

National Federation of Women's Institutes Campaign action pack



theWI
INSPIRING WOMEN

“The WI calls on all supermarkets to sign up to a voluntary agreement to avoid food waste, thereby passing surplus food onto charities thus helping to address the issue of increasing food poverty in the UK”

Snailbeach WI, Shropshire Federation, 2016 Annual Meeting Resolution

Why is food waste a problem and how much does it cost?

Socially: Globally it is estimated that 222 million tonnes of food is wasted every year. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation reports that this equates to almost the entire net production of sub-Saharan Africa. This is happening at a time when an estimated 8.4 million people in the UK do not have enough to eat, with 4.7 million unable to afford a basic meal a day.

Environmentally: Producing food has an impact on the local and global environment

as it uses water, energy and pesticides. The amount of water required to produce 1kg of meat is between 5,000 and 20,000 litres. Preventing UK household food waste would be equivalent to taking one in four cars off British roads.

Economically: In the UK food waste costs the average household £470 a year which equates to £13 billion of edible food being thrown away each year.

Eighty three percent of delegates supported the resolution at the 2016 Annual Meeting, which calls on supermarkets to sign up to a voluntary agreement to avoid food waste, as well as to pass surplus food on to charities to help address food poverty.

The Food Matters campaign was launched following the discussion at the Annual Meeting, and the first stage of the campaign focuses on the issue of food waste, and the role supermarkets can play in reducing food waste at all levels of the supply chain. The second stage of the campaign will focus on the issue of food poverty.

The campaign so far

The NFWI wanted to test whether or not WI members, as a powerful lobby of customers and consumers, felt supermarket practices were contributing to food waste in the home – and what retailers could do to help alleviate this.

Over 5000 WI members responded to two surveys conducted by the NFWI in autumn 2016. The first survey asked for individual member views on issues such as date labelling and multi-packs. The second survey saw members visit their local supermarket to investigate practices on the supermarket shelves.

More details of the surveys and the findings can be found later on in this action pack.

Why focus on supermarkets?

At store level, supermarkets are only responsible for a fraction of the food wasted in the UK, yet their marketing and selling techniques have been identified by the media, food charities and Parliamentary committees as causing food waste up and down the food supply chain.

With their links to suppliers, consumers, and farmers in the UK and around the world, supermarkets are in a powerful position to lead the fight against food waste.

Supermarkets have been accused of encouraging wasteful practices in the home by offering multi-buy and multi-pack deals which encourage overbuying and using inconsistent labelling which leads to consumers throwing away still edible products. Strict grading standards set by retailers have been blamed for causing tonnes of vegetables and fruit to be wasted at production level because they don't meet exacting appearance standards.



What did the NFWI do?

The NFWI wanted to get a more accurate understanding of members' shopping habits and how supermarkets were influencing their buying, wasting and consumption habits. In order to do this, the NFWI conducted two surveys:

- One survey was conducted individually with WI members and questioned attitudes and opinions towards multi-buys, multi-packs, date-labelling, storage instructions, grading standards and misshapen fruit and veg.
- The second survey asked WIs to visit their local supermarket in order to assess the retail landscape; what multi-buys were available, the availability of wonky and value fruit and vegetables and innovative packaging. It also asked respondents to compare 'once opened consume within X days' labelling between equivalent branded and own-brand items to see if there were differences.

Over 4000 members responded to the individual survey, and almost 1000 WIs visited their local supermarket.

What are some of the obstacles to tackling food waste?

Defining and monitoring food waste is difficult as there are different approaches to quantifying food waste. Moving along the supply chain, waste can be less obvious in different parts of the chain. There will always be unavoidable waste such as tea bags and meat and fish bones, but other food waste is more avoidable, such as producing too much food at home, or unsold products in stores.

Recently, some supermarkets have made an effort to be more transparent with their food waste statistics. Tesco started reporting on food waste across its supply chain in 2013. Sainsbury's has also started releasing data on its in-store waste, though not for its supply chain. Other supermarkets have, to-date, declined to release any data. Without this full transparency it is difficult for consumers to judge how much progress stores are making on cutting waste throughout their supply chains.



Our findings:

Date labels

47% of members are guided by **date labelling** telling us that they use these labels as a guide to knowing how old food is, but will still check food before throwing it away.

74% of members correctly **identified use by dates were a signifier of food safety.**

Significant confusion exists amongst WI members about the meaning of date labels. Only 45% of respondents correctly identified that best before dates were there to inform consumers about food quality.

Anecdotally WI members told us that they believe people are **becoming too reliant on date labels when deciding whether or not food is ok to eat**, often throwing perfectly good food out unnecessarily.

Our findings:

Innovative packaging

We asked WI members to find packaging which enables consumers to store and protect a product to help keep it fresher for longer.

87% of supermarket egg and dairy aisles carried products with innovative packaging. However, most of these were confined to one or two products and usually consisted of branded cheese in a resealable packet.

39% of members said they would like to see supermarkets introduce innovative packaging to help them keep food fresh for longer in the home, saying that this would help them reduce food waste.

39% of members thought, incorrectly, that best before dates were there to indicate food safety.

41% of members told us that they assess food on its own merits and will eat it if it looks or smells ok; **effectively ignoring date labels altogether.**

Why is this an issue? Confusion around date labels raises potential issues for food safety (where use-by dates are being ignored or misunderstood) and food waste (where best before dates are being mistaken as a marker of food safety).

Why is this an issue? By introducing innovative packaging, supermarkets can help consumers store a product effectively to help keep it fresher for longer. Supermarkets could be doing much more to pioneer these new innovations, such as resealable packets or those that easily allow products to be split by portion.

Our findings:

Once-opened instructions

WI members surveyed over 1,000 branded and own-brand products in their local supermarkets, comparing the 'once opened, consume within X days' (open-life) instructions on products.

35%

of products sampled had a different open-life when compared with a branded / own-brand equivalent

WI members found huge differences in the open-life of branded and own brand products. This included products with virtually identical ingredients, such as tinned tomatoes.



69%

of members surveyed said that on-pack instructions play a guiding role in how they use and consume products.

Overall, supermarket products had a shorter open life than branded products.

Why is this an issue? It has been estimated that increasing the life of a product by just one day would save 250000 tonnes of food from being wasted. Inconsistent and confusing 'once-opened' instructions are leaving consumers to guess whether these are recommendations around product quality or safety, and may be leading to consumers throwing food out prematurely.

Our findings:

Multi-buys

75%

of supermarkets surveyed **offer multi-buys on fresh produce.**

Buy one get one free offers are much less prevalent than they used to be. **But other offers such as 2 for £X and three for two are still common-place.**

36%

of WI members said that supermarkets should **'stop promoting buy one get one free and other similar offers'** to help reduce food waste in the home.

Why is this an issue? While positive progress has been made to phase out 'buy one, get one free' offers, supermarkets are still offering multi-buy offers that encourage consumers to buy larger quantities of food. Supermarkets should swap these promotions for price reductions on single items so that consumers aren't encouraged to buy more than they need.

Our findings:

Multipacks

80%

of WI members said they **want to be able to buy products loose** so they can buy only what they need.

64%

said that retailers should sell products in **smaller packs at a similar price per kilo as larger packs.**

40%

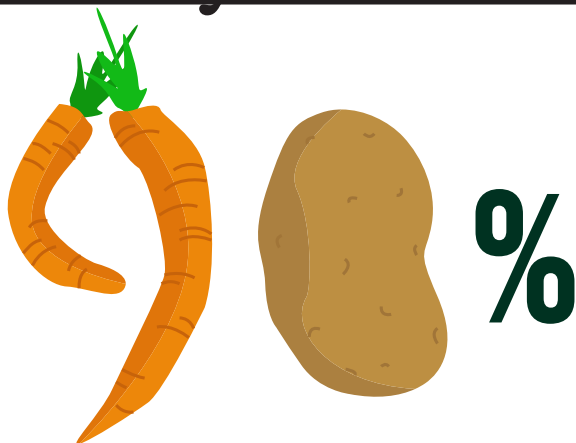
of members told us that **prepacked products** led them to **buying more food than they needed.**

Why is this an issue? By only offering consumers products in large packets, or pre-packed rather than loose, supermarkets encourage overbuying which could lead to food waste in the home.



Our findings:

Wonky fruit and veg



90% of members would be **happy to buy 'misshapen' or blemished fruit and veg,** irrespective of whether or not it was cheaper.

9/10

members believe the **grading standards** set by supermarkets that mean fruit and veg can be rejected **are wrong.**

48%

of stores surveyed carried a 'value' fruit and veg range.

Why is this an issue? Supermarket grading standards can mean that produce is rejected because it is not a uniform shape or size. Members have made it clear that they don't want to see good food wasted because it doesn't look 'perfect'. We want to see supermarkets stop rejecting produce in this way, and use their considerable marketing power to educate consumers that it's taste that counts, not appearance.

29%

of stores surveyed **carried a wonky fruit and veg range.** Of these stores, 68% offered only one or two different products.

What we would like to see next:

The NFWI is calling for supermarkets to take action on the following areas:

An end to overbuying;

- supermarkets should offer a price reduction on individual items rather than offering multi-buys.
- shoppers should be able to purchase products loose so they don't have to buy more than they need.
- smaller pack sizes should work out at similar prices per kilo/litre as their bigger equivalents, so it makes sense to buy only what is needed.

"...[there are] too many confusing offers and far too many large packs. Pensioners and people living on their own need to buy small packs at a reasonable price." - WI survey respondent

Extending the product life of foods in the home;

- supermarkets need to end confusing date labelling, and reassess whether best before dates are needed at all on some packaged fruit and veg products. Supermarkets should consider replacing use-by dates with best before dates where food safety is not compromised.

- retailers should rethink their approach to 'once opened, consume within X days' labels and these should only be displayed on products if they are there for food safety reasons. They should ensure open-life instructions are as long as possible.

- where packaging is deemed necessary, innovative packaging, such as resealable cheese packaging, should be introduced across all product lines as a priority, and not limited to just one or two.

"confusion over use by, sell by, best before means some people throw away perfectly good food" - WI survey respondent



Fully utilising the farm crop;

- supermarkets should adopt, stock and promote a far wider range of wonky or misshapen fruit and vegetables in their stores.
- supermarkets should relax grading standards to ensure that a larger proportion of the farm crop can be used across all product lines.
- supermarkets should use their substantial marketing power to educate customers that it's taste that counts, not appearance.

Greater supermarket transparency on food waste;

- all supermarkets should publish a detailed breakdown of food waste throughout their supply chains to help consumers assess supermarket progress in tackling food waste, and help retailers target 'hotspots' of food waste.
- supermarkets should publicly report on food waste annually, and display the information on their websites in an accessible format. Auditing should be conducted by an independent third party.

"Ploughing perfectly good food back into the ground because of over-production or grading issues is criminal when many people are near the breadline." - WI survey respondent

The WI food waste manifesto

Accompanying this campaign action pack is the WI's Food Waste Manifesto which sets out the actions we would like retailers to take to ensure that their practices are not resulting in more food waste in the home or at farm level. Please take this manifesto with you when you meet your local supermarket manager during the weekend of action.



Get Involved!

Take part in our weekend of action. The NFWI is organising a weekend of action for the **19th to 21st May** to encourage supermarkets to take further action to tackle food waste. To take part, present the enclosed manifesto containing our campaign asks to your local supermarket manager. Ask them what they are doing to tackle these issues, and ask them to raise it with his or her head office. Make sure you include your, or your WI's, contact details so that they can write back to you with a response.

display until
03/07/17
Use by
05/07/17

Draw attention to the Manifesto and weekend of action with an activity or 'stunt'. Here are some ideas for ways you could make your activity stand out:

- Think about creating something beautiful out of wonky fruit and vegetables, similar to Giuseppe Arcimboldo's oil paintings, take a picture of the creation and present it to your local supermarket along with the Manifesto to highlight that all food is beautiful and too good to waste.
- You could take along examples of confusing labelling, multi-packs or multi-buy offers to highlight what needs to change.
- Hold a photo opportunity and invite along the local media – perhaps you could bring along fruit and vegetables that taste great but look a bit wonky.

Invite other interest groups to your weekend of action to make even more of an impact. You may already have links in your community, or further ideas for groups to invite can be found in our discussion guide on the WI website.

Publicise the weekend of action. You can find a template press release and discussion guide on the Food Matters pages of the WI website. Be sure to include any details of accompanying activities if you decide to organise one – and take lots of pictures!



Let us know what you did!
We are always interested to hear how you get involved with campaigns. Let us know what you did and what response you receive from the supermarket as well as the local press.



Contact us

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