Introduction to Food Waste

Cambridge Sustainable Food Alliance Jan 2011

CaSFA members include:
This presentation is about

Food waste facts
Sustainability issues
Tips to reduce waste
Quantity of Food Waste in the UK

• Between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of all food destined for home consumption is wasted
• 8.3 million tonnes wasted from households
• 4.3 million tonnes of packaging
• 3.0 million tonnes wasted manufacturing foods for household use.
Types of food we throw away

• Unavoidable 1.5 million tonnes
  – E.g. Bones, egg shells, teabags

• Possibly Avoidable 1.5 million tonnes
  – Eg potato peelings, bread crusts

• Avoidable 5.3 million tonnes
  – 50% cooked too much or served too much
  – 40% gone off
  – 10% unknown
Money thrown away

• For the average household of 2.4 people that is £480/year
• Children raise the cost to £680/year
• Up to £50/month could be saved with a bit of planning
Who wastes what?

• Every age group wastes food
• Mainly fruit and vegetables are wasted but all food groups are wasted.
Sustainability issues: What are we wasting?

• The grain used to make flour is rich in energy and minerals.
• Minerals are harvested from the ground by the parent plant, energy is converted from sunlight.
Minerals, water and energy

• Minerals taken away in the harvest must be replaced or the soil will not produce more food.
• Rock deposits of some important minerals such as phosphorus, are being rapidly used up. Recycling minerals is more sustainable.
• Plants need water and water is scarce in many regions such as the south of Spain or Egypt. Water is too valuable to waste.
• Growing and harvesting our crops uses energy – for planting, weeding, fertilising, harvesting. This can be from human labour or from fossil fuels (through chemical inputs and tractors). This is embedded energy.
The people producing our food

• The UK has not been self-sufficient in food for centuries
• Think about who produced your food
  – What sort of returns do they get for their work?
  – Who owns the land? Who gets the profits?
  – Is enough land allocated for food for the local people?
  – Are the workers protected from chemical sprays?
  – Is the local ecology damaged by fertiliser runoff?
  – Imported food is often grown under less strict regulation than we expect here in the UK. This affects the environment, domestic animals and people.
Sustainable food

• Growing food sustainably means
  – minimising use of fossil fuel energy
  – returning nutrients to the soil
  – looking after the people who produce our food.

• Food is too valuable to waste
  – Make the Most of Food
What should we be eating?

• Eating too much of the wrong things is waste

• We need a balanced diet
  – but this doesn't mean we have to eat the same thing every day. We average our nutrient intakes over days and weeks.

• The Eatwell plate shows the proportions of the main food groups we need:
The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.
Food Hygiene

- Food will go off more quickly if not stored correctly
- Bugs can cause infection or produce toxins (not destroyed by cooking)
- High risk foods are meat, fish and cooked rice.
Tips on food safety

• Pay attention to use-by dates and know what is in your fridge/freezer
• Check the temperature of your fridge and freezer
• You can refreeze food if it has been cooked since it came out of the freezer
• Food safety bingo:
  www.food.gov.uk/northernireland/safetyhygieneni/bingo
  (http://goo.gl/HhGCG for short)
Food storage tips

- Keep potatoes in a cool, very dark place
- Store fruit in the fridge
  - Just put out a few pieces in the fruit bowl
- Keep cucumber cut end down in a mug
- Lots more tips at http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/
Estimating portions

- Cooking and serving too much are the biggest causes of waste
- Measure or estimate portions (you know your families appetite)
  - [http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/perfect_portions](http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/perfect_portions)
  - Use scales for potatoes
  - Use a cup to measure out rice
  - use a plate while preparing vegetables to estimate servings
Serving

• Serve small portions or allow people to serve themselves. Let them come back for seconds or thirds.
• Food that has not been put onto plates can be stored for reuse.
• Use leftovers for breakfast, lunch, or as part of another main meal
  – soup, stir-fry, curry, risotto, buffet ...
Meal Planning

- **Either** Forward planning
  - Plan your meals and shop only for the items on your menu.

- **Or** Seasonal purchasing
  - Buy seasonal vegetables for 3-4 days
  - Plan meals around what is in your basket

- **Or a combination of the two.**
Shopping

• Minimise trips to the supermarket so you are less tempted by their marketing snares.
  – Home milk deliveries by the milkman
  – Small local retailers for bread, fruit, vegetables, eggs and meat
  – Grow your own vegetables, fruit and eggs
MAKING the most of FOOD

1. Plan your meals,
2. Buy what you need
3. Prepare and cook what you need
4. Serve what each person needs
5. Reuse leftovers where safe
6. If you need to dispose of waste work out the best method of disposal, return your nutrients to the local environment
   - Home composting
   - Green bins