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The stark reality is that one third of food is wasted globally at a cost of \$750 billionⁱ. To put this into perspective, in a year an area larger than the size of Canada and India combined is used to grow food that is never consumed, which, if diverted from traditional waste streams, could feed the world's 900 million hungry four times overⁱⁱ. As with most global issues we face, collective action is required to reach the United Nation's Sustainable Development target 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030ⁱⁱⁱ.

At a time when plastics and packaging, inherently linked to food waste, continue to dominate headlines, the opportunity should be seized to uncover trends between the two issues and foster joined-up policy and action. From a UK perspective, momentum from WRAP's Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, which aims to make food waste more visible and is the first of its kind globally, and the Food Waste Coalition, a cross-industry group calling for mandatory food waste collection in England^{iv}, must be maintained. Ahead of the impending publication of the Government's new Resources and Waste Strategy, it is vital that food waste is not side-lined and left in the shadow of plastics.

In September 2017, Blue Planet II catapulted plastics into the public eye. The scale of the problem was exposed to the world and the war on plastics was declared. Coupled with actions to combat plastics pollution, commitments were made by a handful of governments and industry to address food waste and drive change. That being said, the same catapult effect is yet to be seen for food waste, with consumers remaining ignorant to the full extent of the issue. A possible reason is that whereas for plastics, civil society could place blame on business, the same is not true for food waste. Figures from the findings of WRAP's Courtauld Commitment 3 revealed that £13billion of edible food waste was thrown away by households in 2015^v. This is something that may stand to change as food prices rise and incomes stagnate. The risk here is that if efforts to address the issues are being driven by different parties, fragmented action is inevitable and will, in all probability, be less effective.

Dangers of a siloed approach persisting

If the two areas remain separate, commitments and innovations on plastics and packaging could in fact promote food waste further. A few issues that should be highlighted are:

- **Reduced packaging can result in increased food waste:** Knee-jerk commitments to reduce single-use packaging are likely to be at the expense of food waste. Packaging that prevents spoilage and enables complete consumption of goods can divert 280,000 tonnes of food waste^{vi}.
- **Compostables hailed as the solution:** Waste management infrastructure in some parts of the UK cannot currently support the growing trend towards use of compostable packaging, bags and utensils. Care must be taken to ensure that food waste recycled through anaerobic digestion and home composting is not being contaminated with compostables. Companies introducing these alternatives to plastics must be mindful of their disposal, take responsibility for issuing clear instructions for recycling to consumers and ensure that mechanisms are in place to avoid them ending up in landfill or incineration.
- **Policy hindering progress:** Similarly to plastics and packaging, there is disparity in food waste collections across councils in England; currently only around one third of households have such collections. The volume of food waste from households is being masked by other residual waste (in black bins). Without separate collections, the true scale and cost of the problem will not be exposed to consumers. However, despite calls from the Food Waste Coalition, indications from the Environment Minister, Michael Gove's speech on UK Climate Change Projections on 26th November 2018 suggest that, although food waste is on the agenda, mandatory collections of food waste in England will not be introduced^{vii}.

Industry driving change

It is not all doom and gloom. Innovation is widespread across the board, as various industry stakeholders work together to ensure the criminal levels of food waste are reduced. There is clear recognition that it makes commercial sense to engage with food waste, reducing overproduction and costs. UKHospitality's 2018 edition of its Food Service Management Report promisingly reveals that

91% of respondents have comprehensive food waste action plans in place^{viii}. It is important that action plans focus on upholding the waste hierarchy and there are plenty of examples of initiatives doing exactly that.

- **Prevention:** Take milk, for example, British households waste 490 million pints of milk a year. WRAP is working across the supply chain to improve the lifetime of milk. Early next year, trials with a major supermarket will see smart labels on packaging with temperature-sensitive ink being used to help reduce the volume of milk wasted^{ix}. As smart packaging innovations improve, consumers will rely less on exaggerated best before and use by dates that often mean food is thrown away prematurely.
- **Redistribution:** More than four times the current figure of 43,000 tonnes of food could be redistributed but is currently being sent to anaerobic digestion or landfill^x. FairShare, the UK's largest charity fighting food waste and hunger, is obviously the stalwart of this space but has a focus on retailers, manufacturers and foodservice. Therefore, the rise of redistribution apps, such as Karma and Too Good To Go, is welcomed to enable restaurants and cafes to more easily redistribute surplus food.
- **Reuse:** Food and drinks' brands utilising food to make tasty new products, such as Rubies in the Rubble, Toast Ale and Snact, are another example of innovation disrupting the status quo, redefining food waste as a valuable resource. However, as with supermarkets' wonky fruit and vegetable ranges, care must be taken to ensure these products and ranges are not seen as green gimmicks. Making use of surplus food must become the rule and not the exception.

What we must focus on

Ultimately, although consumer awareness of food waste is increasing, it is a problem that requires attention at every level of the supply chain. The consumer has been conditioned to expect perfection both in food quality and presentation. There is a need for complete re-education. At primary producer level, working with retailers to encourage the use of the whole crop; at manufacturing and distribution level, implementing innovations that make the shelf-life of food longer but not at the jeopardy of recyclability of packaging; and at consumer level, introducing an extensive education programme in

schools and beyond to instil an understanding that not all produce is perfect, address portion sizes, provide skills to use leftovers as ingredients for a new meal and, whilst widespread food waste collections are absent in England, encourage home composting.

Either way, the food waste crisis is building momentum. Is it only a matter of time before we wage war on food waste?

Where can Sancroft help?

- Establish an action plan (aligned with plastics and packaging strategy) that supports your organisation in tackling food waste levels
- Develop educational resources for internal and external communications
- Conduct stakeholder mapping and engagement to build understanding of best practice in managing food waste
- Pinpoint the segments in your supply at high risk of producing food waste and develop collaborative action with suppliers to mitigate identified risks

ⁱ <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/08/28/why-wasting-food-is-bad-for-the-planet>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/196402/icode/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>

^{iv} <https://resource.co/article/coalition-calls-mandatory-separate-collection-food-waste-england-12973>

^v <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/home/topics/waste-not-want-not/food-waste-update-reveals-13bn-of-edible-food-thrown-away/546874.article>

^{vi} <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/link-between-food-waste-and-packaging>

^{vii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/michael-gove-speech-on-uk-climate-change-projections>

^{viii} <https://www.ukhospitality.org.uk/page/FoodServiceManagementReport2018>

^{ix} <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bottles-will-warn-milk-is-off-colour-2n9v8mpdk>

^x <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/uk-food-redistribution-increase>