economy, as I understand it, the UK Government's negotiating approach was very much to get the word "voluntary" in there and to remove mandatory targets. There is not a food waste target anymore. You said you would send us your submission on the Circular Economy. But would you say that targets are useful, and mandatory targets, and enforcement measures if people do not comply with them, are something that is needed?

Tristram Stuart: A national target would be helpful. The UK had an instrumental hand in ensuring that the Circular Economy Package did not include mandatory targets for member states. That was a very regressive position to take. If we still have the opportunity to undo that damage, that would be a good thing.

Kerry McCarthy: Good. I thought you would say that.

Q61 **Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen. You have been very generous with your time. You have also been very great witnesses. I have had great difficulty in stopping you talking, which is excellent. Sometimes I have to get witnesses to talk. You have really given us some great evidence. It has been a really lovely way to start our report. We have plenty of food and ammunition now to fire at the supermarkets and others when they come in here. We really have enjoyed your evidence, even if you have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

been a little bit more difficult to control than sometimes. But that has come from the sheer enthusiasm and the ideas that have come forward this morning, so I do very much thank you both for that. Thank you very much.

Tristram Stuart: Thank you.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall: Thank you all very much for having us here.