



Reducing food waste

Advice from chefs and catering professionals



This document contains wise words and inspiration from GreenCook Food Waste Ambassadors in the UK and Netherlands. These are networks of skilled and passionate food professionals, who have a wealth of knowledge about the industry. In this document, they share their advice on how to create more sustainable dishes whilst curbing food waste.

Sustain's Ethical Eats project, funded by the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund, has supported around 1,000 London restaurants and catering businesses in London, helping them with identifying practical steps towards becoming more sustainable, sharing skills and experiences, and promoting their good work. We have organised workshops on themes such as food waste, nose-to-tail eating, sustainable fish and seasonal vegetables; run 'meet the producer' events, and organised visits to local farms.

Ethical Eats has also been a partner in the transnational GreenCook programme, funded by the European Regional Development Fund Interreg IVB, which works across several European countries to reduce food waste in the retail, catering and domestic sectors. The programme has involved partners from across Europe, working on practical, research and other initiatives. Ethical Eats has coordinated the UK participation, with a focus on reducing catering waste.

To this end, we have run workshops, roundtable events, visits for professionals and catering students to find out more about the work of food waste reduction pioneers, and exchange visits to see inspirational projects in other countries. We have supported improvements in catering training standards and guidance documents for students, to include food waste reduction. And we have participated in several Awards programmes to highlight food waste reduction innovation.

Another important strand of our work as part of the GreenCook programme has been to support inspirational GreenCook Food Waste Ambassadors in the UK to cultivate and celebrate food waste reduction initiatives in the industry. This work was based on the GreenCook Ambassadors network in the Netherlands, run by De Vale Ouwe, which has provided us with valuable advice, support and opportunities to visit inspirational projects, see: www.greencook.nl/index.php/en/nl

Miranda Godfrey

International Culinary Art Diploma
Lecturer, Westminster Kingsway
College, and UK GreenCook Food
Waste Ambassador



What made you start working on food waste reduction?

In a catering college, food is produced in big quantity all year round, so food waste is a big issue socially but also economically. There are lots of little things that pile up to create food waste. For example, we can only order cress in 500g bags, so when we only use two stalks as a garnish, the rest is thrown away. Or the fact that qualification bodies require students to make four portions of each dishes for their exams when it isn't necessary and create lots of avoidable waste.

How have the students reacted to this issue?

Food waste education is really important and students get it and embrace it because for most of them the final goal is to open a business and food waste reduction fits their bill in terms of sustainability, but mostly in terms of money saving potential. In terms of changes in the college, for customers and at the canteen we are using smaller plates for our buffets.

What is your best success on food waste reduction so far?

I try to think about new ways of reducing food waste for everything I notice and then it's about convincing the rest of the college. Since we started being more careful with what is wasted, I have managed to save some money with which I now buy free range eggs instead of caged hen's eggs for my class. This has shown some of my colleagues how reducing food waste can have a very tangible impact and allow them to buy better product.

It is also about getting people out of the pattern of thinking, "I need THIS ingredient specifically," and get everyone to be more flexible and adapt recipes to what is available.

Food waste measurement has to be adapted to catering colleges as currently it is a burden due to the amount of different food we produce every day. But having students measuring their food waste and then creating a healthy amount of competition has proven very efficient. At the moment each student has 2 bowls on his or her bench for each recipe: one where all the trimmings and unavoidable food waste goes; the other one for all the avoidable food waste. Students then go through the bowl with avoidable food waste and find out ways to use some of it. Seeing is almost already acting!

Good equipment is crucial for us in the battle against food waste. For example, our powerful blenders allow us to blend various off-cuts into delicious soups and sauces.

It's also about trying new things. For example, at the moment we are growing cress for garnish in the classroom in used mushroom trays. If it works, we will be able to be self-sufficient in cress, while growing an unusual variety. As we will be able to pick on demand, the waste will be minimal.

What advice you would give to colleague starting to reduce food waste?

It is about asking question and inspiring people to ask questions. Why has the City & Guilds qualification body decided on four portions for their assessments? Why is the time we can leave food on a buffet only two hours? It is also very important to measure food waste so we can see what we save, and ultimately to have this built into the system.

What should we be doing in 10 years' time?

There is room for improvements with catering colleges' test assessments for City & Guilds qualifications, where students are asked to cook four portions of everything. That creates a lot of waste and it isn't necessary. It would make sense to reduce the assessments portions from four to two, and maybe create a voucher system where this food would be made available at the canteen and could be eaten for free by the students after the assessment is complete.

We could also have adapted examinations where only what needs to be judged will be cooked. When judging Egg Benedict preparation, for example (a standard test for catering students), I only need to see the egg and the hollandaise sauce, there is no need to add bread as it doesn't really matter in this case.

It would also be amazing to have a food measurement system integrated at the colleges which would allow us to monitor food waste and reduce it. Compulsory food waste training in all catering colleges would also be great as we need to train the future generations of chefs to be food waste smart!

Find out more about the International Culinary Diploma at Westminster Kingsway College in London:
www.westking.ac.uk/course/international-culinary-diploma/

Sarah Moore

Artisan Caterer, and UK GreenCook Food Waste Ambassador



What made you start working on food waste reduction?

The social fact that we waste over 20% of our food makes this issue extremely important on the national and international agenda, but also on our plates. As people who eat, buy, prepare or grow food, we are all qualified to speak about it and act on the food waste issue.

Have you raised awareness of food waste with your customers? How has this worked?

I have started to work with my clients when serving a buffet and I now talk to them before they come and help themselves. I do something that is really counter-intuitive for caterers and tell people that there is enough food but it's "only one of each of everything". I was initially quite scared about

saying it but the feedback has been really good once the reason behind it was explained. So maybe we just need to tell customers about portion size. No one has ever disagreed with me when I explained it so it has been a really good experience so far.

What should we be doing in 10 years' time?

No catering college can hear Miranda [from Westminster Kingsway college, see previous case study] and not take action, but it has to be underpinned with proof that it is possible and feasible. We have to win hearts and minds! Being part of a community that wants to improve food waste reduction and using "networking knowledge sharing" is really helpful. We have to learn to say no to some things, and it does take some bravery sometimes.

Find out more about Sarah Moore's artisan catering business at: www.sarahmoore.co.uk and read her blog 'Mudpies and Minestrone' at: www.mudpiesandminestrone.blogspot.co.uk

Tom Fletcher

Founder - Rejuce, and UK GreenCook
Food Waste Ambassador



Thomas has built a business called Rejuce by re-using, re-directing and recycling food surpluses from local markets and supermarkets by bicycle: transporting and transforming it into healthy eco-friendly juices, soups and smoothies.

What made you start working on food waste reduction?

Travelling and seeing first-hand the amount of food we take from developing countries and then seeing the amount wasted at the other end, especially in the wholesale markets. It sickened me to do nothing about it and pretend that I was someone that couldn't do anything to change it, as I was the perfect person to do it.

Have you raised awareness of food waste with your customers? How has this worked?

All my customers and retailers understand the difference between food that is not good enough presently to be sold and food that is too good to throw away, because they drink it willingly. They are the best ambassadors of Rejuce as they tell their friends and can be justifiably smug about consuming our products. It's a win-win situation: the customer benefits from a healthy, hearty juice made with at least three different types of fruit and veg, helping them reach their 5-a-day; the food suppliers win because they don't have to pay to dispose of their edible produce; and the environment we all share wins because food doesn't go to landfill or get churned into topsoil. It then gets covered in ammonium nitrate to boost the soil's fertility artificially, which is much more energy intensive than using natural fertiliser such as animal manure, and causes unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions.

What is your best tip when working with saved fruits and vegetables?

Be vigilant and don't be squeamish, some people are going hungry because no one wants to do what we do. I once fell nose deep inside a bin box of rotten strawberry juice because the cardboard I was walking across was wet underneath and couldn't support my weight! I carried on collecting the edible ones and some four hours later I showered and changed and was absolutely fine.

Look for ways to standardise your processes as much as possible because it is a numbers game and if you can simplify things you will win in bulk. However mundane it is, keep motivated with other sources of entertainment like audio books.

What should we be doing on food waste reduction in 10 years' time?

Ideally, the majority of surplus food would go to humans, as it is still fit for humans. The second biggest percentage, what isn't fit for human consumption any more, would go to pigs and other livestock that prefer wet feed. The third use – the minority of food waste – would go to Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and be churned into fertiliser and bio-gas. If I had my way, we would continue to rescue the energy from any saved food unfit for human consumption mainly by mammals' digestion, and then use the treated excrement as fertilisers as humans always have done in the past. AD should be a last resort to treat food waste as I believe it is an expensive and energy-intensive way of making fertiliser and bio-gas.

To make this happen, two things would be needed.

Firstly, the laws around redirecting food waste would have to be supported. As with the Good Samaritans Act in the USA, businesses would have an incentive to reclaim the money back from tax from the cost of transporting and handing this surplus food to farms and – for example – charitable food banks.

Secondly, as with the current food and hygiene standards in the food production and catering industries, a widely accredited form of certification should be attainable for re-classifying food from inedible waste to edible surplus. This test would certify someone who has the correct knowledge and experience to judge a good apple from a bad apple. As ridiculous, as this may sound, it might be the only way to cover businesses for insurance and legal reasons and to show "due diligence".

In my understanding, the best way to make use of edible food surplus is to turn it into juice, soup, preserves and dehydrated fruit and vegetables, because the initial produce is unrecognisable – cosmetic standards don't matter. Adding value to this otherwise forgotten saved food is the key to solving the problem quickly as a tax or disincentive will not encourage the right thing to be done, just the cheapest thing. An incentive or a win-win will encourage a wider approach where more thought is applied and more opportunities are created.

Find out more about the work of Thomas and Rejuce at: www.rejuce.co.uk

Marianne Karstens

De Vale Ouwe, GreenCook
Netherlands project co-ordinator



What has worked best in your battle against food waste?

Change lies in a mix of inspiration, awareness raising and measurement of the waste produced. Sharing knowledge, creativity and skills around food waste reduction in workshops (nose-to-tail, sustainable fish, etc...) is also crucial.

Skills, co-operation, creativity, innovation and correct interpretation of food regulations are all important and these will continue even after the GreenCook project ends. If there is limited money, the business should focus on serving food at the correct temperature and re-using leftovers.

Find out more about De Val Ouwe at: www.devaleouwe.nl and the Netherlands GreenCook Food Waste Ambassadors on the following page, and also at: www.greencook.nl

The UK GreenCook Food Waste Ambassadors network was based on the GreenCook Ambassadors network in the Netherlands, run by De Vale Ouwe, which has provided Sustain's Ethical Eats project with valuable advice, support and opportunities to visit inspirational projects, see: www.greencook.nl/index.php/en/nl

Netherlands GreenCook Food Waste Ambassadors

Jan van de Kreeke,
F&B (manager)
and Banqueting
coordinator, for
Hotelschool
The Hague in
Amsterdam



What made you start working on food waste reduction?

Gerhard van den Broek: Simply working in the kitchen and seeing that food waste is everywhere, from the preparation to the buffet, is a real eye-opener. And also, as an entrepreneur, money is important and any food wasted is money lost. Both these considerations together make you a food waste fighter and you start creating all sorts of recipes that save good food from being wasted, like making croutons from bread leftovers.

**Gerhard van
den Broek,**
Chef, Landgoed
Rhederoord



What has worked best for you in your battle against food waste?

Gerhard van den Broek: When we measured our food waste for a week, I was shocked by the amount that was thrown away. There are things you can't avoid throwing away like vegetable peelings, but other things can be saved using creative cooking. I love to be creative, and it is my passion to do so with what I have. I love to work on flavours and creativity is a skill you have to get as a food waste conscious chef.

**Marnetta
Braks, Chef,**
Streekrestaurant
De Hofkaeme



We will apply nose-to-tail cooking concepts whenever we can, for example by buying whole deer during the hunting season. I like this challenge as in my restaurant there is no menu and I decide what people eat: people simply decide the number of courses they would like and what they eat (vegetarian, only fish, etc.). This puts me in a good position to use the "stewy parts" of meat and create delicious dishes with lesser known cuts of meat. This is a really helpful approach when trying to reduce food waste.

Jan van de Kreeke: We have two types of restaurants. In Le Début, our fine dining restaurant where we serve a menu based on local and organic food, where the guest can state his or her dietary requirements and our chefs will take care of the rest. Guests have no choices on the menu content. In La Mangerie, our “front cooking buffet style” restaurant for students and lecturers, we have different approaches. For the buffet, we make sandwiches early and we adapt to demand as we go by making fresh sandwiches on demand. Guests need to be educated about this practice and we always explain why we are doing what we do.

There is almost too much variety, too much choice, and sometimes this promotes food waste. We use all our left-overs to make a delicious soup we call “Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday soup”. We also let students and lecturers taste it so they can see for themselves that it is delicious.

For businesses, it’s a choice to have sustainable options and work within these boundaries when changing the menu. It’s also about taking steps with customers and showing them what we are doing. We explain that the change to sustainable products hasn’t affected the price, but the portion is a bit smaller. Our message is: “Eat less but better.”

Marnetta Braks: Working with better sourced and higher quality product and changing the portion size and not the price makes sense. As the products are of a higher quality and often taste better, a smaller portion tends to be just as satisfying.

What should we be doing in 10 years’ time?

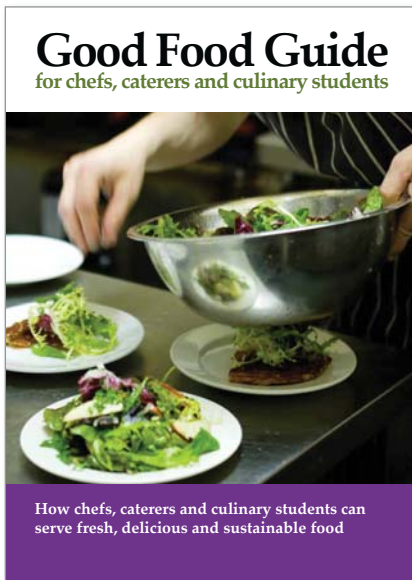
Jan van de Kreeke: I would like to see new technologies in the kitchen like using coffee grounds to grow fresh mushrooms. We would also need a clearer regulation on food waste that will allow us to use good quality food even after it has been 2 hours on a buffet, when the required temperature level for safety has been respected.

To find out more:

- **Hotelschool The Hague in Amsterdam**
www.hotelschool.nl/en
- **Landgoed Rhederoord**
www.rhederoord.nl

Publications

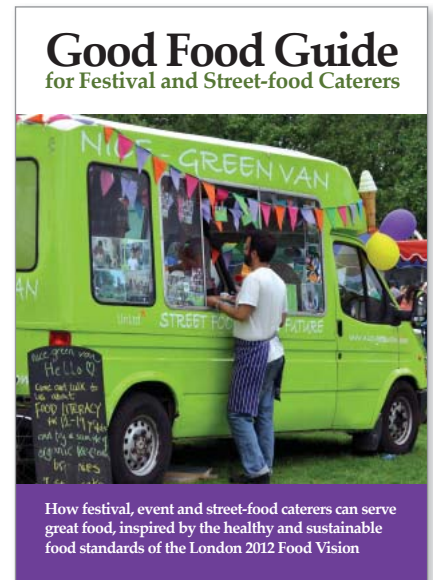
Ethical Eats has produced a range of guidance documents to help caterers, event organisers, catering colleges and catering students to learn how to serve healthier and more sustainable food, including reducing food waste. These are all available to download on the Sustain website: www.sustainweb.org/ethicaleats/publications



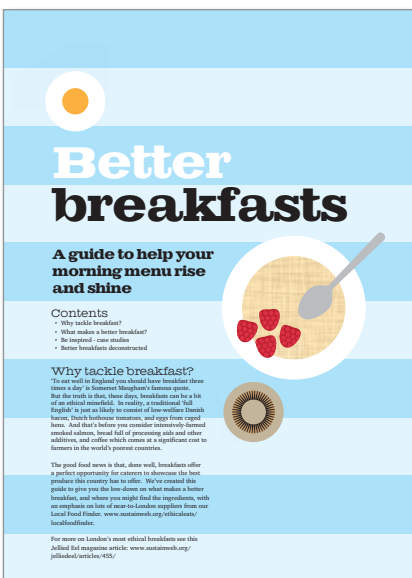
Good Food Guide: For chefs, caterers and culinary students
This handy guide aims to provide practical advice on how to implement positive changes within established restaurants, cafés and catering businesses, as well as help encourage those at the start of their culinary career to take food sustainability to the next level.



The Good Food for Festivals Guide
By adopting the simple, affordable and effective actions outlined in this guide, many of which are already being taken by some forward-thinking festival organisers, your event can play a part in improving the health and well-being of visitors, the livelihoods of farmers and producers, the welfare of farm animals, conservation of precious wildlife and fish stocks, food waste reduction, and the long-term sustainability of our food system.



The Good Food Guide: For Festival & Street-food Caterers
This guide shows how festival, event and street-food caterers can serve great food, inspired by the healthy and sustainable food standards of the London 2012 Olympic Food Vision. It draws on the advice of street-food caterers who are using their dishes to improve the health of visitors, the livelihoods of farmers, the welfare of animals, the conservation of wildlife and fish stocks, food waste reduction, and the long-term sustainability of our food system.



Better Breakfasts: a guide to help your morning menu rise and shine
Breakfast can be a surprisingly complicated affair from a sustainability point of view. Coffee from impoverished farmers in developing countries, pork from low-welfare pigs, eggs from caged hens, tomatoes from hot-houses in Holland, intensively farmed salmon, and on breakfast buffets, a very large amount of good food going to waste. But Ethical Eats is here to help, with the Better Breakfasts guide, which gives you all the information you need to help your morning menu rise and shine!

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Sustain advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, promote equity and enrich society and culture.



Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
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