

Executive summary

The food we waste in Scotland

A study of the food and drink Scottish households
are throwing away



Household food waste in Scotland: The facts

- Scots throw out 570,000 tonnes of food and drink a year.
- More than two-thirds of this could have been eaten.
- This avoidable waste costs £1 billion a year.
- That is £430 per household, or £550 for a family with children.
- Half of the good food put out for collection is untouched.
- One in seven items is still in its packaging.
- At least £18 million worth is still in date.
- Food waste costs Scottish councils £85 million a year.
- Stopping this waste of good food would reduce greenhouse gas emissions equal to taking one in four cars off the road.



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What a waste

Few people would like to think that their household needlessly fritters away £430 a year – but that's exactly what happens all over Scotland because of the staggering amount of good food we waste.



Three-fifths of all food waste is put out for council collection. The rest is put down the sink, fed to pets or composted at home.

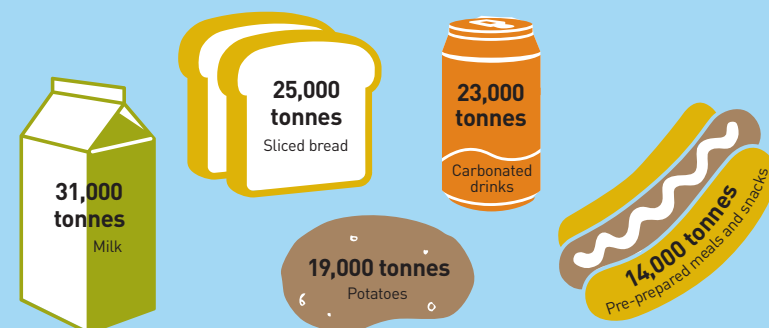
Between us we throw away 570,000 tonnes of food and drink every year – over two-thirds (69%) of which could have been eaten if we had planned, stored and managed it better.

This all represents a huge waste of money at a time when household budgets are stretched. The avoidable share of what is thrown away costs us all £1 billion a year at 2008 prices.

There's also a cost to the environment. Food waste sent to landfill gives off methane, a greenhouse gas many times more damaging than carbon dioxide. If we could stop wasting food that could have been eaten on this scale it would prevent the equivalent of 1.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year – roughly the same as taking one car in every four off Scotland's roads.

These startling findings are the result of the most detailed study ever into food and drink wasted by Scottish households. Through face-to-face interviews with householders and, with their permission, detailed analysis of the contents of their bins, the new study reveals the extent of our wastefulness.

Needlessly wasted: The top five



What do we throw away?



Inconvenient?
We needlessly waste 26,000 tonnes of takeaways, ready meals and snacks a year, costing us £110 million.

Of the 570,000 tonnes of food and drink waste we produce each year, around three-fifths (340,000 tonnes) is put out for local authority collection – either as part of mixed waste or in separate containers for recycling.

We dispose of the rest in a range of other ways. It's composted, tipped down the sink or fed to our pets.

Some of the food that we throw away is unavoidable; either it is something we cannot eat, like used tea bags or banana skins, or that we normally choose not to eat, like potato peelings. However, over two thirds (69%) of what is thrown away could have been eaten if we had simply managed it better.

This avoidable waste is food we've bought but then not used because we've left it to become mouldy, go past its 'use-by' or 'best before' date or because we simply don't fancy it any more.

It also results from over-buying and over-generous portioning - we cook more than we really need to or order too much at the takeaway.



The 32,000 tonnes of untouched bakery items thrown out is equivalent to 40 million large loaves of bread.

There's also the food we buy and then throw away completely untouched.

The study shows that more than half (54%) of all avoidable food waste put out for council collection is either packaged items thrown away unopened or unpackaged items, like fruit, thrown away whole.

We throw away 130 million full packs of food every year and at least one in seven of these is still in date. As the researchers could only count items still in their packaging, the true figure for food we get rid of in-date is likely to be higher still.

The food groups most likely to be wasted whole and unused are bakery goods (32,000 tonnes per year), fresh vegetables and salads (30,000 tonnes per year), and fruit (23,000 tonnes per year).



On average the amount of good food we each waste in a year tips the scales at 76kg, or just over 12 stone.



Unhealthy attitude to waste? The fruit and vegetables thrown away by Scots in a year are equal to 1 billion portions which could otherwise contribute to our 5-a-day - that's 4 portions per person per week.



4 portions per person per week

What is it costing?

The simple answer is: more than it needs to. The study estimates that the avoidable share of the food and drink we waste costs us £1 billion at 2008 prices.



The food we waste costs the average family more each year than their gas, phone bill or public transport use.

It means the average household spends £430 a year, or more than £8 a week, on good food and drink that is then thrown away. This is money which could otherwise have helped pay household bills. For example, it costs us more on average each year than either our gas supply, our telephone bill or our bus and train fares.

Staggering amounts of expensive foods, like meat and fish are thrown away. Each household wastes around £58 a year on meat and fish which could have been eaten. Our wasted dairy bill costs us £87 per household per year.

There is also a hidden cost of collecting and disposing of this waste – an £85 million bill which is picked up by us all as tax payers.



£135
wasted

effort?

The average household spends over £135 a year on food that is bought then thrown out whole or unopened.



£38
million

The cost of a full Scottish breakfast?
(cost of avoidable waste per year for each item)



*bacon is reported as part of pork/ham/bacon



What's being done?

Clearly, wasting so much food has costs. We pay for it at the checkout and then pay again through taxation for its disposal or composting by local authorities.

There's also an environmental 'bill' for this wastefulness. At each link of the food chain, from farm to shop, from shop to plate and from plate to disposal, energy is used that generates emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that drive climate change. Most of the food wasted in Scotland goes to landfill where it can generate the gas methane as it rots. That has serious implications for the fight to curb climate change because methane is around 25 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

WRAP Scotland (Waste & Resources Action Programme) works to minimise landfill, reduce carbon emissions and improve our environment, so dealing with the food waste problem is a top priority. The study outlined here is part of our effort to build the evidence base on waste. And we are also working hard to make real and lasting changes.

One example is our encouragement and support for the food industry and retailers to make changes both in store and to packaging that can reduce food waste in the home. In 2005 we brokered the Courtauld Commitment, which has been signed by 40 leading brands and supermarkets. They now have a target to work with WRAP to reduce household food waste by 155,000 tonnes by March 2010. This agreement has been a major step forward in the drive to cut both food and packaging waste.

WRAP Scotland also provides households, via Waste Aware Scotland and local authority partners, with subsidised home compost bins to recycle their food waste at home.

At the same time we are working closely with local authorities and the waste industry to increase resource efficiency through food waste collections and the effective reprocessing of the food that they collect, through composting or anaerobic digestion.

Doing something useful with the food waste we do produce is one thing, but preventing waste in the first place is where gains will be greatest. Working with Waste Aware Scotland, WRAP has launched 'Love Food Hate Waste', a major consumer-focussed campaign that helps us all make the most of the good food we buy by providing practical tips and tools.

Working with community groups and partners in the retail sector and local authorities we are raising awareness of food waste and delivering solutions, such as recipe ideas for using leftovers, food storage know-how and help with understanding 'use by' and 'best before' labels.

Find out more at: Love Food Hate Waste
www.wasteawarelovefood.org.uk



The Love Food Hate Waste campaign provides practical advice to help people reduce their food waste.

155,000 tonnes

The Courtauld Commitment has a target to reduce UK household food and waste by 155,000 tonnes by March 2010.



About this report

This report is based on the first really detailed examination of Scotland's food waste habits. The research set out to quantify the waste food thrown away by Scottish households and to find out about the sorts of foods thrown away.

Food Waste

Nine Scottish local authorities have recently started or piloted food waste recycling collections.

Researchers interviewed a representative sample of 1,558 householders in seven local authority areas during autumn 2008 – Dundee, Perth and Kinross, Aberdeenshire, the City of Aberdeen, Falkirk, Glasgow and Renfrewshire. The areas were chosen to reflect a range of different household waste collection systems.

Householders were told that the contents of their bins were going to be analysed and were given the opportunity to opt out if they wished to. There was a chance that participants would change their habits so collection of waste for analysis took place four weeks later so that any temporary behaviour changes could return to normal.

Waste from a total of 1,169 households was analysed. All food waste was weighed, sorted and categorised into one of 14 food groups and one of 170 individual food types. Researchers also made a judgement about the preparation state of each food item found and it was also given an 'avoidability' rating and a value, based on retail prices at the time.

The study also incorporates information from research, also conducted for WRAP, into food and drink which is disposed of via the sink or drain and via home composting.



The full report

This document sets out the highlights of 'The Food and Drink we waste in Scotland', which can be accessed at www.wrapscotland.org.uk/thefoodanddrinkwewaste

For information about the methodology or the findings of the report, please e-mail: evaluation@wrap.org.uk

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