

Chapter 16

The Attitudes and Approaches to the Food Waste Management of Hospitality Businesses in Oxford, UK

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the food waste management behaviour of the hospitality industry, based upon empirical research of businesses in the historic city of Oxford, United Kingdom (UK). The findings identify trends and commonalities between food waste management in the hospitality industry, as well as best and innovative practices. It is evident that businesses are aware of the problem of food waste but are not clear on how to manage it. There appears to be a reliance on redistribution to staff and high wastage in animal protein products such as meat and fish, by the businesses. In addition to enhanced training on food waste and stock management, there is an opportunity for more businesses to engage in consumer behaviour change campaigns. At the local level, this study identified best practices among community food networks for sustainable food management, particularly food redistribution. This provides illuminative insights for impactful knowledge sharing between these organisations, hospitality businesses and governmental bodies at local, national, and global scales.

1. INTRODUCTION

Food waste has risen in prominence due to its environmental, economic, and social consequences on a global scale. Across food waste prevention discourse, there lacks a unified definition for food waste,

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-2181-2.ch016

but it can be understood more broadly as wastage that occurs due to the failure to consume or use edible food items for human purposes (Alexander et al., 2013). According to the United Nations Environment Programme's Food Waste Index Report (UNEP, 2021), about 17% of global food production goes to waste, which undermines the sustainability of food systems. Reducing food waste is therefore a global priority within the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 12 on 'Responsible Consumption and Production' and Target 16 within the Global Biodiversity Framework (UN, 2021; UNEP, 2022).

The economic implications for food waste in the European Union alone amount to 143 billion euros lost (Teigiserova et al., 2019). Additionally, food waste disposal is a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change. Almost one-quarter –of food's emissions come from food that is lost in supply chains or wasted by consumers (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). In the UK a third of all food produced is 'lost' before it leaves the farm, and more than a quarter of food grown is never eaten – accounting for 6-8% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions (WWF, 2021). This global crisis is compounded by the fact that food loss and food waste breeds food insecurity (Santeramo, 2021) at a global scale.

The hospitality industry plays a lead role within food systems, and it is therefore important to examine both its contribution to the global problem of food waste and how it is combatting the issue. In the UK, 'Guardians of Grub' provides resources and tools to hospitality and food service organisations to fight against food waste. It is said that the hospitality industry generates 1.1 million tonnes of food waste each year, which generates 2.09 million CO₂ emissions (Guardians of Grub, 2023). Shockingly, 75% of this food waste is said to be avoidable and costs businesses around £3.2 billion per year (WRAP, 2020). At a time of a global climate crisis, extreme poverty and a cost of living crisis, it is critically important to call for a change in wasteful food production and distribution practices.

The 'Farm to Fork Strategy' includes legally binding targets to reduce food waste in the European Union, yet controversially, the UK governmental body 'Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA) rejected to implement legally binding reporting measures for UK businesses to report their food waste (The Grocer, 2023). Where national regulatory approaches to managing food waste are ineffective, it is arguably the responsibility of local regulators to regulate and work to implement concrete actions to limit the amount of food waste at the business level (The Grocer, 2023). This study focuses on the case of the city of Oxford, located in the region of Oxfordshire in the UK. Oxfordshire recycles around 25,000 tonnes of food waste every year (Oxfordshire County Council, 2023) and can be considered a positive platform for enacting change and improving the food waste management system within its sphere.

The research in this chapter presents the perspectives of food waste management operations of enterprises across the hospitality industry. It examines food waste practices vary across restaurants, gastropubs, cafés, social enterprise cafés, hotels, and hotels with restaurants. This informs practitioners in the food industry and government, educational, and local community actors to n better tailor future food waste management interventions. I and provides insight for global comparative discussion.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out by 'Shared Planet' consultancy on behalf of Oxford Brookes University Business School, in support of food waste actions initiated as part of a programme of events organised as part of the UK and Ireland Chapter of the UN 'Principles of Responsible Management Education'.

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