



## **Food & Climate Connection ‘Food Focus’ Paper: *climate change and food action within Buckinghamshire***

### **Introduction**

The Food & Climate Connection action group brings a local focus to the needs within the food sector in relation to the climate crisis for Buckinghamshire. Food is excluded as an area in many climate strategies; including our own Buckinghamshire Council *Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy*, other than its pledge to encourage environmentally sustainable behaviour. This ‘Food Focus’ paper summaries local focussed work, bringing together those from climate and environmental based community action groups with members of the Buckinghamshire Food Partnership.

### **Buckinghamshire- Food Waste the local context**

According to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA,) in 2018-2019 153,152 tonnes of rubbish was recycled or composted in Buckinghamshire; this is 58 per cent of the local authority's household waste. Their data also shows that Buckinghamshire Council disposed of 407.7 kg of household waste per person from homes across the county in 2019-2020, which was in fact 56.7 kg less than five years earlier. With a growing population of around 543,128, this is indeed a trend which needs to be stopped.

In Bucks the garden and food waste bulking service is currently managed by FCC Environment. Historically we had an in-vessel composting (IVC) facility was in operation on site ay High Heavens Waste Complex in High Wycombe until its closure in 2013. This was due to Buckinghamshire Council starting to collect food and garden waste separately and removed the need to compost mixed food and garden waste together in the IVC. It is

thought that around 70,000 tonnes of material will be handled via this contract every year, which manages, transfers and treats the county's green, food, bulky and wood waste; with most of the waste treated either in Buckinghamshire or just a few miles over the border.

Compostable garden waste is now:

1. unloaded by collection teams and household recycling centres vehicles
2. transported to composting facilities in Buckinghamshire and neighbouring Counties
3. composted creating a nutrient rich soil improver. This process reduces the need for peat-based compost.

Food waste is now:

1. transported to local anaerobic digestion (AD) facilities
2. processed to generate electricity which feeds into the national grid, alongside quality fertilizer produced for agricultural use.

<https://www.olleco.co.uk/sustainability/anaerobic-digestion>

*Interesting fact:* The AD plant in Aylesbury is located next to the Arla dairy, allowing it to become a 'zero carbon' milk processing facility. With its produced biofertiliser used for both of ABP Food Group's and Arla's farmer suppliers.

However, we are aware, Anaerobic Digestion is not the only answer concerning what to do with food waste. Feedback's research found that preventing food waste results in direct emissions savings over 9 times higher than sending food waste to AD – and about 40 times higher when trees are planted on the spared grassland (eg not being used to grow AD crops). And 3 times more emissions are saved by sending food waste to animal feed than to AD. Millions in public money is poured into subsidising AD plants, while addressing food waste are neglected and left to voluntary action by businesses.

<https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Feedback-2020-Green-Gas-Without-the-Hot-Air-Exec-Summary.pdf>

This is a driver for us to continue our work to make people more aware of their food waste, not only to save themselves money; but also to reduce waste first, see how they could compost second and then third utilise the council's food caddy scheme. With us looking to continue to promote our 'Eat it, Compost it, Caddy it' message around reducing food waste.

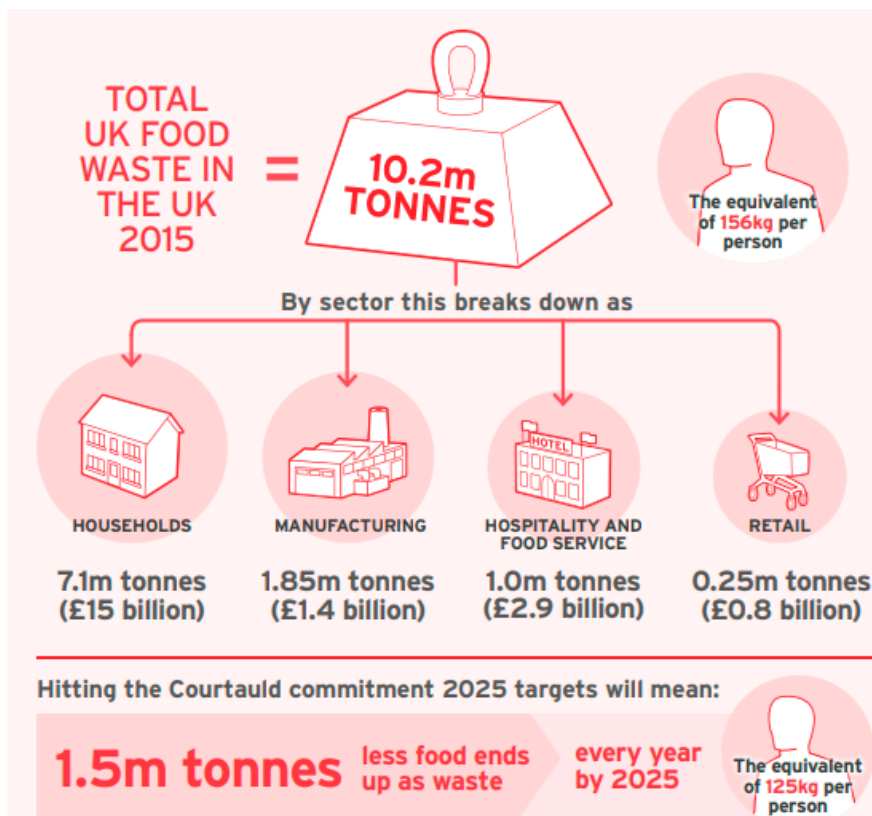
There is also the countywide lack of business monitoring when it comes to data on business based food waste; as well as waste from the food production sector including farming.

## The National Picture

In May 2021 Defra carried out a consultation of household and business recycling in England. Which includes recommendations to consider free garden waste collections for every home, which they say could save householders more than £100 million a year in green waste charges.

Environment secretary George Eustice said: “Householders want more frequent recycling collections. Regular food and garden waste collections will ensure that they can get rid of their rubbish faster, at no additional cost to them. “Our proposals will boost recycling rates, and ensure that less rubbish is condemned to landfill.”

Defra added the measures will help ensure that the government meets its ambition laid out in the Resources and Waste Strategy of recycling at least 65% of municipal waste by 2035, with a maximum of 10% being landfilled. Ministers are also committed to eliminating all “avoidable waste” by 2050.



Packaging is also targeted with producer payments to local authorities and businesses for managing packaging waste. Payments to local authorities for the cost of managing packaging waste generated by households, both packaging waste that is collected for recycling and packaging waste disposed of in residual waste, will be made under the packaging Extended Producer Responsibility scheme. Payments for managing packaging waste from businesses will be limited to recycling cost. The recently launched Extended Producer Responsibility consultation sets out proposals for payments to local authorities and businesses.

The HM Government 'OUR WASTE, OUR RESOURCES: A STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND 2018' aims to make sure that manufacturers and producers bear a heavier financial burden for the pollution they cause, the Strategy fully upholds the 'polluter pays' principle. And by protecting the natural world, and leaving it in a healthier state for the next generation, it will help us uphold a core pledge of our 25 Year Environment Plan. Another issue raised is plastic waste which can link to all the excess packaging found within food distribution; from cartons to boxes to bottles or wrappers. Plastic waste is 'avoidable' when the plastic could have been reused or recycled; when a reusable or recyclable alternative could have been used instead; or when it could have been composted or biodegraded in the open environment. This champions us to act against plastic pollution, and also instigated the plastic bag fees in shops and the banning of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds.

In the UK alone, an estimated 10 million tonnes of food and drink are wasted post-farm gate annually, worth around £20 billion. Growing excess food that no one eats damages the Earth's ecosystems when we dispose of it. Moreover, a fifth of UK greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are associated with food and drink, mostly created during production (agriculture and manufacturing) – and needlessly if the food and drink are wasted. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to halve global food waste at consumer and retail levels by 2030 is also a guiding factor connected to this national strategy. Including being more effective in redistributing food to those who need it most before it can go to waste. It also highlights the following actions:

- Consult on annual reporting of food surplus and waste by food businesses
- Consult on legal powers to introduce food waste targets and surplus food redistribution obligations
- Publish a new food surplus and waste hierarchy
- Promote awareness of the issue by appointing a new food waste champion
- Support cross sector collaboration through the Courtauld 2025 agreement

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf)

The fact that the UK sources much of its food from areas of the world already being hit hard by climate change. Our responsibility does not end at the UK's borders. The UK government is at risk of underestimating how serious the impacts of climate change on our food system might be. The results of that miscalculation could be devastating for the viability of food and farming sectors, for the environment and for our citizens.

The Food Ethics Council urges the UK government to take co-ordinated action to secure our food system against the threat of climate change. In July 2016 the UK's Committee on Climate Change published its UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 Synthesis report: priorities for the next five years. Highlighting direct climate change-related threats for the

UK including increases in flood risk and exposure to high temperatures and heatwaves, shortages in water, substantial risks to UK wildlife and natural ecosystems, risks to domestic and international food production and trade, and from new and emerging pests and diseases. However the government disputed these findings and assessment and continue to not see any true risk needing action.

England's National Food Strategy 2019 (NFS) provides an overview of the state of the "food system" an all-encompassing term that covers the production, processing, transport and consumption of food. Research suggests that the food system is responsible for about one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions. Under its commitments to the Paris Agreement, the UK has pledged to reduce emissions from 1990 levels by 68% by 2030. The government has also set a legally binding target to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Which means looking at local food economies will also need to be highlighted as a way to help reduce emissions as part of a forward thinking plan.

Nearly half of all food-related emissions are due to agriculture, including rearing livestock. The methane produced by cows and other ruminants is "estimated to have caused a third of total global warming since the industrial revolution", the report notes. Other major contributors to the emissions include transportation, food and fertiliser manufacturing and packaging.

We also look forward to the Climate Education Bill which is also in progress in the UK.

## **Our Work- 2022 onwards**

As a partnership between many VCS environmental organisations and community groups Food & Climate Connection have selected key action areas for 2022.

### Food Waste:

- Community Food Waste challenges connected to Food Savvy <https://www.foodsavvy.org.uk/>
- School Food Waste Challenge Pilot.
- Social Media Awareness #reducefoodwaste campaigns around key times of the year eg Christmas, Food Waste Awareness Week and Zero Waste Week

### Food Packaging:

- Bucks based food packaging research and call to action
- School food packaging pilot project with Amersham Museum
- Buckinghamshire recycles Waste Wizard map promotion <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/waste-and-recycling/what-to-recycle-where/#>

Behaviours:

- 'EAT IT, COMPOST IT, CADDY IT' School pilot Alfriston School Beaconsfield
- Sustainable cooking project, connected to food poverty, energy/ fuel poverty and environmental benefit (Slo' Plates)
- Compost Project
- Local Producers work mapping <https://www.bigbarn.co.uk/places/Buckinghamshire/>

Campaign Ideas:

- County wide reporting for businesses of food waste
- Junk food advertising

Food & Climate Connection is made up of:

*Bucks Food Partnership,*

*Sustainable Amersham,*

*Carbon Zero Haddenham/ Haddenham Parish Council,*

*Feedback,*

*Grow Together Bucks CIC,*

*Khepera CIC,*

*Climate Action Wendover,*

*Seed1 Marlow.*

*January 2022*