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UK supermarkets reject 'wasted food' report claims

[COMMENTS \(1102\)](#)

Britain's biggest supermarkets have been defending their practices after a report suggested that up to half of the world's food is thrown away.

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers said the waste was being caused by poor storage, strict sell-by dates, bulk offers and consumer fussiness.

The British Retail Consortium said supermarkets have "adopted a range of approaches" to combat waste.

They also lobbied the EU to relax laws stopping the sale of misshaped produce.

According to the report - [Global Food: Waste Not, Want Not](#) - from the UK-based institution, as much as half of the world's food, amounting to two billion tonnes worth, is wasted.

Its study claims that up to 30% of vegetables in the UK were not harvested because of their physical appearance.

'Waste of resources'

The report said that between 30% and 50% of the four billion tonnes of food produced around the world each year went to waste.

It suggested that half the food bought in Europe and the US was thrown away.

Dr Tim Fox, head of energy and environment at the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, said: "The amount of food wasted and lost around the world is staggering. This is food that could be used to feed the world's growing population - as well as those in hunger today.

"It is also an unnecessary waste of the land, water and energy resources that were used in the production, processing and distribution of this food.

"The reasons for this situation range from poor engineering and agricultural practices, inadequate transport and storage infrastructure through to supermarkets demanding cosmetically perfect foodstuffs and encouraging consumers to overbuy through buy-one-get-one-free offers."

He told the BBC's Today programme: "If you're in the developing world, then the losses are in the early part of the food supply chain, so between the field and the marketplace.

"In the mature, developed economies the waste is really down to poor marketing practices and consumer behaviour."

Dr Fox called on "governments, development agencies and organisation like the UN" to work to help change people's mindsets on waste and discourage wasteful practices.

But the BRC questioned the report's link between promotions and food waste, highlighting a UK government survey that showed buy-one-get-one-free offers were becoming rarer.

"Retailers want to help customers make their money go further," it said.

"They've also adopted a range of approaches to help people make the best use of the food they buy, including giving clear storage

advice and recipe ideas, and offering a wider range of portion sizes."

It added that "using more of the crop to cut food waste and increase sustainable production is an objective for all retailers. This is how we are exceeding government targets for food waste."

The supermarket giant Morrisons said it was working with farmers and suppliers to eliminate wastage.

A spokesperson said: "We understand how important it is to tackle the issue of food waste and make an effort to do so in every area of our business - from our manufacturing facilities right through to store.

"We don't currently offer buy-one-get-one-free offers on our fruit and vegetables, have relaxed our specifications on this produce to accept more 'wonky' crops and offer clear labelling for customers."

Toine Timmermans, from Wageningen University and Research Centre in the Netherlands, described the IME publication as a "relevant report that draws attention to an important issue and topic".

But he added: "Based on years of research I find the conclusion about the amount of food waste (1.2-2 billion tonnes) unrealistically high."

Tristram Stuart, from food waste campaign group Feeding the 5000, said: "Amazingly, there has been no systematic study of food waste at the farm level either in the UK or elsewhere in Europe or the US.

"In my experience, it's normal practice for farmers to assume that 20% to 40% of their fruit and vegetable crops won't get to market, even if they are perfectly fit for human consumption."

Tom Tanner, from the Sustainable Restaurants Association, said: "It is the power of major retailers - convenience shopping and supermarkets on everyone's doorstep, you can nip out and buy a ready made meal in two minutes rather than make use of what's in your fridge."

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692. Mike

9 HOURS AGO

+28

My girlfriend and I live together and every week from our shopping the only wastage is the stuff that is actually inedible. I find it absolutely ridiculous to throw any food away.

The concept of not having wastage is simple - only buy what you are actually going to eat.

420. AA

11 HOURS AGO

-37

The amount of fresh food we throw away is ridiculous because of the poor quality, I'm forever having to throw fresh fruit & veg away because it's been fridged in the supermarkets, bread's another that doesn't last, I ended up throwing near enough a loaf away due to it being stale and this was with it having plenty of time left on it's best before date.

401. Louise

11 HOURS AGO

+8

I struggle to find food made for two people. I have to go out of my way to visit a large supermarket to buy small jars & tins, and I have to mess about freezing small portions of meat from large packs because I rarely find small packs of meat. Otherwise I end up throwing out food, or over-eating! Supermarkets should sell varieties of portion sizes to cater for different sized households.

272. valkyrie20

11 HOURS AGO

+113

Waiting for a late night train, I got talking to a lad working for a station sandwich shop, carrying 3 sacks full to bursting of leftover sandwiches, rolls, etc. to be thrown because the next day it all had to be fresh when

sold. When asked why it wasn't taken to the local homeless shelter, just outside the station, he said it was because the company were afraid of litigation. Food waste much?

170. neil

12 HOURS AGO

-34

This is a necessary evil. The general populace buys too much food, which maintains the prices (for farmers), which means that it makes economical sense for farmers to keep growing food (but they STILL need subsidies)

If we were eating 99% of the food that is produced, what would happen if there was a couple of bad harvests? The waste is REQUIRED. This is why the west has had no famines since WW2.

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