



Food Rescue Café



saving the earth one meal at a time



An EPA Green Enterprise Project

Food Waste Prevention and Surplus Food Use in Cafés - Workshop Report The Rediscovery Centre, Ballymun - Wednesday October 18th

About 180,000 tonnes of food is wasted in Ireland's Restaurant and Food Services sector annually and there is growing momentum behind solutions to address this problem. Surplus food redistribution is second to prevention at source in the Food Waste Hierarchy and there is significant scope for social enterprise/community cafés to benefit from surplus food redistribution.

The Boiler House Café in the Rediscovery Centre is exploring the opportunities and challenges around the use of surplus food in social enterprise cafés, with a view to producing guidelines for other cafés.

The Rediscovery Centre hosted a workshop on **Food Waste Prevention and Surplus Food Use in Cafés** to help inform the development of such guidelines. Attendees and facilitators were assigned to groups based on expertise and asked to discuss and comment on four questions.

Feedback for each question is summarised in this report, please visit www.rediscoverycentre.ie/research for further information on the project.

Q1. What are the benefits and challenges of surplus food use in cafés?

- Surplus food use in cafés can reduce food purchase costs and these savings can be passed on to the customer. Soup or one pot made from surplus food could be sold at a discounted price. The surplus food donor can also save on food disposal costs.
- Surplus food use prevents valuable, nutritious food, and the resources (e.g. energy, water) used to produce it, from going to waste. Surplus food redistribution can help maximise nutritional uptake from food within the community.
- A strong café ethos in relation to food waste prevention and surplus food use can maximise economic return from purchased food, rather than using composting, landfill or incineration as a default option. The 'Too Good To Go' app facilitates surplus food rescue from shops, cafés and restaurants at a reduced price to customers.
- Engagement between the café and customers on the benefits of surplus food use and food waste prevention can increase consumer awareness on the need for food system change and may trigger behaviour change towards more sustainable lifestyles.
- Promoting the cost saving aspect of surplus food use can stimulate interest in a less wasteful and more circular lifestyle.
- Food waste prevention and surplus food use can reduce the carbon footprint of a business and help reduce biodiversity loss.
- Surplus food waste can build local collaborative networks and improve community cohesion. Surplus food use can also stimulate creativity, a core element of successful circular projects, among staff and within the community.
- Surplus food use is a novel selling point and can reflect a café's commitment to sustainability initiatives. A genuine PR narrative built around food waste prevention and surplus food use can be used as part of advertising campaigns.

Q1. What are the benefits and challenges of surplus food use in cafés?

- There are logistical challenges relating to the collection and delivery of surplus food, such as cold chain maintenance and staff time, and coordination of café needs with available surplus food types and volumes.
- The acceptance of surplus food with close 'use-by' dates can put pressure on kitchen staff.
- Staff time and training needs to be allocated to the coordination and management of surplus food, which may impact on broader café operations. Staff buy-in is vital for successful use of surplus food and there needs to be investment in training to build capacity.
- Lack of infrastructure to deal with surplus food can be an issue. Freezer and shelf space is needed to store varying amounts of surplus food intake.
- Surplus food availability varies with seasons and weekly according to donor circumstances. Cafés therefore need to have a flexible menu and both traditional (e.g. pickling, fermenting) and innovative kitchen skills to ensure food is used in accordance with food safety guidelines and not ultimately wasted.
- Customers may not be in favour of perceived food waste being used in the menu owing to food safety concerns.
- Food brands will be keen to ensure that food safety guidelines are being followed to ensure brand protection.
- FoodCloud only redistribute surplus food to social enterprise/community cafés, surplus food should not be redistributed for profit.
- There can be a carbon cost of transporting surplus food so local suppliers are the preferred option.
- Surplus food use needs to be embedded into café management procedures and there needs to be an awareness around supply chain regulation, if supply chain is not secure there could be a challenge around provenance.
- Empowering management and staff to change current practices and come up with creative ideas and menus around surplus food could be difficult. It is easier to have a set menu, managing a surplus food menu is more demanding on time.

Q2. What guideline content and format might work best?

- Guidelines should cover food waste prevention, food waste disposal regulation, surplus food redistribution logistics, staff training and the exchange of information between café staff and customers.
- Guidelines should build on and sign-post to currently available resources.
- Include food waste audit and benchmark assessment step-by-step guidance.
- Include examples of food waste prevention and surplus food use success stories to motivate action.
- A database and map of food suppliers willing to engage with surplus food redistribution would be useful.
- Encourage local connections as they are likely to lead to more emotional investment in the surplus food use initiative
- Link to mandatory HACCP food training and information sheets on allergens and other food safety issues
- Include progression charts to track progress towards surplus food use targets
- Include tips for successful surplus food use such as encouraging the use of take away boxes and celebration of progress at staff meetings
- Include lists of foods that work well as part of surplus food redistribution and those that don't or should be avoided
- Include tips on incentivising staff to prevent food waste - avoided cost of waste disposal could go to the team?
- Consider how seasonal large volume products can be incorporated into a base menu.
- Include information on food preservation techniques such as freezing, fermentation and pickling
- Provide a range of options for a range of food types typically available from surplus food redistributors
- Encourage the use of apps such as FoodCloud, Olio and Too Good To Go to avail of the existing surplus food redistribution network.
- Seek input from Chefs and other leaders in food waste prevention and surplus food use
- Details on allergens must be included on any re-packaged products

Q2. What guideline content and format might work best?

- Provide café case studies of best practice relating to food waste prevention and surplus food use – success stories are a good motivator.
- Include links to tips on food preservation and ideas for managing foods that are often wasted in café settings.
- Include photographs and visuals that place people at the heart of the story to encourage engagement.
- In time, linking with an award for cafés that are signed up to the EPA Food Waste Charter and employ food waste hierarchy best practice could stimulate better practices.
- A social enterprise/community café forum would allow for knowledge exchange.
- Link with Climate Action Regional Offices which may be in a position to provide training or local promotion of food waste hierarchy best practice.
- Encourage input from Chefs who are currently leading on food waste prevention best practice and tap into Chef networks.
- A high quality, well placed infographic poster in the café with a QR code to online resources such as a project webpage, video explainer and customer survey will allow customers to engage with the project in their own time.
- The European Food Information Council (EUFIC) provides excellent examples of food related infographics.
- An interactive online or in person workshop delivered by a café operator experienced in surplus food use could be used for staff training. Online resources should be suitable for a range of device types
- Train a staff champion to train other staff on food waste prevention and surplus food use.
- A visually engaging, step by step food waste audit guide with a clear focus on benefits from the time investment.
- Food waste ambassadors could provide onsite guidance and workshops. Peer to peer learning is important, it would be best for ambassadors to have with experience in managing a café and working with food.

Q3. What aspects of surplus food use and monitoring need further research?

- More reliable data on food waste and surplus food throughout the supply chain is needed.
- Research to inform lobbying for legislative support around food waste prevention and surplus food redistribution
- A European Citizens' Food Waste Panel are contributing to the EU Food Loss and Waste Platform and further research is needed relating to their recommendations.
- Surplus food redistribution: Transport logistics, food safety and developing a local network
- Food innovation relating to valuable food by-products
- Research on surplus food nutritional and calorific value and food preparation to retain nutrients
- Bulk cooking techniques relevant to surplus food use that preserve nutrition
- Research relating to an award or standard relating to the food waste hierarchy or food waste prevention and surplus food use.
- Positive Carbon provides a software solution for tracking business food waste
- Use existing online tools to show impact of surplus use, such as impact on carbon footprint, to gain support.
- Use historical data to create movement past 12 months and look forward - quantification is key, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it", this relates to surplus food volumes, types, other food purchases and food waste.
- Research is needed on the nutritional value of surplus food – is surplus food redistribution meeting nutritional needs within communities?
- What is the nutrient loss in food waste and how does it relate with nutrient deficiency in Irish population?
- How much milk is wasted from café jugs and how can practices be redesigned to prevent such waste? Working with corporate organisations has challenges and research is needed to show value and to develop a structured approach to surplus food use.
- Consider linking nutrient and carbon data as part of research on surplus food redistribution and use.

Q4. How can surplus food use in cafés help to drive public engagement on the need for food system change?

- Ask customers for feedback and ideas on food waste prevention and surplus food use via online surveys, in café feedback forms and a customer suggestion board.
- Social enterprise cafés have the capacity to build relationships with customers and to develop relationships with customers.
- Use high-quality in café boards to display information on food waste prevention.
- Personalise the costs of food waste – follow a food from seed to end of system, wasted or eaten. Highlight the value of food, which has been cheapened.
- Inform people of the value of soil and highlight quality soil as a scarce resource.
- Highlight that food in the black bin is a wasted resource and opportunity.
- People engage well with success stories.
- Provide cooking workshops, such as hummus made easy or on how to make multiple meals from a whole chicken.
- Create a positive atmosphere in the café around food waste prevention and surplus food use, encourage everyone to think carefully about food purchases, handling and waste prevention.
- Encourage the use of takeaway boxes with clear instructions on when food should be eaten by e.g. add an 'Eat Today' sticker.
- Collaborations between local colleges or universities and cafés may help to promote food waste prevention and surplus food use.
- Promote food waste prevention and surplus food use via local social media, local radio stations and publications to reach out to the community.
- Publicly celebrate amounts of food diverted from landfill and progress towards food waste prevention and surplus food use targets.
- Promote local growers and local produce, along with the effort involved to get food from farm to fork.
- Promote the many values of food management, healthy food and cooking at home. With their consent, celebrate customers who share ideas and recipes with the café.