

Giving surplus supermarket food to charities will not solve hunger or waste problems, new paper claims

January 26 2017, by Ed Grover



Credit: City University London

Supermarkets and the UK government cannot provide a long-term solution to poverty or food waste by giving away surplus products to food banks and charities, academics have concluded in a new paper.

According to the Food Research Collaboration publication, a large-scale system of food donation could actually have negative health and social consequences for the groups of citizens that it is intended to help.

The briefing paper, written by Professor Martin Caraher of City, University of London and Dr Sinéad Furey of Ulster University, reviews the available data and research on the issues of [food waste](#), food poverty,

food bank use and corporate food donations.

It concludes with the recommendation that the government should consider the "impracticality, morality and distraction" of redistributing [surplus food](#) and instead address the structural, root causes of poverty.

The authors say UK parliamentary discussions about corporate food donations have been prompted after France and Italy approved legislation requiring supermarkets to give surplus products to charity.

The idea was also supported in the Feeding Britain report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty, and MPs quizzed supermarket directors about their current redistribution efforts at an Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee meeting on food waste on Wednesday 18th January, 2017.

Key conclusions from the paper:

- Legislation that requires retailers to give away surplus food is a short-term band aid and is not a way to address hunger, citizens' social rights to food or their nutritional needs.
- It is demeaning to have a two-tier approach, where some citizens are able to choose food in socially acceptable ways and others have the choice made on their behalf.
- Giving away surplus food will not fix the dysfunctional food system, address environmental problems, provide incentives to reduce surplus or cut waste in the long term.
- There is not enough research on the long-term impact of donations on citizens' health and food insecurity, but there are short-term benefits for individuals.
- Support for redistribution would absolve the UK government of its moral obligation to provide social security and move responsibility onto charities and businesses.

- A supply of food from supermarkets is unpredictable and beneficiaries would be determined by individual interests of charities.

The authors say the problems of food waste and food insecurity must be treated as separate issues by politicians and the media, with systematic solutions developed for each problem.

They argue food policy solutions lie in disincentives to the production of waste, such as landfill taxes and not offering tax rebates on donated food.

To address food insecurity, the academics say only a comprehensive social security provision can provide a solution, arguing the government must ensure that benefit delays and sanctions do not lead to families seeking aid from [food banks](#) and that the gap between income and food cost is closed.

Among the statistics cited in the paper are the findings that 30 per cent of food grown around the world is never eaten, and the UK discards ten million tonnes every year. A significant proportion of the UK population faces insufficient access to food, according to studies highlighted, with one poll suggesting 10 per cent of people aged over 15 in the UK are food insecure.

Professor Martin Caraher said: "Solutions to food waste and food insecurity are not to be found in redistributing food surplus and waste from supermarkets to emergency food aid outlets. This is not addressing the rights of the poor and needy to an appropriate and healthy diet.

"When taking into account the available data, we argue the negatives of this kind of donation system outweigh the positives. While in the short term the redistribution of food waste to emergency food aid providers

may provide immediate relief, there is no evidence to show that it addresses food insecurity."

Dr Sinéad Furey said: "We cannot continue to simplistically interlink two separate and distinct debates to the extent that the redirection of surplus or unsaleable food is considered the panacea to the continuing scandal of household [food insecurity](#). Instead, the answer lies in a social justice and a rights-based approach to addressing the structural causes of food poverty through informed debate and political championing."

Professor Elizabeth Dowler, of the University of Warwick, a member of the Food Ethics Council and a contributor to the paper, said: "Corporate philanthropy hand in hand with local charity is not, as you might think, an obvious win-win, but an unsustainable sticking plaster, accountable to no-one, that demeans those desperately seeking help.

"Government and the food sector must work together to ensure a fair food system in which precious resources are used to provide good food for all but not to excess, and that people have jobs or a [social security](#) system which guarantees them enough income to buy the food they need. The use of leftover [food](#) for leftover people has to stop."

More information: Is it appropriate to use surplus food to feed people in hunger? Short-term Band-Aid to more deep rooted problems of poverty: [foodresearch.org.uk/is-it-appr ... ed-people-in-hunger/](https://foodresearch.org.uk/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger/)

Provided by City University London

Citation: Giving surplus supermarket food to charities will not solve hunger or waste problems, new paper claims (2017, January 26) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-01-surplus-supermarket-food-charities-hunger.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.