

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Food Waste in England, HC 429

Wednesday 30 November 2016

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Mrs Margaret Ritchie; David Simpson; Kerry McCarthy; Rebecca Pow; Chris Davies

Questions 62-162

Witnesses

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

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

Examination of Witnesses

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

Q62 Chair: Good afternoon. I am sorry to have kept you a few minutes before we started. Welcome to the Committee. We are looking at food waste and we very much appreciate you coming this afternoon to give evidence. Starting with Laura, please could you introduce yourselves?

Laura Hopper: I am Laura Hopper, CEO of the charity Plan Zheroes. We are a surplus food distribution charity working primarily in London.

Lindsay Boswell: I am Lindsay Boswell. I am the Chief Executive of FareShare, which is a national organisation that redistributes food to just under 5,000 charities and community groups in all four nations of the UK.



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Vera Zakharov: I am Vera Zakharov. I am the Love Food Hate Waste co-ordinator for the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership. I also support the Surplus Food Project's network in Brighton & Hove, and I am the Sussex gleaning co-ordinator with Feedback.

Q63 **Chair:** Thank you very much. You are all welcome. Lindsay, we very much enjoyed our visit last week and learned a great deal. It is good to have you here again, as it is Laura and Vera. First of all, to FareShare, how much surplus food is currently being discarded by the retail and hospitality sectors in England, and how much could be redistributed? It is just a small question to start off.

Lindsay Boswell: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Using WRAP's research and figures, the size of the prize is that at least 270,000 tonnes of food in the United Kingdom is allowed to go to surplus that is fit for human consumption and could be redistributed to charities. Whenever I refer to redistribution, I am talking specifically about redistribution to the voluntary sector. A piece of work that WRAP did for Tesco, the first supermarket that was open and transparent about its food waste, showed that 1% of that amount of food was at a retail level. The vast majority of the rest of the food is in the supply chain. By that I mean the distribution centres, packing houses, production, and the manufacturers in particular, right back to farm gate.

WRAP's figure of 270,000 tonnes excludes hospitality, as I understand it, and excludes anything from the farm gate back into the farm. As far as hospitality goes, I am not aware of any accurate figures. However, in terms of food that is available and could be economically and efficiently redistributed, the supply chain to the hospitality sector and the major suppliers to those organisations are again where the real size of the prize is. However, I am not aware of figures from the hospitality sector.

Q64 **Chair:** Do you not know even from their society or anything else? I suppose it is probably a job to pull them all together, but we need to try to get those figures if we can.

Laura Hopper: The WRAP hospitality figure is 900,000 tonnes. That figure is a few years old. They estimate 75% of that is food that could have been eaten by people.

Lindsay Boswell: That includes right through to the front end and the serving hatch, so to speak.

Q65 **Chair:** Does the figure include those that do not eat half of their meal?

Laura Hopper: Yes, it includes plate waste.

Q66 **Chair:** That is an interesting one, especially sometimes with children, where they decide they do not want it. It is more difficult for us to legislate for that: "You must eat what we put in front of you or else." It is quite a serious point in a way. Is there any figure as to how much of that 900,000 tonnes is from the moment it is served to the client?



Vera Zakharov: Do you mean plate waste?

Chair: Yes.

Vera Zakharov: According to the Sustainable Restaurant Association's *Too Good To Waste* report, 34% comes from customer-caused plate waste. If you are interested, it is mainly potato, which I imagine means chips.

Q67 **Chair:** It would be interesting to know of that 34% how much went for animal feed. Waste such as potato could be fed to pigs, because it is not a meat protein. We have had some trouble in the past with some meat proteins. It is an interesting figure. We looked last week at your depot. We probably asked you this then, but it is good for the record. How much of your food, on average, comes directly from the retailer, processor, or manufacturer into your sites? I suppose it varies a bit.

Lindsay Boswell: Almost none of the food that you saw in our depot and we redistribute has made it to a shop. The food in our warehouses and depots is almost exclusively from the supply chain. In our chilled capacity, there is a large percentage of that food that has come from a distribution centre. However, it is still under ownership of the suppliers, not the retailers.

Q68 **Chair:** I know it is waste food, but it is a sort of wholesale-price food that has not actually been retailed and gone out of the other end.

Lindsay Boswell: Correct. It is still owned and is the property of the suppliers.

Q69 **Chair:** Is it because somebody has over-ordered and they do not want it, or there is a problem with the pallets?

Lindsay Boswell: Yes, or it is just economic for the supplier to not take a small percentage of the pallet out and send the whole pallet to the supermarket distribution centres. That would be called an "over" in the industry. It is a combination of either an over or a quality control issue. That product, certainly for the main four supermarkets, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, and the Co-op, all comes redistributed into the 20 regional centres, one of which you visited.

Q70 **Chris Davies:** Where was that food going before you got involved?

Lindsay Boswell: The food I have recently been talking about would have been sent back to the supplier. The supplier would then have the disposal problem. Depending on whether it is suitable for animal feed, it would either go to animal feed, go to anaerobic digestion and be turned into green energy, or go to a hole in the ground.

Q71 **Chris Davies:** If you have an oversupply of something and cannot distribute it, where does your oversupply go?

Lindsay Boswell: We have almost no oversupply, because we have demand far in excess of supply. If we do have a product that we cannot



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dispose of, we will work with one of the city animal farms in the urban centres that we work with. If they cannot take it directly to a farm, it will go to anaerobic digestion.

Q72 Chris Davies: Are you primarily urban-based? Forgive me; I represent a large rural constituency in mid-Wales and have not come across your great services in the past.

Lindsay Boswell: This is an important point, and thank you for asking it. The vast majority of our model is urban-based, and that is because the vast majority of food we redistribute is given to front-line organisations. They then provide a service that addresses the causes behind hunger rather than just the symptom itself, which is being unable to feed oneself. The vast majority of the voluntary sector infrastructure for that tends to be urban-based. However, having said that, we currently cover 995 towns and cities across the four nations of the United Kingdom. In your constituency, where there is a Tesco store we will have been connecting local charities with that Tesco store.

Chris Davies: There is a structure.

Lindsay Boswell: Correct. In the interest of balance and fairness, that is a pilot. We are working with Tesco and hope to expand across to other retailers as well.

Chris Davies: We do have great voluntary services in rural areas as well as urban.

Lindsay Boswell: Absolutely.

Q73 Chris Davies: On transparency, what improvements would be brought by making public reporting of food waste mandatory for food businesses? Can you see any improvements there?

Lindsay Boswell: At the moment, Tesco and now Sainsbury's, who have followed them, are the two retailers that publish their figures. This has been a hot topic of debate, discussion, and pressure for quite a considerable period of time. The rest of the food industry tends to, if I may use the phrase, hide behind the British Retail Consortium. If you do not measure it, you are not going to do anything about it. The concept and the idea of getting each retailer to measure, and to be open and transparent about where their food waste is, will really, really help to make a difference. It is no coincidence that Tesco and Sainsbury's are doing a lot around food waste as a result of that transparency.

Vera Zakharov: If the Committee is interested, there is a really great report called *Counting What Matters*, which was done by This is Rubbish, which specifically looked at some of the challenges. They found that many food manufacturers and retailers were interested in making their waste figures more transparent so long as there was an equal playing field. I applaud Tesco and Sainsbury's for being the early adopters, if you



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will, but there certainly is an interest in doing so, so long as the competitors are doing it too.

Q74 **Chair:** If it was mandatory it would be a level playing field, would it not? Would you welcome it being mandatory?

Lindsay Boswell: Without a shadow of a doubt, we would welcome them all doing it. If the only way to get that done is mandatory—

Chair: So be it.

Laura Hopper: We cannot help unless we see where the waste is and where the problems lie. As much transparency as possible enables us to do our jobs better.

Vera Zakharov: When we talk to members of the public about reducing their household food waste, they want to see what supermarkets are doing. What has been great about Tesco publishing its figures is that they have seen where the waste has been happening and also then taken measures to reduce that food waste. That was really inspiring for consumers. Having a bit of that will inspire consumer confidence and household food waste reduction action further.

Q75 **Chris Davies:** Can I just say, Chairman, if I may, my wife is a radiographer in a cancer hospital, and she longs for the day when there is no role for her any longer and cancer is eradicated. We are looking, in this inquiry, to eliminate food waste if we can, or certainly reduce it. Your organisations tend to rely on it slightly, because you are there to redistribute. Are you fully on board with us in trying to reduce the food waste problem in this country?

Lindsay Boswell: FareShare is first and foremost an environmental organisation. We believe that the nutrients, the water, and the energy that have gone into making that food should be used for the best possible purpose. We just choose to squeeze as much social goodness out of that food as possible by diverting it to front-line charities. If we came to that magic land where there was no surplus food, then those charities would have to buy that food at the going rate, and we would go and do something else.

Q76 **Chair:** You said that we were reusing 1%, so there is quite a long way to go yet.

Lindsay Boswell: FareShare feeds just shy of 500,000 people per week through those frontline charities. That is done with 3% of the food that could be diverted. As far as we are concerned, 97% of edible, fit for human consumption, surplus food in the United Kingdom still goes to waste. Surpluses are created as a result of supply and demand. Supermarkets would say that that starts with consumers expecting the shelves to be full. Therefore, right the way back to the farm gate and the farmer planting the seed in the spring, there are surpluses factored in.



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The big crime is not to be able to meet demand. While I applaud the ambition of the Committee to eliminate food waste—

Chair: We have a little way to go. I am so keen on Chris's faith in what we can do as a Committee.

Q77 **Kerry McCarthy:** There are figures you have mentioned to me in the past about how much FareShare saves charities by being able to give them the surplus food—money that they would otherwise have to spend the charity's resources on. Do you have those figures off the top of your head? I think there is also something about the fact it could be the second largest supporter of charities after the National Lottery Fund if we gave it all the food waste.

Lindsay Boswell: In round-figure terms, on average, charities tell us that if they had to buy the food that we gave them it would cost around £9,000 each per year. That comes in at a run rate of about £22 million this year. That £22 million can be diverted by those frontline charities, many of whom are relying on relationships with local authorities for their provision. They have seen some of that funding be placed under enormous stress and duress.

If we were, in the United Kingdom, able to match what France do, and redistribute 10 times the volume that we currently do, the equivalent saving would be between £150 million and £200 million per year. With the same-size population and first-world food industry, I see no reason why we could not do that. I do say, therefore, that, in value terms, leftovers to the voluntary sector are second only to the National Lottery. That is a mad sentence to utter.

Laura Hopper: If I could add this, it is not just about savings. There is a multiplier effect. Some of the charities that we are working with, because of the amount of surplus they get through us, can serve additional meals to homeless people. Depending on how much surplus they get, they have a pop-up in the middle or at the end of the week. They have also used it in a social enterprise café, which generates income for them and helps them to become more independent from funders. There are lots of positive ways that this can be used.

Lindsay Boswell: A huge amount of social good and cohesion gets done with that £22 million.

Q78 **Rebecca Pow:** On that point—and I know we are going to ask you lots of questions that might tease out the answer—why are we not simply redistributing more food? You said you could do so much more. What is the simple answer to why we are not?

Lindsay Boswell: We need a culture shift in the UK food industry. Most of the UK food industry, particularly the suppliers and manufacturers, just do not see these small percentages. To put it into context, in percentage terms, we are quite often talking about incredibly small volumes. We work with a fruit juice manufacturer, which has a surplus of 0.2%. That is



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probably the equivalent of, if every person in this room had a meal and we all cleaned our plates but one of us left a pea on one plate, we would say that we were all very hungry and cleaned up, and would not notice that one pea. However, in that particular example, that one pea is the equivalent of a million glasses of fruit juice. There is a culture issue about the food industry not seeing and not recognising this.

However, there were two big game-changers that really enabled France to operate at such a greater level of scale than the United Kingdom. The vast majority of the food is at manufacturing and suppliers and only 1% at retail. The profit margins at that level are minute, and it is on a real volume game that they manage to run successful and sustainable businesses. However, it costs money to keep that food fit for human consumption and redistribute it to charity. Our calculations are that it is approximately £100 per tonne for management time, storage, and transport for redistribution.

Therefore, somewhere in the order of £10 million per year is what it would cost the food industry to divert that food. If you are a French food business, you can do that and offset those additional costs against your tax bill; it is cost-neutral. The two figures that I have quoted—£10 million of input costs and £150 million to £200 million of savings for the voluntary sector—open the door for one another.

Q79 Ms Margaret Ritchie: WRAP has called for a food surplus and waste management plan for businesses. Do you agree that this would help businesses identify sources of food surplus and waste?

Laura Hopper: We are working with WRAP in the Courtauld 2025 agreement; we are involved in their redistribution and hospitality in food service working groups. We definitely feel that there is lots of scope to improve the amount and quality of the information that businesses are getting in terms of reducing waste and especially in terms of redistribution. We work with smaller and medium-sized businesses; we do not work with the large retailers at this time. We see a lot of lack of awareness about whether or not it is legal to donate surplus food and the food safety guidelines around this. There are a lot of misconceptions about what types of food you can donate to charity. Those are a lot of the areas where we need to improve the amount of information that is going to food businesses.

Vera Zakharov: I definitely support making it more robust and clear. At the Brighton level I get a lot of calls from businesses and our environmental health team to find out what it is actually legal to do and whether food can actually be legally donated. I use WRAP's resources quite a bit and I have also sent in some suggestions for improvement. For example, at the moment there is a surplus food donation myth-buster guideline; it is said that charities will not accept food past its best-before date. However, my experience at the local level is that they are happy to take food past its best-before date so long as it is good quality. I would



not be surprised if other charities across the nation felt the same way. That is something that needs to be re-addressed.

It is definitely important to make these guidelines more readily available for businesses. However, I am aware that sometimes businesses do not even know it is out there. It is important to look at who is communicating with local businesses. Setting retailers aside who do have a strong relationship with WRAP, where are smaller businesses at the local level getting their information from? It is really important to work with local environmental health and food safety teams, because often they are the first port of call, and also the local waste authority teams. They need this information because they may be the ones that businesses are contacting.

Lindsay Boswell: If you talk to any of our European neighbours, or indeed go across to the States, everybody is jealous of WRAP and the United Kingdom. In terms of evidence-led food waste initiatives, all look up to and admire WRAP. They are a fantastic organisation. However, their main mechanism is the Courtauld 2025 commitment. They quite rightly say that the Courtauld commitment touches 95% of the UK's food retail by market share. 95% of retailers are covered, but that is not where the majority of the food waste is.

The big problem WRAP has is one of capacity and funding. At the moment, they only engage with approximately 1% of the manufacturers and the supply base. They do not have the resources to be able to develop and expand that. There is a lot, lot more that could be done. For what it is worth, it does not directly answer your question, but I would love to see more funding going into WRAP so that they are able to expand and reach into the supply chain and the manufacturing base much more than they are currently doing.

Q80 Ms Margaret Ritchie: Earlier, we were talking about whether or not you agree that WRAP would help businesses identify sources of food surplus and waste. Should this type of work be aimed at major supermarkets in particular, or all food businesses over a certain size?

Laura Hopper: All food businesses, definitely, over a certain size. There are things that we can do. As I said, we work mostly with small and medium-sized businesses, so we are working on disseminating that information out through the food businesses that we work with. As Vera said, we are also working through environmental health and waste authority teams. There are lots of ways we can get this information out there.

Vera Zakharov: I agree. Over a certain size all businesses should be engaged. There is real power in working with some of the bigger companies that work with contract caterers. There is quite a bit that they can do as well, so we are strengthening those relationships. I know that we are not directly talking about it, but public and institutional procurement through medium and large caterers in Brighton & Hove



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serves 1.4 million meals per month. It is a really huge figure. We are working with some of those companies to make sure that they are reducing their food waste and looking at ways to connect local charities. Often it is big companies that are supplying universities and schools, so making sure that they are on the ball as well is really important.

Lindsay Boswell: WRAP being able to support and work with all organisations over a certain size is absolutely fantastic. However, at the same time, we have some regulation in this country so that food businesses are required to follow the waste hierarchy. We are actually not enforcing that legislation despite the opportunity to do so. I will quickly quote: "If your business or organisation produces or handles waste, you must take all such measures that are reasonable in the circumstances to prevent waste, and apply the waste hierarchy when you transfer waste." If that was enforced, alongside advice as to how you do that from WRAP, then we would actually have quite an interesting position.

There is an interesting parallel with the construction industry. If I am to apply for planning permission to either demolish or build a building, I have to explain what I am going to do with the waste: the bits of timber, the concrete, and the wood. I have to submit that, which makes me put a plan into place. We would recommend and love to see a parallel set of learning. That does not require any new legislation, because the legislation is already there. It is just that nobody knows the legislation is there, and certainly it is not being enforced.

Chair: Theoretically, councils have enforcement officers on planning and building control. It is an interesting point you make that we could follow up. Thank you very much.

Q81 **David Simpson:** You are very welcome to the Committee. How easy is it for charities to establish relationships with supermarkets to redistribute surplus food?

Lindsay Boswell: If you had asked me that question perhaps two years ago, I would have said it is extremely difficult. There has been a huge shift in the viewpoint and attitude of all of the major retailers over the last couple of years. They all now want to be seen to put their houses in order in terms of redistributing that 1% of waste at store level. It is a matter of public record that there is a redistribution model Sainsbury's have been doing for quite some time, as with the majority of others. We run a major partnership with Tesco. We now have a relationship in place where every single large or medium-format Tesco store in the United Kingdom is making its food available on a nightly basis to charities. We have had over 3,000 charities collecting that food.

Q82 **David Simpson:** I will come to the ladies with a different question, because there is no point in repeating that. I met with Tesco on Friday in my own constituency in relation to food redistribution. Some of the general public can be very sceptical. If, for example, Tesco, Sainsbury's, or someone else said to you that they had 20 pallets of 10 produce for



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redistribution, how do you assure them that every part of that will go into redistribution and not to some unscrupulous individuals? I am not saying this against your organisation, but the food industry seems to attract those. What traceability, checks, and balances are there that food cannot be taken and pushed through the resale units again in some shape or form?

Lindsay Boswell: FareShare has total traceability. We practice product recalls. The retailers and manufacturers practice product recalls on us. We have a full traceable record, right out to the 4,600 frontline charities we give food to, and we visit and inspect every single one of them. We know every single one of them.

Vera Zakharov: We are very lucky in Brighton & Hove that we have some fantastic champions at some of the local supermarkets. There have been good relationships. However, there are a couple of challenges there. We do have FareShare in Brighton, but we also have other projects such as The Real Junk Food Project and the Food Waste Collective, who have their own very strong relationships with individual supermarkets back of store.

One of the challenges is timing. For example, the realities of collecting food after 7 pm, oftentimes as late as 10 pm, means that many people involved in surplus redistribution work, most of whom are volunteers doing this on their own time, are really squeezed into this timeframe and losing time to spend with friends and family, and social time. It is also a really difficult time to work in. That is one challenge. If supermarkets really want to support this work, they need to look at what issues and constraints charities have and what timings work best for them: "What kind of food do you need, and what timings work for you?" The supermarket has the flexibility and the storage, so they can be a little more flexible there.

Another issue that comes up is the retailer in-store use-by dating on non-guided items is quite short. For example, bakery items often have to be used just that night or by the next day.

The other thing I want to mention is that we are lucky. Another supermarket in another local authority might not even have knowledge of the national retailer policy on donation, and they might close their doors to charities. It is inconsistent. In some places, where there is somebody who believes in working with charities, those relationships work well. However, the next store over might close its doors, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, where you just might have the one Sainsbury's, the one Tesco, the one Morrisons. If they close their doors, it means that none of the projects in that vicinity can actually benefit from those relationships. That is problematic.

Laura Hopper: I agree. We have had mixed feedback in terms of charities working with retailers. Sometimes they are told at the store-level that it is great; the manager of the local store is really



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enthusiastic, wants to work with them, and has the authority to do that on an individual basis. Other times it is a very bureaucratic procedure where they have to submit an application, which then has to go up to head office. That is where we come in, facilitating those relationships directly between the charities and the stores they want to collect from.

We have also launched this online platform for surplus food donations to help make it easier in terms of the timings and types of food on offer. Charities get a notification from our email system about the food that is available at the store, and they can decide whether or not they want to go to collect that type of food. Sometimes there is an issue where charities show up and have a regular collection time and the store has barely enough food to make it worthwhile for them to come and collect, or it is not the type of food they need. Those relationships can break down, and that is where the redistribution charities come into play, helping to facilitate those.

Lindsay Boswell: Mr Chairman, if I may, as all three of us agree, we do not want to get to a place where the food industry is just treating the voluntary sector as a dumping ground. That will create all sorts of misuses of food, which I think is behind your question. There does need to be support and investment at the same time as the food volumes increase in the charity sector's redistribution capacity.

Q83 **Kerry McCarthy:** Could you tell the Committee a little more about the relationship you have with Tesco, and what other retail chains need to do to come up to the same standard? How did the relationship develop and how does it work?

Lindsay Boswell: Do you mean specifically around the store-level surpluses, or in broad and general terms?

Kerry McCarthy: Generally.

Lindsay Boswell: As would befit the largest retailer, we get more food from Tesco than anywhere else. Logic says that is the way it should be. We currently receive somewhere in the order of 5 million meals worth of food from Tesco's supply chain and distribution centre network.

Q84 **Kerry McCarthy:** Is that 5 million meals per year?

Lindsay Boswell: Per year, yes; these are all annual figures. However, at the beginning of this year we put a partnership together that we call FareShare FoodCloud, which is enabling exactly the points that my colleagues were making about the need to be there. The standardised systems and processes make it easy and visible for a charity to go to collect that surplus food. We now have 804 main-sized Tesco stores and all medium and large-format Tesco stores in the United Kingdom.

Q85 **Kerry McCarthy:** It is basically an app where the staff in the store record what surplus becomes available so that you know it is worth going to the shop to collect.



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Lindsay Boswell: Yes. Everybody focuses quite rightly on technology, because that is the whizzy bit. However, the real clever bit is a lot more manual, which is recruiting the charities, taking those charities into the store, getting them to understand how to navigate their way around the store, and getting the management team within that store to understand the needs of those charities. It is only successful if that relationship is sustainable. Otherwise, it will just break down after a few weeks. That is where the main investment has been.

By this time next year, if you were sitting here and I was invited back, it is our joint ambition to be in a place where every single Tesco store in the United Kingdom is redistributing. In the interests of balance and fairness, one of the requirements of that partnership with Tesco was that all of the learning from that process would be available to other retailers. We are talking to other retailers.

Q86 Kerry McCarthy: That was going to be my next question. Is it your aspiration to be able to replicate the same sort of arrangement with Morrisons, Waitrose, Co-op, and everybody, or does there need to be another FareShare to do similar with other stores?

Lindsay Boswell: This is not about FareShare doing it, but it is absolutely about all of the retailers doing it. We would like to see that there is a commonality of approach, so that it is as easy as possible for any charity to collect surplus food at the end of the day. That means that, as much as possible, it operates to a similar model and in a similar way. We will find that many charities collecting from a Tesco store may also be collecting through the Real Junk Food partnership with a Morrisons and a Sainsbury's store. If it is different times of day and different systems, then the voluntary sector, which is over-reliant on volunteers and incredibly time-poor, will slightly lose the will to live.

Vera Zakharov: I do not know if there will be a chance to mention this again, but we have a bit of a nutritional issue when it comes to redistribution. My personal experience is that there is a lot of bread being donated, so much so that charities cannot say yes to everything. However, there is not enough fresh produce at the store level being donated. For example, some retailers have policies where anything from fruits and vegetables to meat and dairy products can be donated. Stores at the level do not know this. They think only bread and maybe eggs are allowed to be donated. Meanwhile, many other projects need high-nutrition foods. Standardising that would go really far, because some of the people being fed by these charities have very little access to high-quality nutritious food. I would hate to see them eating mostly bread, although bread is important.

Q87 Chair: You are saying that Tesco is doing a good job. Who are you now talking to and who perhaps is not quite so keen to talk to you as they might be? It might be interesting for us to get that on record.



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Lindsay Boswell: Thank you for asking that question. We have had conversations or are having conversations, it is fair to say, with pretty much the whole of the retail sector. In the interests of balance and fairness, there is another scheme called Neighbourly, which was a purely IT connection platform. Marks and Spencer work with Neighbourly. I am going to phrase my answer deliberately so that I do not betray any of the business-in-confidence situations we have, but we are in active engagement with the majority of the discounters, as well as Asda and Co-op. We have a long, long association with Sainsbury's; they helped found us in the first place. The organisation that we do the least with is Morrisons. I am aware that they do some redistribution elsewhere, but I cannot say whether it is comprehensive or not.

Q88 **Chair:** That is interesting. It would be good if we could get all supermarkets and retailers to step up to the plate. I know it is difficult for you.

Lindsay Boswell: My sense is that at the moment they are all aware of the public pressure. Thank you for the work that you are doing, because this actually helps maintain that pressure. I am not aware of any of the retailers at all who are quite happy to keep chucking food in the bins compared to a couple of years ago.

Q89 **Chair:** Was that their attitude?

Lindsay Boswell: There was not the pressure that made them behave differently.

Chair: It is public pressure as well; they are expecting to see those big retailers behave in a better way.

Lindsay Boswell: That comes back to the transparency question of earlier on.

Chair: It does indeed. Sorry to press you slightly on that one.

Laura Hopper: We have also had quite a few enquiries from consulting companies working for supermarkets, which will not disclose their client but want to find out information from us about how it works. Even PR agencies from supermarkets have been calling us. That illustrates just what a hot topic it is for them.

Q90 **Chair:** Of course, the more difficult people to get at, and you referred to this when we came to see you, are the processors. They are perhaps not household names, and therefore supply all sorts of supermarkets and retailers that may not be quite so keen to let you have the food. That is perhaps a slightly more difficult nut to crack.

Lindsay Boswell: We are all aware that the retailers, as the ultimate major purchasers, have huge influence over those relationships. There is a lot of criticism over the relationship between retailers and suppliers for negative pricing. Our experience is that there is actually an opportunity here to have a positive relationship. One of the things we would love to



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see you recommending is that more retailers put more of their focus on that relationship.

Chair: Between the processor and themselves, basically.

Lindsay Boswell: Yes, with their supply chain.

Chair: This is where they could be a force for good.

Lindsay Boswell: Completely. We have already found with Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, and Co-op that, whereas they used to send the product back to the supplier and charge the haulage to the supplier, they now redistribute it to our 20 regional centres on the same lorries that are delivering to their shops. That saves the retailer the problem. There is one example that works for the supplier, works for the retailer, and works for social good in the country.

Q91 **Rebecca Pow:** We have talked quite a lot about supermarkets and how they deal with waste. What about the smaller, independent retailers? How should they be tackling handling waste, and indeed do they? I have my local one-stop shop and we like to try to encourage people to shop locally in smaller shops. How do they get involved? I will start with you, Laura, because I know you trade with more cafés, restaurants, and perhaps smaller outlets.

Laura Hopper: We have seen quite a bit of interest from small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector and restaurant chains. Chefs hate throwing away good food, so they are really keen to do something about it. Like I said, with the barriers in terms of food safety, particularly in the hospitality sector, we are definitely behind the retailers. That food is just trickier to handle, so there need to be clearer procedures on that in terms of what kinds of food can be donated, cooled down, frozen and redistributed. We could distribute a lot more through that sector if we had clear policies around cooling and freezing down foods.

Q92 **Rebecca Pow:** For cafés and restaurant obviously that would be an extra burden of work. Are they interested in doing that?

Laura Hopper: Yes, some are already freezing down foods. We have been working with Nando's, which does a great job; they freeze down chickens and redistribute to charity through us. They are really doing great work. We see our online platform as a community resource. It is a free platform, so anyone can use it. This makes it particularly attractive for small businesses, where they do not want to face an additional cost in terms of redistributing food. We are trying to create very local networks so that you have a charity right around the corner, perhaps, from a business that has food, and can just go around and collect it.

Vera Zakharov: My many years of experience working with local businesses—that is retailers, cafés, and restaurants—is that you need a variety of options. For example, some businesses will not use online



platforms, but many will. They perhaps get their information from local authorities. Making sure that their options and guidelines are disseminated so they know what they can safely do is important. A local food network approach really works in cities like Brighton & Hove, where there is a really good network to be able to reach those smaller businesses. Also, there is a local number that businesses can call to find out what is going on. Not all of them will be able to use the same system, and I say this as a massive fan of Plan Zheroes; we do promote their platform.

Having local surplus food project networks in cities and town really works, because they can actually reach more businesses that way. If one business wants to donate and the charity they have a relationship with cannot collect, there is actually a network through which they can donate elsewhere. Tying those local approaches into local food strategies, such as a local food use strategy at the local authority, city-wide level, would be really fantastic to reach some of those local businesses that may not be using or know about more national frameworks. I hope that is useful.

Q93 Rebecca Pow: Are you suggesting that they be run by the local authority if you had a local food product network?

Vera Zakharov: In our experience, a local authority is under-staffed and there is not enough resources, so this sits within the local food partnership. There is already a fantastic national network in place called Sustainable Food Cities; it reaches many of the cities and towns across the country. I would absolutely lean on something like Sustainable Food Cities to be able to reach those local businesses better. Wherever there are surplus food projects, whether FareShare, Real Junk Food, or other redistribution projects, actually supporting them to come together and use their resources more wisely and their business contacts more collaboratively would help. I would like to see more of that.

Lindsay Boswell: I cannot add anything to what my colleagues said.

Q94 Rebecca Pow: We have dealt mostly with the voluntary groups. If we increased our levels of redistributing surplus food, what more would supermarkets need to do ensure that the donation of the surplus food is feasible? Would we have enough surplus food if you upped your demand and wanted more? You expressed that we have more than enough.

Lindsay Boswell: The business-critical issue within the FareShare network is that demand far outstrips supply. All of our 20 regional centres have long waiting lists, and those waiting lists are getting longer. At the same time, many of the 4,600 organisations that we provide food to have seen increases in demand. I was at one yesterday in Brixton that had seen a fourfold increase in demand for food over the last two years. We are a long, long way from being in a position where we do not know what to do with all the food.

Rebecca Pow: Demand outstrips supply, but earlier you said that only



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1% of our waste food is used.

Chair: There is waste food out there, but it is just not getting to you.

Lindsay Boswell: Correct.

Chair: The actual food you have is very much sought after, and you could do with more. Is that correct?

Lindsay Boswell: Yes, and our ambition is to grow tenfold from where we are now to match what I was talking about in France.

Chair: We will do our best in our report to encourage the retailers, the processors and everyone across the board to do better.

Q95 **Rebecca Pow:** How can we get that 99% of waste food to you? You said it was because lots of retailers have not got the facilities to chill it and keep it to its sell-by date. You said that there would be a tax way of getting around that, like they do in France.

Lindsay Boswell: They have the facilities; they do not have the incentive.

Chair: We do not want to over-incentivise it. It is about getting the balance right.

Lindsay Boswell: Completely. Thank you for saying that, Mr Chairman, because the argument that is being put to me at the moment by Defra is that a tax break is going to incentivise the production of surplus food. It is not. You are not making money out of that food. There is no profit being made. In fact, there is a huge loss being made. We have about as modern and as cutting-edge a food industry as exists on this planet in the UK. No part of the food industry willingly produces food that they know they are not going to be able to sell. It is about those minute, small margins. If the direct additional costs for a business that is absolutely on the margins of sustainability, because the discounters and the retailers have tied them down to an absolute minimum profit margin, are not losing money on redistributing that food to charities, then they are more likely to do so. At the moment, we compete with other forms of disposal.

Q96 **Chair:** What you are saying is that they could have a tax break for regaining their loss.

Lindsay Boswell: Correct. Our experience over 20 years of working with a lot of manufacturers is that when we drill down with them about what it actually costs them to give us food, it averages out at around £100 per tonne.

Q97 **Rebecca Pow:** Could we have some examples, then, on what types of food these miniscule, throwaway bits are? What sort of things are they?

Lindsay Boswell: They are huge volumes but very small percentages. They are anything you can buy; every single form of fresh produce. I give you an example of a conversation that took place this year with a carrot grower. They said that they could give us 24 tonnes per week. However,



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they said that they could not afford to cover the transport costs for those 24 tonnes. We went away and talked to some funders and partners, and came back to them three weeks later saying we could afford to pay for the transport of the food to our 20 regional centres.

At that stage they said, "Too late, because I have an anaerobic digestion plant that will now pay me a small amount to take it away. If you can match that..." What we cannot afford to do is start buying. I had deep concerns about paying for the transport side, because that is a bottomless pit and is not sustainable. However, if that food business knew that the cost of keeping those carrots fit for human consumption and the transport to the redistribution was able to be recovered, that would be perfect.

- Q98 **Chair:** The tax incentive will need to be paid to get it redistributed as food for human consumption, to make sure that we do not subsidise still further it going into anaerobic digestion. That is absolutely the key. We talked about that before we started. There is almost a competition sometimes in some of this food.

Lindsay Boswell: That competition, Chairman, is an unintended consequence of the United Kingdom's totally laudable investment in anaerobic digestion.

Chair: Exactly. It is laudable, but it is creating this competition. We will put something in, and it will be interesting to see what the Treasury make of it all. There is something that could be done there.

- Q99 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** You noted that there is a need to increase investment in the redistribution infrastructure. Where should that money come from?

Laura Hopper: That was quite a big concern in my written submission. I was thinking more about this, and an obvious place to start seems to be the landfill tax. The revenues from that are around £1 billion per year, I believe. There is a precedent in terms of the landfill communities fund, which gives landfill operators a credit against their landfill tax liability for investing in the fund and improving communities in the area of the landfill. If food waste is so important to us, why can we not allocate some of that money to help develop the infrastructure for surplus food redistribution?

- Q100 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Where should that money come from, and how much investment do you think would be necessary?

Laura Hopper: As I said, some of the receipt from the landfill tax should actually go into this fund, which could be managed as it is with the landfill communities fund, which is overseen by HMRC, I believe. I have not done the calculation myself, but I believe Lindsay estimated around £10 million per year.



Lindsay Boswell: We have done a piece of work asking what it would take for the FareShare network to scale up to deal with the 100,000 tonnes. Our calculation is a one-time requirement over five years of approximately £3 million a year. The sustainability out of that is approximately two fifths of the charities that we supply the food to, we also make a management charge to. The more food we can get hold of, the more earned income to cover our direct running costs.

That £3 million per year is to scale up, so that once we are there we are operating at a level where we are sustainable. Where that should come from is probably some joint partnership between some parts of Government and the food industry. Indeed, the vast majority of the money that funds our ability to redistribute and feed 500,000 people a week comes from the food industry, supported by charitable trusts and foundations.

Chair: It is an interesting point Laura made on the landfill tax. Of course, the landfill tax is usually fairly wealthy; there is a fair bit of money in those funds. I know that they go to a lot of charitable causes, but it is interesting to consider whether a small percentage of that could be tapped into, because there are quite big funds that are available. It is an interesting suggestion that we will look at.

Lindsay Boswell: In the big picture, we are actually not talking about huge sums of money.

Laura Hopper: Exactly. The other point I wanted to make was that we should also not over-invest. If we are following the food waste hierarchy and focusing on prevention ahead of everything else, we do not want to over-invest. There is the capacity.

Chair: The point has been well made. If we put a small amount of money in, then they are not going to over-waste food because it is a loss anyway. It is getting that balance right that matters.

Q101 **David Simpson:** What changes need to be made to correct the whole issue around sell-by date and best-before date in relation to the impact it has on redistributing charities?

Vera Zakharov: First of all, as I mentioned before, particularly when it comes to surplus food redistribution, there are sometimes challenges around best-before dates. Many charities are more than happy to receive food past its best-before, and that really needs to be made clearer. There is also obviously a lot of food out there that really does not need a best-before date. This absolutely needs to be revisited.

There is quite a bit that can benefit charities collecting surplus, but if we are talking about the top part of the food waste hierarchy, revisiting date labelling absolutely needs to be done. I personally believe in legislation around this. It needs to be standardised across retailers to help consumers reduce the level of food waste happening at the household-level.



Again, things like sell-by and best-before are still confusing people. That absolutely needs to be addressed. Also, there are many foods out there that have a use-by date that is too conservative; many foods are perfectly fine past it. A revisiting of reasonable risk windows would go a long way. People are still chucking out a lot of food because of its date labels. At the charity redistribution level, a lot more can definitely be done, especially because charities can accept a lot more than businesses think.

Q102 Chair: Do we need best-before at all? Why do we not just go for use-by or some other phrase?

Vera Zakharov: My experience, with my Love Food Hate Waste hat on, is that the only issue that happens with best-before is if you keep flour around for a few years it might get weevils, so is no longer vegan or vegetarian. I would also be concerned about some chemicals leeching into tinned food stored for a decade. Otherwise, I do not really see any issue. Just the other day I ate an energy bar that was two years past its best-before date and I am here to tell the tale.

Chair: You are looking okay at the moment.

Vera Zakharov: I am feeling great and energised. I do so much of my work demystifying this but I can only reach so many people. People use those date labels as certain markers. It speaks with authority and scientific purpose. If it is confusing people, we absolutely need to be doing a lot more focus on that.

Q103 David Simpson: We will take it into consideration that we need to change it. There is no doubt that you are energised. What lobbying have you done as an organisation with the Food Standards Agency, and who else have you spoken to about this?

Laura Hopper: The FSA has a representative on the Courtauld 2025 redistribution working group. There is quite a heated discussion on what we can do to clarify foods that have a best-before date, and whether the FSA can clarify the period beyond the best-before that certain groups of food would still be good for. We work with charities that do accept beyond the best-before date. Usually it is with lower-risk products.

We had, for example, a manufacturer of high-quality yoghurt and creams. They had 300 litres of UHT whipping cream that had just hit its best-before date; they came to us and asked us if we could redistribute it. It was lovely and could still be used to cook with, but unfortunately no charities would take it, because they thought it was cream and the manufacturers could not get a certificate saying how long it would be useful for. We are working towards that. We are asking the FSA if there are certain categories where we can give guidance on the useful life of that food beyond its best-before date.

David Simpson: Vera, if you have any of those energy bars left, bring us one, because it is certainly working.



Q104 **Chair:** You have raised an interesting point about the FSA. With food labelling, we want people to be able to eat it for as long as possible. However, the moment you ask them to eat it and it may cause harm, we have a problem. How do we get there? We all accept that a lot of food could be eaten for a lot longer, but it is about making sure that we do not actually ask somebody to eat food that is not safe.

Lindsay Boswell: Best-before dates are about the quality of the experience. There is an issue that we do not want charity redistribution to end up as a dumping ground of second-class food for second-class citizens. That is a horrible sentence. We are passionate that no good food should go to waste. The point we are making is that some of that good food has a date that was earlier than today.

Chair: Different types of food seem to have unnecessary restrictions on them as well. That is where we could do more.

Lindsay Boswell: I am certainly not a retail expert.

Chair: You can accept a lot tighter sell-by dates on meat and dairy products, but I do not know why some others, such as cereals, have dates on them at all.

Lindsay Boswell: I understand that if you are a food business you need to be able to tell whether that pork pie is three days or three months old. You probably need to do that with your eyeballs rather than technology. I understand that there does need to be some form of system, but that is stock control, not consumer safety. This is not a FareShare policy view, but personally I think there is a blurring of the boundaries between stock control and safety.

Q105 **Kerry McCarthy:** I think FareShare told me about one premium cereal brand that will not allow its products to go into stores if there is less than six months to go until their best-before date; they are worried that people will buy it, take it home, eat it six months later, and it will not be quite as tasty. That seems ridiculous, because I am sure most people eat cereal more quickly. Courtauld is a voluntary agreement. Do you think that is sufficient to drive progress forward, or should the Government have a mandatory food waste reduction target?

Lindsay Boswell: I gave a slight indication in an earlier answer. Voluntary or not, the reality of the fact at the moment is that where the vast majority of food is wasted, which is in manufacturing, processing and the supply chain, is woefully underrepresented within the Courtauld 2025 signatories. It is extremely good at signing up the retailers. I am not sure whether the barriers to that are ones that only a mandatory system would overcome.

We desperately want Courtauld 2025 to work. The outcome, as far as we are concerned, has got to be for more of where the surplus food is to be actively engaged with that process. My interpretation and reading of the issues is that one of the barriers is that to participate, you need to pay.



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Perhaps some manufacturers and suppliers do not see the value of doing so. Like most things in life, it comes down to money.

Q106 **Kerry McCarthy:** What is the cost of participation?

Lindsay Boswell: I have no idea. I ought to, because we are signed up. However, as a charity I think we are signed up as a zero rate. It is understandable, because it is a voluntary agreement and WRAP is itself a charity. Somehow it has to find the resources and capacity to be able to do that. We understand that as well as anybody.

Q107 **Kerry McCarthy:** Scotland is looking at a 33% target by 2025, which makes it the first country in Europe to do that. Do you think we should be emulating what Scotland are doing?

Lindsay Boswell: We should always be emulating what Scotland are doing, but my name might give that one away.

Q108 **Kerry McCarthy:** In the circular economy discussions at EU level, there was talk about a food waste target. However, the UK Government were not keen on having it in there. Do you think we should be pushing to get it reinstated?

Vera Zakharov: My personal feeling, if I can just speak as an individual environmental campaigner, is that we should be using targets. There is a lot of passionate work that has been done by early adopters, but we are not as far along as I would like us to be. I prefer a voluntary agreement or responsibility deal, but if not everybody is coming to the table, then do something a little more hard-hitting and binding. If we are putting this in the context of climate change and our real need to address the environmental impacts of food waste, we need to be moving a lot quicker. I say that as an individual.

Laura Hopper: I agree. There are some companies doing great things, but unless we have targets we are not going to get everybody on board. It is becoming really urgent in terms of our environment, the climate, and saving our planet. I feel very strongly about it. We have been talking to some businesses for over a year and nothing has happened. I started with Plan Zheroes a year ago and I am still having conversations with some of the same businesses. If they see that there is a very concrete target out there, maybe that will encourage them to take more action.

Lindsay Boswell: It is about combining targets and transparency with possibly some future threat. We are all charities. We are well aware that the Government enabled the charity sector to self-regulate on charity fundraising, with the threat that if it did not get its house in order it would enforce regulation on it, which it is now doing. It set it a timeframe and set it some objectives. I would rather work with a willing industry rather than a press-ganged industry, but I want to work with the industry.

Chair: It is therefore almost about making sure that those big retailers



and processors actually publish the figures, then it is transparent. We can then put pressure on that way. That is an interesting point. Yes, we will give it great thought.

- Q109 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** There has been legislation introduced in France to make it illegal for retailers above a certain size to destroy or landfill food, and requires them to establish relationships with redistributors of surplus foods and to offer suitable food to them. Do you believe there should be legislation in this country requiring all food businesses of a certain size to have a policy in place for food distribution to charities, as there exists in France? I think you had expressed disquiet about that.

Lindsay Boswell: There is some subtlety behind the words that you very accurately quoted. Most of the newspapers have been less accurate than you have been. Most people have assumed that this legislation makes it illegal to not give surplus food to charities. That is not the case. What that legislation really says is that all food retailers over a certain size are required to have a policy of charitable redistribution in place, and be ready to enact that if a charity comes and has a conversation with them. The reality is that in France, the needle has not changed at all, because that was already the case before that was put into place.

What is incredibly difficult to do is to be able to say "We've now found that bun, and that bun should have been given to a charity. But we have identified that there was a failure at the earlier time when that bun was fit for human consumption, as opposed to being hard and stale as it is now." FareShare's view is that to put legislation and regulation in place like that will not make a difference. However, what our sister organisations in France tell us is that the debate and discussion and publicity around the legislation has been incredibly helpful in just keeping up awareness and pressure on the need. As I said earlier on, we believe there is already some legislation, in terms of the waste protocols that food waste businesses are required to follow in the waste hierarchy. That is where we think the focus should be.

- Q110 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Does the current situation create a lack of clarity for either charities or businesses, do you think, Lindsay?

Lindsay Boswell: Yes. I just do not think most of the food industry thinks there is a problem.

- Q111 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** What impact would a requirement to donate surplus food have on redistribution charities?

Lindsay Boswell: All three of us might get swamped. It is a nice problem to have. It is not a problem we would shy away from, but we would want it to be done in a sustainable, balanced way, because, as we identified earlier on, there needs to be increased capacity in redistribution.

- Q112 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Vera, I note that the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership favour the legislative approach. Maybe you could expand on



that.

Vera Zakharov: In the report, there is favour for a legislative approach when it comes to things like date-labelling and transparency. Forcing businesses to donate may potentially create a problem where businesses might be dumping food upon charities because they feel that they have to do it. I would defer to Lindsay on my understanding of what is best in terms of surplus food distribution from a legislative approach.

However, I do want to mention that, no matter what approach is taken, there needs to be a real understanding of the hierarchy of needs for food projects. Rather than donating low-nutrition, low-quality and perhaps even junk foods and sugary foods to charities that are feeding people with real nutritional deficiencies, there needs to be an emphasis on good-quality food donation.

If we are looking at different measures to get more businesses to get involved in this, there needs to be clarity. It is about letting charities lead the call on what they actually need to receive, and letting them set the tone, but also being aware that we really want to be putting good-quality food into the charity sector and not dumping whatever is at a surplus. I just wanted to clarify that.

Q113 **David Simpson:** You probably touched on this in relation to awareness. What more needs to be done to raise awareness among the food businesses of their ability to donate? You may have touched on that, so maybe a quick answer would suffice. What do you think the awareness needs to be?

Laura Hopper: We are working with WRAP on some new campaigns to increase awareness, particularly in the hospitality sector. There is a lot more we can do, in terms of getting celebrity chefs involved and spreading the word. There have been some programmes on TV, with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Jamie Oliver. We can do more of that.

Like I said, our experience is that chefs put so much love and care into the food they prepare in their restaurants, and they really do not want to throw it away. It is about creating awareness and putting the procedures in place, like I said, in terms of the food safety and the redistribution aspect of it.

Q114 **David Simpson:** Are you both of the same opinion?

Lindsay Boswell: Yes. The hospitality sector is such a multiple-populated one. The real opportunity is to focus on the distribution network for the hospitality industry.

Chair: It is similar to the retail sector, in some ways.

Lindsay Boswell: That is correct, yes.

Vera Zakharov: It would be great to have guidelines for the hospitality sector, for different types of businesses, on ways that they can reduce



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food waste and options they have in terms of surplus distribution. This is something WRAP has already done. There are some really good guidelines. That absolutely needs to be made clear.

We also need to have some advice on public institutions through the tendering process. There is a lot of power in setting the tone and making it really clear that food waste is an important issue when it comes to public and institutional procurement. It could be allowing the companies that are bidding for that through the tendering process to show what they are going to do, because that is going to stick them to making those reductions further up the chain.

Q115 **Chair:** You raise an interesting point. Perhaps we should ask the question of what is happening to the waste in the House of Commons, through our catering system. It is something that would be an interesting point to make.

Lindsay Boswell: I think I can give you the answer to that, Chair. I have had long conversations with your caterers. You may find that the soup the next day gives you a certain sense of déjà vu.

Q116 **Rebecca Pow:** Moving on to fast food outlets in particular, what more could they do? You have mentioned that Nando's are very good, but what about the others? Taunton, where I come from, is littered with fast food outlets. I do often wonder what happens to all their waste.

Laura Hopper: There definitely is food in those outlets that can be distributed. But taking on Vera's point, it is about the quality of the food. For example, we have way too many of these packaged sandwiches out there. We cannot even find enough charities to take those sandwiches. There are some charities that want them and that need them for lunches that they serve for elderly people, or other community groups. There are just so many of those sandwiches out there.

Q117 **Rebecca Pow:** Do you think that is because they are just completely getting wrong the prediction of how many they think they will need every day?

Laura Hopper: They want to offer consumers a full choice, in terms of the different types of sandwiches that they have on offer. But, in my opinion, there is too much choice. They should focus on the best-selling types of sandwiches that they have, and just focus on providing those in their supply chain, instead of 100 different types of sandwiches.

Rebecca Pow: Is that something we could make a comment about, Mr Chairman? That seems a really good point.

Lindsay Boswell: There is an extremely good scheme that one chain called Itsu, which was set up by the original founders of Pret, do. They reduce the price at certain times.

Q118 **Rebecca Pow:** They do. When we finish late, sad as it is, I often call in there on my way back to my flat, because they sell off at 20% or



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something after eight o'clock, don't they? They clear the shelves. It is very healthy.

Lindsay Boswell: That is a very practical and sensible approach to take.

Vera Zakharov: I cannot speak for fast food chains. There are a lot of issues there. At the restaurant level, things like menus can be drivers for behaviour change. There is a lot that can be done at the plate level. We are wasting some of the cheapest foodstuffs, like bread and potatoes. That is most of the stuff that is coming back to the kitchens.

A lot more needs to be done to, first of all, encourage take-home boxes. Chips are a good example. What would you do with chips if you took them home? A lot of people do not really think about that as something you can take home and turn into leftovers.

Q119 **Rebecca Pow:** What would you do with them?

Vera Zakharov: This is the best recipe for chips. Do a hash. You fry it with onions and other vegetables, and you serve it alongside eggs. It is really, really good. It is about things like prompting people to be able to take home leftovers, making it so that, rather than the person having the incentive to ask for a take-home box, restaurants and fast food establishments encourage people to take that food home and use it another day. Also, even more importantly than that, it is about giving people the option of smaller portions.

Q120 **Rebecca Pow:** I was going to say that. So often, you go to a pub, and people think that they are getting a good deal if they have a plate this big. It has always got this ridiculous lump of salad on the side, which most people do not eat because it is not very appetising. I love salad, but it is not done in a very good way. It is just going to be thrown in the bin.

Vera Zakharov: There should be clarity on what you get. Coleslaw is a really good example. It is wasted en masse at so many eateries. People should know what they are going to get on the plate, so they can say "no". A lot of people will opt for a smaller portion that maybe is a little bit cheaper. Also, when the portions are smaller, eateries need to communicate to customers why they are doing this. If customers understand why it is being done, they are less likely to complain. There is a lot can be done at the menu level.

Q121 **Rebecca Pow:** Do you think we can make a link with the obesity angle as well? We keep talking about that in the Department of Health. What about linking it with this?

Vera Zakharov: Rebecca, I am so glad that you mention this. The best solutions are the ones that address the health of our environment and the health of our people. That is how we are going to change this. It is about addressing those common issues that have these two outcomes. Couching these behaviour change movements in terms like, "It is better for your wallet. It is also better for your health," is going to be really



powerful, especially for those people who have money to spend and are not really thinking about food waste. It is another way in. I totally agree.

Q122 Chair: The biggest issue is where companies are very much competing with each other with the size of meals, and what sort of meals they are. That is then where you get more wastage. That is the challenge, too. You make an interesting point about take-home boxes as well. People almost feel there is a stigma for asking for that, don't they? They should actually be given them as a matter of course, really. It is an interesting point you make.

Rebecca Pow: As long as it is a recycled box, Chair.

Lindsay Boswell: I would recommend the Sustainable Restaurant Association and their doggy bag scheme that they run and promote heavily to all of their members. That is exactly what that does.

Vera Zakharov: We should probably rebrand it. Calling it a "doggy bag" still assumes a level of shame: "I am not eating it; my dog is going to eat it." It is about embracing this as something people do.

Chair: You have to have equal rights for dogs as well. My dog at home would get very jealous if it did not get some of the food. We will not go into that particular argument this afternoon. There are some very good points there.

Q123 Kerry McCarthy: It is a huge question, but we have touched on it a bit. We talked about the hierarchy of waste and how there are incentives at the moment to move from landfill to AD. However, things often get stuck at the AD level, and there are perverse incentives for people to send to AD, rather than to distribute. What needs to be done to move things up the hierarchy, such as incentives and disincentives?

Lindsay Boswell: To be absolutely clear, I do not believe that we should redirect any of the incentives that go to anaerobic digestion elsewhere. However, what I do believe we should have is an even playing field, so that there are incentives put in place further up the waste hierarchy.

The core of that incentive is around enabling those parts of the food industry where the majority of those surpluses are, which is the suppliers and the manufacturers, to offset their direct costs, which is the £10 million that we talked about earlier on. My understanding is that that is a minute fraction of the cost of one AD plant. We are not talking about a huge tranche of Government funding and incentives needing to be put in place.

If that was there, along with the ability to build up the voluntary sector's capacity to be able to deal with it, then I see no reason why, in a period of no more than five years, the United Kingdom could not be distributing more than 10 times the volume of surplus food for charity redistribution than is currently happening. We are just three of the organisations that are in that voluntary space, and one or two others have been named.



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However, the first point is that if the food industry can sell it, they should sell it.

Q124 **Chair:** You made an interesting point earlier on when you said that you were going to have some carrots. They could not afford to bring them to you, so you were going to get a lorry. By the time you got the lorry, they basically sold them for a small amount to an AD plant. The reason they could sell them to that AD plant is because that AD plant is getting a subsidy to produce the electricity.

That is where I really much take up your point on a tax break in order to get some resource to get that food to you. Somehow or other, we have a perverse incentive, at the moment, for some of them to put it into AD plant. That is where we have to try to balance, somewhere.

Lindsay Boswell: Absolutely. My understanding is that, therefore, in putting those tax subsidies at the bottom of the waste hierarchy, or further down the waste hierarchy, and not higher up, the UK is actually breaking a law that it is itself signed up to.

Q125 **Chair:** Yes, because we cross-subsidise. Thank you very much, Laura, Lindsay and Vera, for a very good evidence session. Thank you. We will dismiss you now, and we will bring in the next panel. That has been very useful. I am certain quite a few points you have made this afternoon will make their way into our final report. If you have any further information, do not hesitate to give it to us in writing. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Jane Bickerstaffe, Director, Industry Council for research on Packaging and the Environment, Dick Searle, Chief Executive, Packaging Federation, and Ashley Munden, Managing Director, EMEA, InSinkErator.

Q126 **Chair:** Thank you very much for waiting. We are delighted to have our second panel. I will just warn you that a bell may go, in which time I will have to suspend the sitting and we will have to go down and vote, because the Minister is on his feet. We will carry on until such time as there is a vote. Jane, could you start, please, and introduce yourself? We will go across the panel, and then we will get on with our questions. Welcome.

Jane Bickerstaffe: Thank you. I am Jane Bickerstaffe. I am Director of INCPEN, which stands for the Industry Council for research on Packaging and the Environment. We were set up by the 1970s by a group of brands and retailers, who realised they were using packaging, because they needed to get food products, particularly, from the field on to people's plates, but they did not know what environmental impact it was having or



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where they could make improvements. They decided to pool resources. What is unique about us is we are companies who make packaging of all sorts of materials, brands and retailers, so we see the whole supply chain.

Dick Searle: Hello, I am Dick Searle. I am Chief Executive of the Packaging Federation, which is the overarching trade association for the UK packaging manufacturing industry, which is one of the top 10 UK manufacturing industries, employing about 85,000 people.

Ashley Munden: Good afternoon. My name is Ashley Munden. I am the Managing Director for EMEA for InSinkErator. InSinkErator is a company owned by Emerson, a technology and engineering-based organisation in the USA. We are actually the inventor of the food waste disposer, which has been sold for some nearly 80 years.

In the US market, some 52% of homes have a food waste disposer. In certain areas of the US like California, 90% of homes have one. In Los Angeles, it is about 80%. In other countries, about 35% of homes have a food waste disposer in New Zealand, and it is 20% in Australia. If I talk about closer to home, in the UK that figure stands at about 6%. There is a little bit of a lack of education here about the product.

Q127 **Chair:** The first question is very simple: what role does packaging play in reducing food waste?

Jane Bickerstaffe: It plays an absolutely huge role, because you could not get peas from the field on to people's plates unless you contain them in some way. The supply system is more and more complex, because more and more of us live in urban areas. 70% of us in Europe do. Our food has to be produced in one place, and got to us in another. Without packaging, we simply could not have it.

Q128 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** What impact did the campaign Fresher for Longer have in improving consumer knowledge of the impact packaging has in reducing food waste?

Dick Searle: The answer is: not enough. It was a very simple campaign, as I said in my submission. It had a very, very simple message: "Store goods in the way it says on the packaging." Do not take the apples out and put them next to the bananas, because that is guaranteed to ensure that they ripen much more quickly than you want. The problem has been to get it widely adopted, both by producers and retailers.

We could speculate that part of the problem is that, for far too long, there has been an awful lot of press attention on packaging as being an evil rather than a fundamental part of the national infrastructure. Producers and retailers have been reluctant to be seen to be praising packaging, when in the past they have been defending it and apologising for using it.

Part of our reason for our submission was to solicit the help of this Committee in getting people just to adopt the very simple message:



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"Please, just store the food in the way that it should be." There is a lot more that can be done from that.

Chair: As I warned you, the bell has now gone. We will be gone about 15 minutes.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q129 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** I had asked, and Dick was explaining, what impact the campaign Fresher for Longer had in improving consumer knowledge of the impact packaging has in reducing food waste. From what you were saying to me, it was not very good.

Dick Searle: Where it was used, it was very effective. People then thought about it. The classic one is putting things next to bananas, because bananas chug out a huge amount of ethylene, which is a ripening agent. If you want your avocados to ripen quicker, put them next to the bananas. It is the same with melons. If you want to keep apples, do what I do. Keep them in the fridge, which is what it says on the pack.

If we can engage consumers, and they can get that message, then certainly it would have an effect. The problem is that it has not been spread widely enough. The Co-op has done some work on it. Marks & Spencer were our launch partner. However, it has not been generally accepted across the retail chain. It is just a simple message, saying, "Look at the storage instructions and follow them."

Q130 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Has it been taken up by retailers? If not, why not?

Dick Searle: Not widely. Regarding why not, all messaging, of course, is decided as much by the corporate social responsibility departments, marketing departments and so on of retailers. There is a lot of competition for shelf space and advertising in store. To date, I believe they have not felt it sufficiently important. This is a great pity. A lot of them, on their websites, will talk about how food waste reduction is important and food waste reduction in the home is important. They are missing out on what I believe is a very simple message.

Q131 **Ms Margaret Ritchie:** Going forward, what more needs to be done to improve consumer awareness of the role of packaging in reducing food waste?

Dick Searle: We believe the Fresher for Longer campaign is a very effective way of doing it, because it is a simple message. If people see that storing according to instruction on the pack, and using the pack, actually saves them money and saves waste, in that way we will start to value packaging rather than regarding it as an unnecessary evil.



It was quite illuminating, when the survey was done, to find that almost two thirds of consumers thought keeping food in plastic packaging makes it sweat and go off quicker, whilst recognising that it works fine in the supply chain. It was almost that good packaging goes bad once you get it across the doorstep. That really rocked us back on our heels. People were simply taking food out of packaging because they thought it was bad for it. We need to reverse that comprehension.

Jane Bickerstaffe: There is a lot that we can do to explain to consumers what packaging does for them in getting products to the supermarket, let alone, when they get them home, keeping them fresher for longer. The problem we have had is that packaging is seen as evil, but also that very well-meaning campaigners encourage people to buy food loose. If they do that, that is fine if they are going to eat it that night. But if they still want to be eating it in a week's time, that is not a good idea.

We have Christmas coming. That is the last time when people should buy food loose, because they always buy more than they need. They end up not eating it. We see the food waste going soaring high after Christmas. All the local authority graphs show that. If they bought it packaged, it would store longer and they would still have it a couple of weeks later or, if they buy it in long-life packaging, they would even have it at Easter time, still in edible condition. We need to get over this perception, with consumers thinking that packaged goods are bad and unpackaged is good.

Ashley Munden: My position on this is that we should purchase the amount of food that we need. For sure, we should get into better habits of buying the quantities that we need as well. It is therefore about buying fresh, especially perishable, foods on a more frequent basis and not storing food in a refrigerator for several days.

Q132 **Kerry McCarthy:** I take your point that packaging can, in some instances, increase the shelf life and protect food, but do you accept that, in the spirit of the circular economy and resource reduction, we need to reduce the amount of packaging that is used, as a general concept?

Jane Bickerstaffe: It is in the manufacturers' interest to reduce the amount of packaging they use, because it is win-win. If they use fewer resources, they are buying fewer resources, which saves on costs. There is not an incentive to use any more packaging than they need. You get some silly examples where things go wrong. With internet packaging, we have all received things grossly over-packaged for all sorts of reasons. But we have also received things damaged.

It is about the right packaging, not necessarily having more or less. The challenge there is that manufacturers have to enable the product to get all the way through the supply chain. It is only each part of the supply chain that has sufficient knowledge to judge what the right packaging is. Sitting here, we do not know how fast a product has to go down a filling



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line, so we do not know how much force it has to withstand. We do not know how high it has to be stacked in a warehouse.

What is happening is that generally in society, in all sorts of countries, we are seeing policymakers saying, "We want more recyclable packaging", or "We want it biodegradable." Those are perfectly useful things for some types of packaging for some products, but not for others. We are being channelled into using sorts of packaging that may not be appropriate. Certainly, I believe it is stymieing innovation.

Q133 Kerry McCarthy: That is something that you say in your written submission. You suggest that producer responsibility should be weakened, particularly the onus on producers to make things more recyclable. However, is it not the case that, at the moment, the UK already has one of the weakest systems for producer responsibility in Europe? Companies here pay less. There is very little compliance.

Jane Bickerstaffe: We meet the targets and we have enormously increased. The rate of progress for us from 20 years ago has been enormous, in terms of our recycling. The point I was trying to make there was more about how producers are responsible primarily for getting the product through the supply chain, and doing that with minimum environmental impact. That is not just what happens to it after use. That is also what happens to it on its journey through the supply chain. What we have seen is the tail wagging the dog.

Recyclability is great for some containers. That is recyclable. When it is finished with, it should be used. These containers are cleverly designed so that they use a lot less material, which means you are getting more beans and fewer lorries on the road delivering it to you, which reduces environmental impact there. It is not necessarily recyclable at the moment; it may be in the future. You can microwave the beans in this, which means overall that the consumer uses less energy if they buy them in this format than that format.

It is horses for courses. The trouble we face is that society is getting so diverse, we need to be able to provide every possible size, so that people can buy the right amount. We need to provide it in such ways that they can cook it in a suitable way.

Q134 Kerry McCarthy: The snack pots are not being produced because of environmental concerns either. They are to meet consumer demand.

Jane Bickerstaffe: No, it is both. It uses less material, so it will probably be cheaper than buying this. But if the consumer buys this, when they only want to eat a third of it, they are wasting their money. They are wasting the product. They are producing food waste. It is about explaining to consumers, "Think about what you want to buy, and buy only the amount you need." Industry will respond by tailoring the packaging to give them the right amount.

Q135 Kerry McCarthy: We should perhaps put on the record that we are



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looking at a tin of baked beans, and four little snack pots. Otherwise, people will wonder what is going on.

Jane Bickerstaffe: Yes, I am sorry.

Chair: It is fine. I do not think we normally have things like that, but it is fine. It is a good point.

Jane Bickerstaffe: I have a few more, if I can share them with you later.

Chair: We probably ought to put on record what you were showing us.

Q136 **Kerry McCarthy:** What is being done by the industry? At the moment, it seems to be presented as either/or. You either prevent food waste by having packaging that is not necessarily recyclable, or you go down the route of trying to encourage recyclable packaging, which means that there is a knock-on impact on food waste. What is being done, in terms of innovation, to produce packaging that serves both purposes?

Jane Bickerstaffe: Lots. More and more things are capable of being recycled. All the metal packaging can be recycled. All the glass packaging can be recycled. A lot of the paper and board packaging can be recycled, provided it is not contaminated heavily with product residue. In the plastics area, you can take the bottles out and recycle those. That is more than 85% of the resources that go into making packaging.

The area there is confusion over, and a lot of people of debating, is other types of plastics, such as pots, tubs and trays. They are increasingly being collected. There is lots and lots of innovation on clever ways to sort them and to clean them. Environmentally, it is more difficult to justify that.

If you take a broader perspective, over 90% of the world's oil supply is burned, either to generate energy for heating our houses or for driving our vehicles around. We use 3% of the oil supply to make all the plastic packaging in the world. That is, in effect, borrowing the oil from the energy route and using it for something useful, getting products through the supply chain. There is no reason why that should not go back into the energy use at the end. If you look at the way waste is managed in the UK today, we have increased our recycling enormously. We are also now gradually increasing our energy from waste.

Q137 **Kerry McCarthy:** We have actually stalled on recycling, though, haven't we? In recent years, we have stalled on recycling.

Jane Bickerstaffe: Every country has.

Q138 **Kerry McCarthy:** If you are arguing that producer responsibility ought to be lessened, which is the industry paying to get things back into recycling, you are arguing that the industry should not have to meet that challenge. You are arguing more for a voluntary approach, rather than the Government intervening through—



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Jane Bickerstaffe: In terms of recycling, yes, but we think that producers' responsibility to reduce environmental impact overall should continue to increase. It does, because manufacturers want to respond to that.

Q139 **Kerry McCarthy:** Do you think that should just be something that comes from voluntary action from the industry? That is what I am saying. Alternatively, do you think the Government have a role? There will be good guys and bad guys, as we have discussed throughout this inquiry. There will be people that want to meet the challenge, and other people that do not.

Dick Searle: We already have set targets for recycling for packaging, set by Government. In fact, there is a consultation that was launched yesterday for new targets from 2018 to 2020. The targets are there, and the targets are met. The way in which they are met is with the producer responsibility in this country, which costs significantly less to business than schemes in other countries.

We have very clear evidence for what is happening in those countries. In Germany, for instance, the scheme costs 10 times as much, but was paid for when it was launched by consumers, because all retail prices were increased on a one-off basis. As Jane has said, recycling is stalling in those countries. In fact, in Germany it is going backwards, despite the fact that the scheme cost 10 times as much, is much more rigorous and is much more onerous than the scheme that we have in this country.

The big problem that we have is participation in households. The big problem is actually getting people to recycle. As Jane has said, 85% of packaging is recyclable. We do not have 85% packaging recycling. We never will, by the way, because there are always going to be losses at various parts, such as participation and processing and so on. The fact is that participation rates, as WRAP has said, are not going forward quickly enough. That is something we need to address. Producer responsibility, in and of itself, will not resolve that problem.

Q140 **Kerry McCarthy:** I have one final question. As I understand it, black plastic trays for vegetables and other foods are particularly difficult to recycle. They do not get picked up on the belt, and so on. Why do we have them?

Jane Bickerstaffe: They are a very small part of the market.

Kerry McCarthy: They do not need to be black.

Dick Searle: I can answer the question on meat. They do not have them because people do not like to see blood. It is a serious point. For red meat products, one of the reasons that you have black trays is because then you will not have blood all across the bottom. There is a lot of work that has been going on in looking at very dark trays rather than black, which can be picked up by the automated sorting that happens. There is



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a lot of work going on in that space. Photoluminescence is another big area that is being looked at.

Kerry McCarthy: That is useful to know.

Q141 **Chair:** The next question is similar, in a way. Are current guidelines restricting innovation? What legislation guidelines need to change? Further, why can more of our packaging not be biodegradable?

Jane Bickerstaffe: You raise another good point. Our problem is that the approach generally to packaging has always been single-issue. It is either, "Let's have it recyclable," or "Let's have it biodegradable." Glass is not biodegradable; paper is. It is horses for courses. You can use biodegradable materials to package some things. The product, particularly if it is a food product, dictates what sort of packaging should be used. If you just take a single-issue approach, you will end up with unintended consequences.

Let me just give you an example of a recyclable one. In the UK, retailers have tried really hard to make all their packaging as recyclable as possible. They are still doing it. That means they package things like ready meals in PET, because that is a polymer that is easily recycled. But PET has a very bad oxygen barrier. All of our ready meals are sold chilled. They have to be kept at that low temperature to keep them fresh. They have a shelf life of a few weeks.

If you go on the continent, where they have not had that same pressure, you will find that a number of their ready meals are sold in a polymer mixture of plastics that actually has a very good oxygen barrier. It is so good you do not need to refrigerate the product. It has a shelf life of 10 months, rather than a few weeks. That means you have less food waste. We are letting the tail wag the dog.

Recyclability is a good, desirable thing for the things that are worth recycling, but for other things there are other considerations. Refrigeration has a big environmental impact. If you can have a supply chain that is not refrigerated, you will have lower environmental impact than one that does.

Dick Searle: Can I also pick up the point about biodegradability? The question I always ask is: why would you ever want to put anything into the ground? Biodegradability implies that if it goes somewhere, on to the ground or whatever, then that will be okay, because it will biodegrade. First of all, it will biodegrade eventually, but it could take months. Secondly, it is going to encourage people not to take care of it. Thirdly, biodegradability has nothing to do with the circular economy.

Q142 **Chair:** I can see that. Do you want to see more legislation or not on this? Would it help?

Dick Searle: I have been in my industry for 50 years. For most of those 50 years, I have been dealing with retailers. Retailers, as you very well



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know from the evidence that you had in an earlier session, exercise very considerable influence and power. I can say without hesitation that the food and drink supply chain in this country is the most brutal supply chain you will find anywhere. Nobody pays more for anything than they have to, least of all the producers, who get squeezed very hard by the retailers' margins, as you were hearing in the earlier session. That of itself has driven the use of packaging and the cost of packaging down quite dramatically. As my good friend and colleague Jane says, cost is usually a pretty good proxy for environmental impact as well.

Q143 Rebecca Pow: My question is about labelling. All our packaging labelling is guided by EU legislation, as you know, with best-before and use-by. What sort of opportunities do you think might be offered to perhaps change that, once we leave?

Jane Bickerstaffe: Labelling is improving dramatically. The best-before is disappearing on all sorts of products. It was a meaningless thing. It means the biscuit is a little staler; it is still perfectly edible. Use-by is important, because it is on products that can actually hurt you, such as chicken. You have to respect the use-by date for those. Sell-by was always a bit irrelevant, and was used for shop staff. That is not happening now.

The big change that has happened is when you used to buy even a use-by, it used to say, "Freeze on day of purchase." You would think, "How the heck do they know which day I bought it?" It has never seemed logical. Now you will see it has changed to say, "Freeze up to the use by date", which is really helping. It is for things like the ready meals, which people in this country buy to a huge extent. You do see them coming into the waste room. It is ridiculous. Just put them in the freezer when they are getting towards their use-by date, then they will extend their shelf life.

Q144 Rebecca Pow: We are looking at what waste food we can redistribute, and send on to those that need it. Often, these labels are misleading them, because they are not taking quite a lot of food if it says "best before" or "use by", because it might suggest that they are passing on food that is not quite up to the right quality. Do you think we could change our labelling so that it would help that?

Jane Bickerstaffe: Best-before is meaningless. It is confusing people.

Dick Searle: The issue, and it does hold to innovation as well, is that use-by is calculated on the basis of somebody storing sub-optimally. For instance, the refrigerator is not operating at 5°C, like mine is at home. It might be operating at 10°C. People then become over-dependent on use-by. I remember rationing—there were not many obese people around then, either—where there was a limited amount of food. If you wanted to know whether it was good or not, you smelled it, tasted it and looked at it. One of the ways that we can make use-by dates less relevant is by educating people as to what is good and what is bad.



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Q145 **Rebecca Pow:** That is quite hard to do, in your sealed packaging on the black containers that are polystyrene. We cannot get near the product.

Dick Searle: That was my point about innovation.

Q146 **Chair:** We have had a whole generation, unfortunately in some ways, that has been educated in this way. I have said this before. My daughter will sniff it and say, "Yes, eat it. It is fine. It smells alright." My son will look at the date and say, "That is it. No," and throw it out straightaway.

Dick Searle: Presumably, if you are looking at it, the first thing you do is to unpeel it, because you want to use it anyway, and you smell it. It also holds to issues about innovation, because there are a lot of very clever gizmos that are coming on the market now, which can sense products which are starting to decay. The retailers are very reluctant to pick these up, because they say, "What if one of those indicators fail and somebody gets food poisoning, because they have not smelled it?" That has slowed down that whole area of innovation.

Q147 **Chair:** You make an interesting point there, because in the end there has got to be food safety as well as reducing food waste. That is where the retailers probably are quite terrified. I can understand partly why. However, we have to drill down on whether they are terrified of food safety or they are just trying to sell more food.

Dick Searle: You may say that. I could not possibly comment.

Q148 **Chair:** Exactly. We have to try to drill down on that one. In what way can innovations, such as food waste disposers, help in the management of food waste?

Ashley Munden: The food waste disposer is a relatively simple product. It connects to your standard sink and uses standard plumbing. It can be installed by a DIY enthusiast, or it can be installed by a professional tradesman, such as a plumber. What it does is it gives a different type of solution that complements other solutions to managing food waste from the home. In its own right, it is not the total solution, but certainly, as a complementary product for disposing of food waste, it has terrific value.

80% of the food waste is ground into 3mm particles. That meets US plumbing standards. That is how we arrived at the 3mm. More than 70% of that food waste is water. It is flushed through the standard pipes into the sewers. The benefit I see, from a policy point of view, is that when it arrives at a wastewater treatment plant, there is then a real value. Of course, some 80% of treatment plants these days have AD facilities.

The value is in the biogas, phosphates and nutrients, and potential fertiliser. Potentially, there is a financial value there as well. We are not saying that all households would install a food waste disposer.

Q149 **Chair:** Would water companies and others welcome this amount off food waste being put into the sewer? It is an interesting point you raise, really.



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Ashley Munden: Sewers around the world are no different. Whether it is the USA, China or Europe, they are pretty standard sewers. In this country, there has been some resistance since about 2009 from sections of the water industry. That has not been supported by Defra, who have no restrictions on food waste disposers. There is a wealth of research, with over 140 studies around the world, that supports the food waste disposer.

The fact that the actual food waste particles are so tiny and so small, and it has a high content of water, means that there is no real evidence to say that it is settling in the sewer pipes and causing a problem. We are involved with a study taking place right now, undertaken by the University of Sheffield. The research council is also part-funding this. There is also involvement of a water company in the South-West. The research study, over three years, addresses many of the issues that you are referring to.

Hopefully there will be some financial statistics and data that come out of the final study to show the financial value of potentially another means, or looking at all of the means of disposal of food waste, to see which is the most financially and environmentally viable in each circumstance.

Q150 **Chair:** If you were inserting one of these, perhaps, in a sink, or in a thing to grind up food waste to go into the sewer system, are these systems expensive?

Ashley Munden: They range from approximately £100 to £250, depending on the sort of model that you want to have. We would expect a product to be installed for 12 years or more. You could be looking at between £8 and £16 a year as a cost. Of course, that cost is borne by the householder and nobody else.

Q151 **Chair:** This question is linked, really. What changes are needed at our current wastewater treatment plants to enable food waste to be broken down into biogas? Is there any need for alteration?

Ashley Munden: My understanding is that in the current system, approximately 80% of wastewater treatment plants have the AD facility. I know Ofwat wants that percentage to go even higher. Those AD plants are able to produce biogas, phosphate and nutrients, and potentially there is a financial value there as well.

Whether that financial value can at some point reduce water bills is a possibility. We have an existing infrastructure. This type of method is complementary to other methods and is being used worldwide. From my point of view, if this is at least considered with an open mind, there are potentially huge benefits.

Q152 **Chair:** What moves are happening across Europe to try to recover critical resources at the wastewater treatment plants? Do you know?



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Ashley Munden: There have, over the years, been some restrictions in Europe on food waste disposer installation. We are now seeing the attitudes being relaxed. In a number of countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and in Sweden. Some years ago, there were restrictions on installing a food waste disposer in Sweden. Now, 62 regions in Sweden permit or encourage the installation of a food waste disposer. In regions such as Surahammar, for example, when waste disposers have been installed, there has been an increase of nearly 50% in biogas production.

Attitudes are certainly changing away from current methods in EU member states. For example, food bins outside the homes is a solution, but is it a perfect solution and the only solution that can be adopted? That is what some of these EU member states are starting to consider. Even in France, where there have been, as I say, some restrictions over many years, they have now embarked on a new study about the benefits of food waste disposers and using a disposer as a waste management method. The results of that come out in January.

When I go to Stockholm now, I see huge amounts of housebuilding taking place. A substantial number of those dwellings now have food waste disposers installed. Potentially, it fits a lifestyle as well. In some cases composting or other methods work well. But for some households, and people, such as the frail, a food waste disposer could present another solution to complement other methods of food waste disposal.

Rebecca Pow: I know, for example, in the block of flats I live in in London, they have all got food waste disposers and they cause nothing but problems.

Chair: The one we have does not work.

Q153 **Rebecca Pow:** About 20 or so years ago they were very popular and trendy, were they not? They have gone out of fashion in the UK. Quickly, how do you address that?

Ashley Munden: It is in individual circumstances. The technology now used for food waste disposers is very different to earlier models. We are many years on. It is 80 years since we invented the food waste disposer. As I say, the grind and the speed of grind is very, very fine. They use very little water as well. I cannot necessarily comment on that particular situation.

Q154 **Chair:** What happens if a knife drops down through them, and they try chopping that one up?

Ashley Munden: It will stop automatically. You can retrieve the knife from the disposer.

Chair: That is what happens to a lot of them.

Q155 **Rebecca Pow:** On that note, as well, it almost encourages the opposite of what our inquiry is about, which is to cut down on waste or to use it for the vulnerable people that need it. One might say that people will not



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care how much they buy, because you can just chuck it down the waste disposer.

Ashley Munden: To address that question, what we say through our communication material and when we discuss our product is that we are dealing with unavoidable food waste. Every time you use one of our products, it is a constant reminder that potentially you could be disposing of food waste that you should not, and that potentially you could be wasting money. We are talking about food scraps and peelings. We certainly do not encourage people to waste more food than they should.

Recently, I have been spending some time on radio, nationally, with a very popular chef, talking about some research that we conducted into how people can avoid waste in food and how people should buy what they need, rather than wasting it. We are dealing with a problem that we have, but by no means are we actually encouraging this. I will go out of my way to make sure that happens.

Q156 **Rebecca Pow:** Can our sewers cope? That is another thing. You, the supplier of the machine, are not paying for that. Actually, the taxpayer is paying for the sewage system. It is billions of tonnes of waste that we throw away. Already in times of flood, our sewage systems cannot cope, in some areas. How are we going to deal with that?

Ashley Munden: The worldwide research does not show that there is an issue with sewers. The research that we understand is being conducted by the University of Sheffield will address some of those issues as well. As I have said some of the views expressed by Water UK are not endorsed by the Environment Agency.

Q157 **Chair:** Following on, I suspect it depends a little bit on the quality of the disposer. If it is not chopping up that food waste very well, that could potentially block the system, I would have thought.

Ashley Munden: They have moved on hugely, from a technological point of view.

Rebecca Pow: I do not really mean blocking. This is going to be the sheer volume of extra stuff going down the sewers.

Q158 **Chair:** It is a combination of all those things. Do the water companies comment at all on this? Is that something we ought to look into?

Ashley Munden: Occasionally, there is some miscommunication. For the typical household, it is about having quality information on how to use your food waste disposer properly, and education. One of the reasons why in this country about 6% of homes have one, compared to many countries where penetration is far greater, is down to a lack of information and understanding.

Q159 **Rebecca Pow:** Are you sure it is not another case, though, of "out of sight, out of mind"? It is like people who chuck wet wipes down the toilet. They just think, "It is out of my house. I do not need to think about it



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anymore.” But in fact, you are passing the problem on to the water companies. I am just querying whether this is the right way to be going.

Ashley Munden: There is no research to support that it is an issue with the sewer pipes, as far as we understand, and as far as my knowledge goes. The issue is more around, as you say, things like wet wipes that we should not put down the toilet. That is where some of the issues are. Certainly from our research, there is no evidence to support the idea that food waste disposers are creating a problem.

Q160 **Rebecca Pow:** If they are so good, and so many other countries are already adopting them, why are we not? How would you suggest we do encourage them?

Ashley Munden: I certainly believe that food waste disposers should be positioned and seen as another tool to help us to manage food waste. For example, if 27 million homes have a food box outside their home that needs collecting. It needs transporting. There are diesel emissions associated with that. It probably is a solution, but not always a perfect solution.

In fact, in the US, in Los Angeles, they have 80% penetration. There is a tender for US \$2 million to make that 100%, to be able to capture 100% of the biogas. It is about looking at the issue with an open mind on how best to capture the biogas and the phosphates by using the existing infrastructure. It is one tool amongst two or three tools that could help householders manage food waste in a way that best suits their lifestyle.

One of the points that my colleague picked up on earlier was about participation in some of the recycling schemes. If you want to encourage participation in recycling schemes, then to offer different households different types of methods would encourage that participation. It might fit their lifestyle or their type of dwelling.

Q161 **Chair:** Surely, as you talk about phosphate, when you talk about the value of the sewage sludge, there is a lot of heavy metals, and all sorts of things in it. I accept your point on biogas, but you cannot always spread on the land what is left afterwards. We have to be a little bit careful before we add too much to that. How do they separate it all? I do not think it is quite as simple as you say it is.

Ashley Munden: I do not have a scientific background. We have special advisers who are very much experts in this field. But my understanding is that there is a shortage of phosphate. This is something that can be extracted at waste water treatment works.

Q162 **Chair:** We had better look into the details of that. Finally, can you tell us about the three-year project you will be running in Upper Rissington, Gloucestershire? Can you do it quite briefly, because I know Members want to go?



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Ashley Munden: That is part of the University of Sheffield study that is taking place over the three-year period. It is run by a professor at the university. This is in conjunction with the research council and with the Albion Water Group. It is looking, really, at the water treatment measurement, covering biogas and soil improvements and analysing discharge into the waterways as well.

There are 150 homes with a food waste disposer, 150 homes without a food waste disposer, and the study is quantifying where a food waste disposer would potentially be the best option. I would hope that out of that research study will come some very useful financial frameworks and information on some of the topics that we have discussed this afternoon.

Chair: That will be run in conjunction with the water company as well, and everything.

Ashley Munden: There is involvement with Albion Water in that project. Yes, they are supporting this project.

Chair: Thank you very much. We are most appreciative of your evidence. Thank you very much for Jane and Dick's earlier evidence. It was very good, thank you. There is a lot of good stuff for us to put into our report. Thank you very much for the time.