

Guide for partners

Consumer attitudes to food waste and food packaging

WRAP, INCPEN, The Packaging Federation, the Food and Drink Federation, Kent Waste Partnership and the British Retail Consortium carried out independent research into consumers' attitudes, behaviours and motivations around food waste and food packaging, to better understand how to help reduce the amount of food thrown away. The results of this research have now been published and this is a short guide to what we found.

Summary

Approximately 60% of household food waste is from food 'not used in time', mainly perishable or having a short shelf-life, with a value of around £6.7 billion. This research confirms that a priority for consumers is how long food stays fresh for. It also shows that consumers are not making best use of the information on pack, or the packaging itself to achieve this, nor are they aware of the benefits that packaging can offer to maximise how long food lasts at home.

Providing consumers with clear and consistent labelling on pack (e.g. the date label or storage and freezing guidance), communicating the benefits of utilising this information and providing improved packaging functionality (e.g. re-closability or materials to enhance life) will help consumers waste less food and drink in their homes, and save money.



Marks and Spencer uses the 'It's Fresh!' strip inside its strawberry packaging that acts as an 'ethylene remover'. Ethylene is what causes fruit to ripen. Customers will now be able to keep their strawberries in the fridge for two more days, helping them to reduce food waste at home.

Key findings

Many consumers do not recognise that packaging protects food in the home.

While there is recognition that packaging is important to keep the product safe on its way to, and in, the store, there is less recognition that it plays a role at home. In fact, the prevailing view is the opposite, i.e. that keeping products in the packaging leads them to spoil more quickly. This in turn leads many consumers to take products out of their packaging, which potentially decreases how long they'll last. This finding is also important because, among the minority of consumers who do recognise that packaging can keep products fresher for longer, attitudes to packaging are significantly less negative.

Consumer confidence around storing food is high, but can be misplaced; the information on labels, and how they are used, could both be more effective.

The majority of consumers are confident in their way of storing food items with habits developed through trial and error or passed down from parents. However, a large proportion are actually storing items in less than ideal conditions, reducing their potential life (see also point above). Despite this confidence, there is demand for better on-pack guidance about storage and the majority of consumers say that they would use this.

There is recognition that food retailers and manufacturers have made progress in recent years to reduce the amount of packaging. Even those who consider packaging to be a major environmental problem acknowledge progress.



Attitudes to packaging shift according to the context and the mind-set that consumers are in. In a shopping context, packaging is a low priority, but plays a supporting and practical role in product choice (aspects of packaging, such as re-closability can influence choice). When framed in the wider context of food issues, only a small minority identify packaging as one of their top concerns. When prompted, consumers are concerned about the environmental impact of packaging, but this is matched by concerns about the impact of food waste on the environment. As awareness of the role packaging can play in keeping food fresher for longer increases, concerns around packaging reduce.

Concern about packaging does not appear to be compromising action on food waste reduction. Unlike previous surveys, that suggested packaging may be a far more pressing issue for consumers than food waste, this research finds that, when prompted, they consider both to be 'equally problematic' and do not have a fixed opinion as to which is 'worse'. However, consumers appear comfortable holding both views at the same time, and **those most concerned about packaging are indeed also those most concerned about food waste.**

Attitudes to packaging are linked to the ability to recycle it. There is a strong correlation between concerns about packaging materials and how easy it is to recycle them at home. The more difficult it is to recycle an item the more concern is expressed about it (despite the fact that much lightweight and mixed material packaging has other environmental benefits and is just as resource-efficient as easily recycled packaging).

Opportunities

The research highlights several opportunities to help reduce food waste.

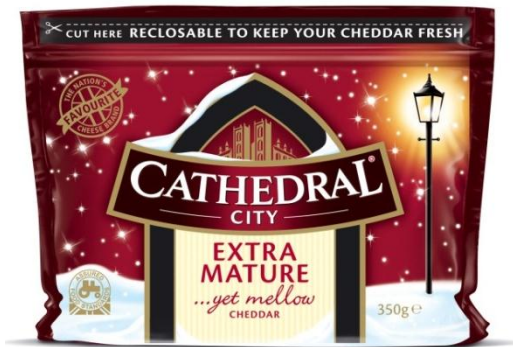
1. As consumers we can all make more use of the information provided on food packaging, particularly as much of this is being updated, and the packaging itself, to ensure that the way we store food at home keeps it fresher for longer.
2. Local Authorities, consumer groups and others can provide information about the innovations businesses are making around food labelling and food packaging and advice on buying food with the appropriate packaging (e.g. loose or packaged if you want to keep it fresher for longer), buying the right pack size and looking more closely at labels.
3. Food and packaging organisations (retailers, manufacturers, trade associations) should consider whether they, or their members, can do more to innovate their packaging or inform consumers about the innovations they are already making around food labelling and packaging, to raise awareness of the benefits and encourage consumers to make use of these.
4. Love Food Hate Waste is doing more to raise awareness of the benefits of reducing food waste, and the role that packaging can play in that starting in March 2013. Further information about how to get involved can be found at our [Love Food Hate Waste partners' website](#) or check out our new features at [lovefoodhatewaste.com](#)



5. Increased provision of recycling services and clear communication on how to use them has the potential to reduce concerns around packaging, by helping consumers deal with packaging at the end of its life.

Examples of packaging innovation to help reduce food waste

Many more packs are now re-closable, with a big increase in some areas such as cheese (Retailer Survey, 2011; WRAP). Keeping food sealed is particularly important in the fridge, to prevent it drying out.



There are a range of new types of packs on the market to suit different needs, including smaller packs of bread, 'fridge packs' for baked beans (which last longer once opened), packs that are subdivided so that you can use some now and some later (e.g. salads, sliced meats, bakery products).

Many innovations help keep food fresher for longer, which means there is more time to eat the food whilst it is still at its best. Examples include extra-filtered fresh milk, vacuum packed fresh meat, intelligent packs for fresh fruit & vegetables which help stop them over-ripening.



Food labels are undergoing a lot of change, to make them less confusing and more helpful for consumers:

- Retailers and brands are removing 'display until' dates so that the 'best before' and most importantly 'use by' dates are easier to see.



- Some products (e.g. most hard cheese and many pasteurised fruit juices) now have a 'best before' date rather than a 'use by' date, giving the flexibility to use the product after the date.
- Most food packs have detailed storage advice, and many are highlighting on the front of pack where to store food to keep it at its best (e.g. most fresh fruit lasts longer in the fridge – but not bananas; check the label to be sure).
- Retailers and brands are now moving away from "freeze on day of purchase" guidance to "freeze before the 'use-by' date", which means if food isn't eaten when expected it can be frozen before the date to use at a later time.

To find out more read the full report at www.wrap.org.uk/fresherforlonger

Love Food Hate Waste will be highlighting the benefits of food packaging to help our food stay fresher for longer in March. For more information on how to get involved go to our [partners' site](http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com) and visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com, [@LFHW-UK](https://twitter.com/LFHW-UK) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/lovefoodhatewaste) to see what the nation's talking about.

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