

Experts urge UK parliament to take action to reduce food waste

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As UK supermarkets pledge to cut food waste by 20% within the next decade, experts are calling on the government to take legislative action and debate the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill.

Writing in *The BMJ* today, Professors Andy Haines and Tim Lang, and Dr Jennie Macdiarmid, say the government's failure to respond positively to the proposed bill "should not detract from the need to pursue legislation to reduce food waste as part of an integrated approach to improving health, increasing [food security](#), and reducing environmental damage."

In September 2015 the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill was put before the UK parliament. It comprises two broad objectives: for individuals, business, and public bodies to reduce food waste and for businesses to enter into formal agreements with food redistribution organisations.

It was due to have its second reading on 4 March, but was placed too far down the agenda to be debated, "reflecting lack of support by the government, which advocates voluntary agreements rather than legislation," they argue.

They say future food security "depends on creating a sustainable food system that can provide healthy affordable diets for a growing population while minimising environmental damage."

They point out that global food waste accounts for 7% of global

greenhouse gas emissions. In 2012, it is estimated that UK households threw away 4.2 megatonnes (Mt) of food that could have been eaten, about 12% of food brought into the home. A further 3.9 Mt of food waste occurred in manufacturing and 0.4 Mt in retail and wholesale.

Haines and colleagues believe that new policies to reduce food waste "should bring together the health, environmental, social, and economic agendas to maximise gains and avoid unintended consequences."

For example, reducing food portions could reduce food waste since a third of the food waste in the hospitality and food sector comes from uneaten food left on consumers' plates, and smaller portions could go some way to help tackle over consumption and obesity, they explain.

"Cutting [food waste](#) is an essential part of creating a more sustainable food system for future food security, but alone it will not be sufficient," they write. "Additional complementary action is needed to tackle the challenge of changing dietary habits to improve health and reduce the environmental impact."

More information: Editorial: Down with food waste, The *BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.i1380

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