

FACTFILE: GCSE HOME ECONOMICS: Food and Nutrition



Food Waste

Learning Outcome

Students should be able to:

- describe a range of strategies to reduce food waste.

Food waste accounts for 7–10 million tonnes each year in the UK. It has been suggested that 50 per cent of the food that is wasted may still be edible.

There are a number of reasons for food waste. The table below highlights the most common food items wasted and reasons they are wasted most.

Common food items wasted	Reasons
Bread and bread items	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best before dates are interpreted incorrectly by consumers therefore bread is thrown away.• Bread has been stored incorrectly and has gone hard.• Best before date has been exceeded and the bread has gone mouldy.
Fruit and Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perishable food: Will go off quickly.• Multi-pack buys encourage over purchasing.• Consumers not storing food correctly.• Lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of packaging in extending shelf life.
Starchy foods (Bread, rice, potatoes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited understanding of portion sizes.• Leftovers are thrown in the bin.
Meat, chicken and fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buying in advance to facilitate busy lifestyle.• Food goes off before cooked due to incorrect storage.• Once package has been opened, smell may be unpleasant.
Takeaway food	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large portion sizes.• The food is not cooked properly or is not to one's taste.
Fizzy drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large bottle sizes are often cheaper than smaller size.• Fizz is lost with opening the bottle several times.
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May go sour with incorrect storage.• Too much is used when serving cereal.

Impacts of food waste



Learning Outcome Link

Factors affecting food choice

Discuss the following factors affecting individual food choice: environmental

Environmental

Food waste should be disposed of in food waste bins. When there is no food waste bin available, or when consumers dispose of food waste incorrectly, food items will go to landfill sites.

Food waste in landfill sites will rot. During this process, a range of gases are released into the air. These gases include carbon dioxide and methane. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is very detrimental to the environment. It contributes to global warming.

Financial

'Love Food Hate Waste' estimates that there is a large financial cost to consumers when food is wasted. The cost of food waste can be as much as £700 a year for an average family.

Reducing food waste

Reducing food waste is a priority for the environment and the economy. Despite the large amount of food wasted in the UK, food poverty is at a high level. Finding ways to reduce waste may also have a positive impact ethically.

Common causes of food waste are listed below along with a range of strategies to reduce food waste.

In the supermarket

Cause	Solution	Benefits
Cheaper to buy multi-pack than single items	Shop with a family member or friend and share the cost of multipack buys.	Economical Environmental
Spontaneous shopping	Make a shopping list. Only buy what is on the list. Avoid perishable foods that are not on your list.	Economical Environmental
Tempted by financial offers	Consider if there are savings being made with meal deals and 'bogof' products.	Economical Environmental
Brand loyal	Swap popular branded products to own brand products in the attempt to save money.	Economical
'Imperfect' product or packaging	With imperfect shapes in fruit or vegetables, make smoothies or soups. Assess whether a damaged pack has altered the quality of the food inside. Supermarkets often reduce the price of these products.	Economical Environmental
Confusion over date labels	Do not put health at risk. Use own sensory judgement. Become familiar with display until, sell by, best before and use by.	Economical Environmental
Poor transportation of food from supermarket to home	Use cool bags for fridge and freezer items. Limit the amount of time that foods spend in transportation.	Economical
Unsure of benefits of packaging	Choose: – ziplock packaging to maximise freshness; – breathable fruit and vegetable bags; – vacuum pack meat; – subdivided packs.	Economical Environmental

Eating out

Cause	Solution	Benefits
Unplanned eating out	Donate your food shopping to local food banks.	Ethical
Large restaurant portions	Ask server to package leftovers and reheat for lunch.	Economical Environmental

At home

Cause	Solution	Benefits
Cooking too much	Use online 'food portion calculators' when cooking pasta and rice.	Economical Environmental
Limited cooking skills	Use recipes that are basic but nutritious. You can alter these to use the food that you like or have already bought. This will avoid food waste and save money.	Economical Environmental
Not sure what to do with leftovers	Use 'Love Food Hate Waste' website to find ideas on what to do with leftovers.	Economical Environmental
Poor storage of food	Get familiar with the fridge and freezer. Temperature: Fridge 0–5°C Freezer –18°C	Economical Environmental
Limited knowledge about recycling	Become aware of the recycling label scheme used on packaging. Get familiar with local recycling schemes.	Environmental

Date labels and food waste

Date labels are used on food items to indicate their shelf life. At times, these date labels are misinterpreted by the consumer. This leads to food items being thrown away despite the fact that they may be fit for consumption.

For the retailer:

Some date labels are for the benefit of the retailer. They are:

- **Display Until, and;**
- **Sell By**

Foods that feature these dates are still fit for consumption after the date featured on the label.

Using these date labels may mislead the consumer. They may be misinterpreted as 'out of date' when the display or sell by dates are exceeded.

Using these types of date labels may increase food waste in the supermarket. Goods will be discounted to give the consumer opportunities to buy at a cheaper rate. If the product exceeds the date shown, the product will be wasted.

For the consumer:

Date labels on food are beneficial for the consumer when they are presented as:

- **Use by**

This date label will feature on the food item. It indicates that a food item must be eaten before the date shown. The food is not safe to eat when the date has been exceeded. This date label will feature on high risk foods such as:

- Chicken
- Fish
- Pâté

- **Best before**

The best before date indicates that a product is at optimal quality before the date stated. After this date, the product is still safe to eat but the quality may be altered.

- Cereal may go 'soft'
- Bread may go 'hard'

Using this type of date label can be confusing for consumers and can be misinterpreted. Often foods that are still safe for consumption are thrown away by consumers.



Learning Outcome Link

Factors affecting food choice

Analyse the mandatory and voluntary information on food labels and packaging

