

## ***Wasting No Opportunity: Tackling food waste across the supply chain***

**Facilitator:** Antonia Lancaster, Integrated Neighbourhood Team Project Lead, Suffolk County Council

### **Panel:**

- Michael Barret, FareShare East Anglia
- Rowen Halstead, Food Waste Chef
- Roz Scott, Still Good Food
- Samantha Oldfield, Food Savvy

Antonia introduced the panel, and encouraged questions and suggestions from the audience.

(Handout on tables) She asked the room: What do you think these percentages relate to?

Highlighted stats:

- 25% of food doesn't get eaten
- 33% of produce doesn't leave farm – 3.6 million tonnes left on the field for cosmetic reasons
- 73% - 4.6 million tonnes thrown out – at the household level

How do we reduce that?

### **What's your approach to food waste within your area? And what are the challenges you face?**

Roz shared her experience about gleaning and its challenges. She works with local farmers; this year they gleaned 12.5 tonnes of produce that would otherwise have been ploughed back into the ground. They get one tonne of produce from each glean and Roz is on her fifteenth glean. The produce goes into Bury St Edmunds and out through Still Good Food shops – as well as the foodbank and to one school. They also send gleaned produce to City Harvest in London. Roz would like to keep it in Suffolk, but lamented that schools are locked into contracts.

*“Why can't something that is grown in Bury St Edmunds be eaten in Bury St Edmunds?”*

Rowen was a chef for 13 years during which he noticed how unsustainable the restaurant industry is. He noticed that people have become disconnected from food system and there is a lack of general knowledge about food waste. Now his mission is to educate people about utilising their food waste as much as possible. He does this through workshops, talks, demos, supper clubs.

Samantha works for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council on the Food Savvy campaign. This is a household food waste reduction campaign tackling that 73% food waste in homes. Their biggest challenge is lack of understanding that food waste is a problem.

*“There is almost a societal norm to wasting food. We all do it, and a lot of it goes unquestioned”*

Another barrier is the value placed on food. People spend only around 12% of disposable income on food, hence they are more likely to waste. She also noted the lack of time on food management. Food Savvy's message focuses on this lack of time and how to make the most of food, saving money in the process.

Michael shared that FareShare moved into its new premises in March this year (Ransomes Europark, Ipswich). They predominantly work with manufacturers and supermarkets, and are increasingly working with growers and importers. Their role is taking out forecasted produce – they were offered 23,000 pumpkins this month from one supermarket. Their biggest challenge: they have to move stock quickly and 50% is fresh fruit and veg. This results in logistical problems. Deliveries to FareShare from suppliers can arrive late – if a pallet of bananas comes in on a Friday, it may have been in transit for 2 days, after being rejected at the port for cosmetic reasons.

*“My problem is to move them as quickly as possible”*

[Surplus With a Purpose](#) is offered if farmers can't afford to harvest, they can access funds through the government to pay the farmer to harvest it and donate it to FareShare.

He has short-dated ingredients available from food processors - needs kitchens to cook it. They are now exploring the potential behind raw ingredients, taking surplus products like potato chips from McD's and processing them into FareShare bean and potato soup!

Supermarkets are not doing the same level of reductions as in the past. Tesco is FareShare's main supplier and the volume has dropped. Mike commented that this is great, because that means that Tesco isn't wasting food.

FareShare East Anglia have access to huge amount of food – 1 of 35 sites across UK. 80 tonnes a month goes out the door, 5 tonnes of food a day out of Ipswich depot.

*“Who needs fresh fruit and veg? How can we get people together? How can we get people cooking? What to do with celeriac? Education on produce is needed.”*

### **How does gleaning work?**

Roz answered that it comes down to the scale of volunteers. She has 45 volunteers in the group, and they work with other groups like the LIONS group.

She said that it is actually pretty easy to organise – she contacts the 7-8 farmers she works with, they phone Roz when it's ready to glean. She then uses a Whatsapp group to rally people. Volunteers love it because there are so many positive outcomes. It also helps farmers with SFI's working towards zero waste on the farm.

One challenge is getting it out within Suffolk. After she hands them to the shops, she can't move it all within Suffolk. Roz tried schools and prisons but they are both tied to contracts.

The real problem is the waste. Cosmetic criteria cause waste. 3.6 mil tonnes of produce never make it out because farmers are tied into contracts with the big supermarkets.

She mentioned that Andrew Forsey from Feeding Britain is questioning supermarkets over their power over farmers and for creating so much waste. She also heard that some supermarkets can tie farmers into non-gleaning contracts (not confirmed).

*“Gleaning is all easy. I want to question why have the supermarkets got that much control?”*

Antonia shared that 66% of the market is controlled by 4 big supermarkets.

## What can people do to reduce their waste?

Rowen mentioned how plate waste is a massive issue – 25% of food waste is plate waste. He said how our eyes can be bigger than our stomachs, and we end up cooking too much. His advice was to be conscious about the whole issue.

*“Look at the food waste you do produce. Everyone produces waste. We run out of time sometimes, things goes off in the fridge, we cook too much. It’s about working out what we can do with it.”*

- Regarding plate waste, cut back on the amount you cook, freeze leftovers and reheat.
- Meal planning is really helpful and helps avoid over buying.
- Don’t be lured by special deals like bogof– only buy what you need and will use
- Choose what you’ll use – buy smaller quantities – loose and not in bulk, example: potatoes (a sack when only needing 2)
- Learning how to store food properly. There is lots of controversy around where you store your eggs and bread. Rowen’s advice was to do whatever works for you. He stores them in the fridge and has never had an issue (bread might go stale a bit quicker but then research ways to use stale bread; bread is very versatile: bread sauce, in salads, croutons) There needs to be educate on uses – bread pasta is fun and interesting!

Then he discussed things we don’t know are food waste: peelings and skins – cauliflower leavers, broccoli stalks. These are edible but thrown away due to lack of education on how to prepare them. 75% of the food that we throw away is actually edible when it goes in the bin.

## What’s being done in the way of education?

Samantha shared that Rowen is a Food Savvy ambassador.

The three core messages of the Food Savvy campaign:

- Shares tips and tricks with Suffolk residents (referred to banana tree with recipes at registration)
- Food saving gadgets given out to public – simple tools to measure commonly wasted food items like spaghetti and rice, bag clips
- Recipe cards and signposting

At B&MS council, they meet people in person to spread the message, understand their challenges, and guide them. Part of her role is to go into schools and talk to kids about food waste reduction through fun workshops and lessons. Offered as a free service, these sessions aim to address plate waste during lunchtime while empowering children to become activists and ambassadors for food waste reduction in their communities.

## Where does the food from FareShare go?

Mike shared that East Anglia is the largest geographic area covered by FareShare. 151 charities are supported which includes kids breakfast clubs, pantries, foodbanks.

He stated that there are more foodbanks than McD’s in UK. He emphasised the need to break the cycle of free food by adopting the hierarchy of needs and offering wraparound services. The step is to get people cooking and provide social support.

He shared the example of Triangle church in Ipswich– people queue for an hour and half which also brings the community together.

## Q&A

Rob Cole from Suffolk Waste Partnership- six local authorities have conducted a waste composition analysis which revealed that 50,000 tonnes of food is thrown away in Suffolk every year. 20,000 tonnes of this is unopened food. So it's not just cooked food that is being thrown away, people are not even getting around to using it.

**How do we get the messages about food waste to breakthrough to society at large and to people in different life circumstances? People are subject to competing messages, how do we increase the understanding and shock of how much we throw away?**

Mike commented that social media is key. Everybody has a smart phone and are looking at short and attractive content. Education can be short and sped up in 20-30 sec YouTube videos. He added that there is a revival of old government videos (how to cross the road)– why can't we have some educational commercials about waste food?

The importance of visibility was brought up. The way waste is visualised needs to be relatable on social media. Tonnage might not mean a lot to the general public – one streets worth of waste does.

Samantha said that there is scope for Food Savvy to work closer with community groups supporting residents, to understand the people they are working with and exactly what challenges they face.

*“We know what some of the behaviour challenges are. Going forward, we can work together to spread our messages and help reduce food waste.”*

Rowen agreed that social media has power. He made a TikTok on the fake farms that supermarkets use to advertise their produce. The video had reach around 120 thousand people.

*“It is a shock to the system when you hear these facts.”*

He also agreed that it is hard to wrap your head around the quantities. They gleaned two tonnes of pumpkins gleaned last week and he commented that it was shocking to see so much food.

Rowen added that information needs to be accessible. He is trying to work on a cookbook that talks about food waste – easy recipes that use common food waste items like bread, milk, potatoes. He noted that years ago, people understood fermenting and pickling. But today, food is too readily available. Learning about preserving food can reduce the strain on farmers and the industry.

Roz's perspective was that there is too much information out there. She thinks we should have a Food Warden/ambassador in villages (similar to tree wardens) who go into schools and speaks to students and parents:

- Shelfie before you go shopping – look what you've got in your shelves, your fridge, your freezer to avoid double buying
- Think about your shopping – a deal is only a deal if used
- Batch cook

She stressed that we need to make things accessible because the public is already bombarded with information.

**Mark from Manna Pop Up shop shared that their pop up shop can get rid of gleaned veg but quirky products (soy milk, meat substitute products, etc) aren't wanted by their customers.**

Roz agreed. When she takes gleaned produce to London, they offer to swap. She needs dried grocery food like cans and bread but they can offer a ton of bananas.

How so we make the swap and exchanges work?

Cupboard staples and fresh produce are what's needed. We need to work together to share and balance it out for customers. Roz would like a barter system to be brought back in.

Amanda Richwood shared an experience: After noticing plate waste in school, they trialled a Clean Plate club Staff so students learn to only put food on plates that will be eaten. House points given out to pupils when they showed their clean plate. Kids then take the clean plate club concept home to parents.

**Work out what fires people up!**

**Is the FareShare supply chain dictated by Head Office? Can local connections be used?**

Mike answered that they are more diverse in local producers but logistics is difficult in the current system – spuds from Glasgow to Ipswich. Other depots are trialling local food sourcing; Mike wants one too and they are trying to work it out.

Milk providers have 50 pallets of fresh milk which they give on the condition that FareShare takes almond milk too.

Demographic matters too. In Brighton, vegan milk/meat substitutes is very popular but not in East Anglia.

**Are local companies approaching and you have to decline?**

Mike said they very rarely turn anything down but they can only move what they can move. He was offered six containers of pasta available but could only take one so he shared the rest within the FareShare network.

80 tonnes of food goes out the door a month at FareShare, Ipswich Towns holds about 30,000 people. If a meal on a plate was placed on every chair in the stadium for three weeks, that's the volume.

**Mollin from PHOEBE Centre opened up about how they had to draw back as FareShare was too expensive from them (£500 a month in their case)**

Mike shared that overheads are huge at FareShare. They operate in a lose/lose situation and rely on grants, lottery grants, funding, local fundraising to keep going.

52 volunteers on the books  
10 paid staff  
£1000 a week on diesel a week  
£80/90,000 a year on rent  
Electricity is a huge cost – thousands a month

With such massive financial outgoings, they are not sustainable as a business. They need to recoup some costs and he believes that the fairest way to charge is by the kilo. He also mentioned that a collection service is available at a reduced costs.

**What role do supermarkets play in food reduction? Multipacks/multiples is cheaper, encouraging people to buy more than is needed. What do you think their responsibility is to stop people from buying more than they need?**

Antonia reiterated that supermarkets have the control: 66% of food controlled by 4 supermarkets. Roz shared that DEFRA is looking into their transparency.

Rowen added that it's not about climate change or environmental impact. It comes down to greed and selfishness - supermarkets care about lining their pockets– if waste gets passed down the line, that's dirt washed off their hands. He said that more of us should be shopping at and supporting smaller independent businesses and farmers markets.

Samantha noted that there is a very slow subtle shift towards buying loose produce. The Choose What You'll Use campaign took place during Food Waste Action Week in March and will do next year as well. For 3 years, WRAP has been lobbying/working with supermarkets to offer affordable loose produce. A lot is going on behind the scenes – she encouraged everyone to check out [WRAP's website](#).

Antonia said that it takes everyone to change. *“We can pass on the blame to supermarkets but that also means passing over the responsibility, and maybe we need to take some of that back.”*

Mike added that his daughter has a group of friends who go to a wholesaler and then shares with the group. His advice was to start a co-op within your communities to buy cheaper and waste less; be canny and share food; bulk buy and freeze.

**A comment was made that parents from the previous generation used leftovers to make stock/soups. We've forgotten how to use leftovers.**

Rowen reiterated the disconnection from our food system. He elaborated how communities were very different years ago, would go to local farms and use all parts of the livestock. He also drew from the keynote speech in the morning: *How many people can tell you where the food comes from? Where does the waste go?*

Rowen also touched upon use by and best before dates which are often misunderstood by public. This misunderstanding results in huge amounts of waste. *“We are programmed by those numbers now and not our own senses”*

Antonia wrapped up the session by encouraging the audience to think about one thing we can do to change.