

GS 2077A GENERAL SYNOD DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION

FOOD WASTAGE

Summary

We worship a generous God who throughout history has provided sufficient for the needs of all of creation. A generosity recorded in the Scriptures and daily revealed in the fruitfulness of the God's good earth.

Since the latter half of the Twentieth Century many have prospered but in so doing have lost their connection with the soil and so have forgotten to respond to God's generosity, succumbing instead to the siren sound of consumer choice. This has led to our nation being the most wasteful in Europe and impoverishment for rich and poor alike.

A renewed gratefulness, supported by national legislation to encourage all parts of the food chain reduce waste, will help many in need and call everyone to a greater care of the environment and of others. In so doing we will provide a legacy of care for future generations.

A Generous God and an ungrateful Creation

1. The whole of the experience of the people of God from the stories of Creation, through the wanderings of the Children of Israel being led to a 'land flowing with milk and honey, and the incarnation of Christ who comes amongst us multiplying loaves and fishes and providing food in desert places, proclaims the generosity of God.

2. We worship a God who provides abundantly for all of creation, counting grains of sand, numbering hairs on heads, clothing flowers with beauty, and providing even the birds of the air with all they need. Our worship rings hollow if in our daily lives we despoil the world around us (the proof of God's provision) and neglect our sisters and brothers who bear the image of the Creator.

Poverty in the Midst of Plenty

3. In the previous century the 1960's and 1970's brought a time of relative peace for many nations and a time of restoration and reconstruction for our own land. The era of 'make do and mend' borne out of the war years had come to an end and the people of England embraced the consumer era with thankfulness and enthusiasm.

4. New Social Housing built as 'homes for heroes', promised prosperity for all and saw the enlargement of the middle class who were able to buy their own homes, had disposable income and even time and money to pay for leisure pursuits. It was for many a golden era during which the nation got out of the habit and the need to dig for victory, saw an end to rationing, and the arrival of the supermarket which provided bananas and other exotic foods all year round.

5. We remain a grateful people, and the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival, continues as an important and regular fixture on the calendar of churches up and down the parishes of our land. But over the decades the gifts have changed. No longer do families regularly bring to church a box, gaily covered with crêpe paper, overflowing with potatoes, runner beans, cauliflower and the inevitable marrow, all of it home grown. Now we see collections of tins, cleaning and personal care products, and even gifts of reward cards and iTunes vouchers. All given freely but with little connection to God's good earth.

6. Like the Rich Fool of the parable we have chosen to 'tear down our barns and build bigger ones' (*Luke 12.13-21*) and in so doing have lost a part of our soul in our desire and new found ability to please ourselves, often unwittingly, at the expense of others. We have confused 'needs' with 'wants' and made idols of our own industry. In the brave new world that is the consumer society we earn our bread by the sweat of another's brow and so find ourselves distanced from the voice of God in creation, which is the 'first bible' for people of all faiths (*Romans 1.18-23*).

7. Godly initiatives, such as the Fairtrade Foundation, have reminded the world and the church about this dissonance and called us back to the soil from which we were formed and care for those who till it on our behalf. However our greed makes it difficult to hear the voice of God and we, in a perverse reversal of the Scriptures, 'though rich make many poor' and find ourselves living in a gilded poverty. This is mirrored by the fact that while many in the developed world struggle with obesity one third of

the world's population are malnourished.¹ God, through the gift of the good earth, has provided for everyone and we have failed to see that generosity and share it

8. Our greed has meant that the soil itself has been wounded as we neglect the lessons of scriptures such as leaving the edges of the fields unharvested (*Ruth 2.8-19*) and have failed to fulfil our duty to care for those who are not as fortunate as ourselves. We have indulged in intensive farming practices that have violated the countryside, destroyed biodiversity, and put lives at risk. The recent restoration of hedgerows in our nation has helped to redress this balance however the promise of the future 'sweeping away' of some farming legislation to encourage profit and competition will only leave us more alienated from the soil.

Partners in Provision – beyond the Food Bank

9. It would be simplistic to put the whole weight of this situation on the shoulders of food producers and blame a chasing after growth in market share amongst retailers. Yes, there is a considerable amount of food wastage in both the production process and in retail (19%) but far and away the largest amount of waste happens in the home (71%). The average British home throws away more than half of the food and drink it buys. Mostly fruit, vegetables, bread, and ready-meals, this comes at a cost of £470 per household per year rising to £700 for a family with children². For members of the Church of England this means we send to waste and landfill food to the value of upwards of £250 million a year. If, instead of buying food then throwing it away, we gave this money to good works our country would be transformed beyond recognition and the whole nation would know of the generosity of God

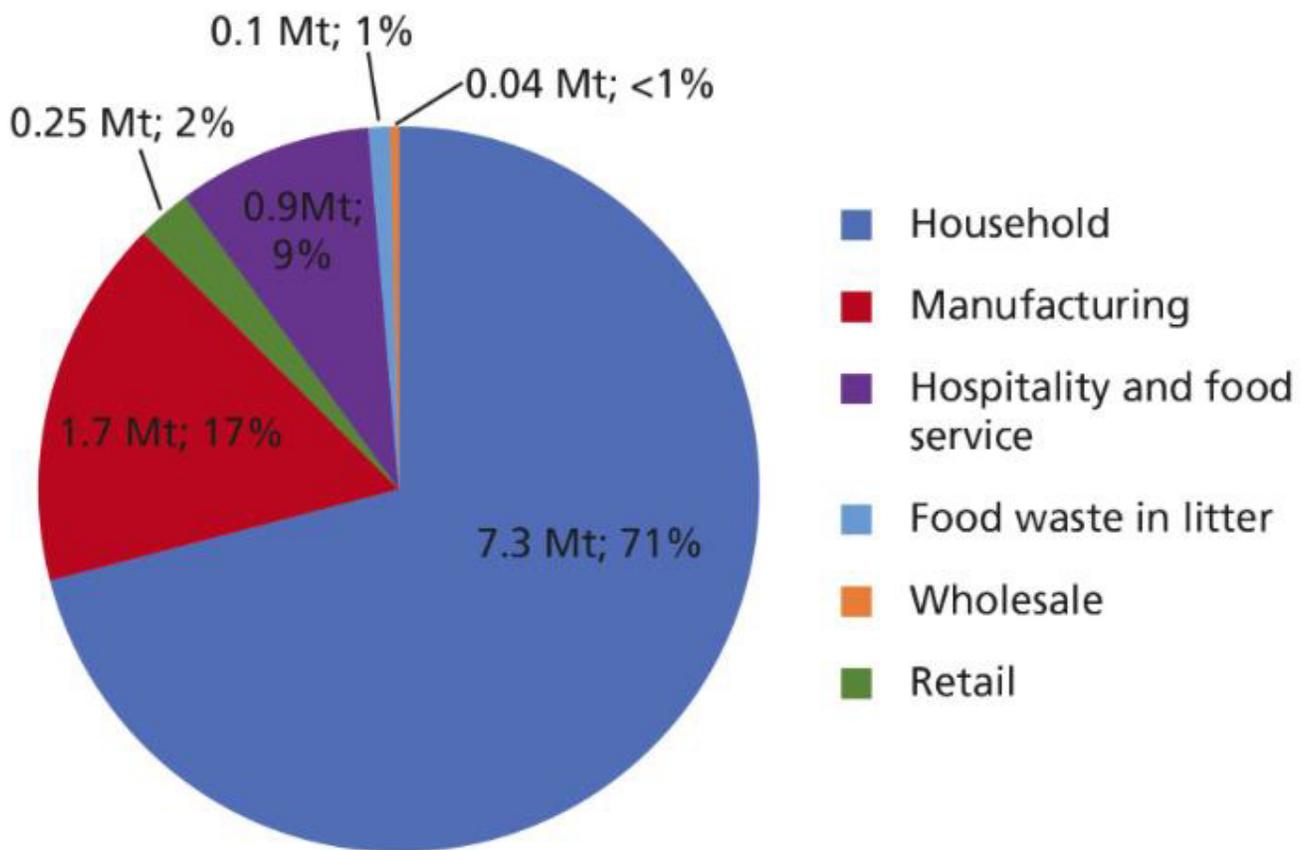


Figure 2: Amounts of food waste arising in the UK by sector (total post-farm-gate = ca. 10 Mt)¹⁴

10. Many retailers have led the way in refusing to send perfectly good food to waste and have resolved to 'fill tummies not landfill'. Their names are a roll of honour for social responsibility and the promotion of the Common Good. Amongst the pioneers were chains such as Pret a Manger, Morrison, Sainsbury and Tesco, who each have unique ways of ensuring that good 'waste' food goes to those who need it most. This is not an exhaustive list of companies choosing to work for the common good and very few large retailers do not carry at least Fairtrade products on their shelves.

11. Reducing waste in the supply chain as well as in our homes requires more than good intentions or a change in legislation. It is not easy for existing structures such as food banks to make good use of food waste from retailers. Fresh food spoils quickly and cannot be easily and safely stored. There is a danger that, without concerted partnership working between community groups, churches, and retailers, food waste would simply move from being put in the skip behind the supermarket to filling the wheelie bin outside the vestry door.

12. The Church of England, with its network of parishes providing a Christian presence in every Community, is ideally situated to provide immediate help in the redistribution of waste food to support community projects and to those in most need. Dioceses and parishes should seek to work with local food producers and retailers to make sure that we do indeed thank the Lord for 'all good gifts around us'.

13. Some may criticise legislation to minimise food waste as stifling productivity and restricting the free market. However retailers have found positive cost benefits in passing on waste food by a reduction in charges for waste. They have also seen a benefit in sales, as customers tend to choose retailers who are seen to be giving back to the community.

¹ <https://www.compassion.com/poverty/hunger.htm>

² These figures are from the 2012 survey by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) more recent studies suggest that the situation has not improved since then. Further information can be found in the report of the Parliamentary sub-committee on Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs below:

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/42906.htm>

http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Estimates_in_the_UK_Jan17.pdf

14. Retailers who have made a commitment to reducing and passing on waste food have, however, found that old habits die hard. When it comes to the end of a long day's work it is sometimes more tempting for their workers to throw food into the bin rather than sort out a collection of edible waste. Legislation would help those on the shop floor, who want to make a difference to their community, ensure that this is indeed what happens.

A Grateful People

15. The spirit of the Sabbath, the Jubilee, the Tithe, and the petition in the Lord's Prayer for the gift of 'daily bread' is founded on the generosity of a God who provides us with far more than we need, desire, or deserve. God gives us more than enough of this world's goods so that we may learn to not depend solely upon them but instead use our bounty to reflect God's generosity in our care of the poor and the needy.

16. These *anawim* are those whom Jesus says will be with us always and are a reminder of His presence amongst us (Matthew 26.11). It is as we learn to serve them that we meet him. Unlike those in the parable of the Last Judgement, we have no excuse. We have been told that we will find and serve Him amongst the hungry and the thirsty, the sick and the stranger, the naked and the imprisoned. If, through our wastefulness of God's gifts, we fail to serve them we also fail to serve God (Matthew 25.45).

17. In God's generosity we find ourselves prosperous beyond our dreams. Reducing food waste and using what we cannot use to help others is an antidote to self-centred consumerism, a reminder to be grateful for all we have, and an opportunity to be as generous to others as God is to us.

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on behalf of the Dioceses of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich
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