Information sheet

Surplus food redistribution in the UK; 2015 to 2018

Introduction

To meet the Courtauld Commitment 2025 (C2025) food waste target and UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12.3, collaborative and concerted efforts to reduce food[1] waste are required. These need to focus on preventing food surplus and waste being generated in the first place, redistributing more surplus food that does arise, and diverting more surplus (that cannot be used to feed people) into animal feed.

Tackling food waste is a key priority for the food sector, governments and individuals. In September 2018, the UK's largest retailers, food producers and manufacturers, and hospitality and food service companies committed to milestones laid out in a new Food Waste Reduction Roadmap, developed in conjunction with IGD and WRAP to tackle food waste in the UK. Preventing food waste at source should always come first[2], but surpluses can arise for a number of reasons; for example, food incorrectly labelled, over-ordered, over-supplied or obsolete seasonal stock. WRAP is working with retailers and manufacturers, logistics and redistribution organisations, together with industry bodies, to identify ways of increasing the beneficial use of surplus food.

A C2025 Surplus Food Redistribution Working Group was established in 2016, and is seeking to address the challenge of increasing the amounts of food surplus redistributed. They are doing this in a number of ways, through:

- developing strategies for long term, high impact solutions;
- sharing best practice;
- identifying barriers and opportunities; and
- overseeing the development of relevant new resources and research and approaches to monitoring progress.

Additional targeted funding from Defra aimed at reducing the barriers to increased redistribution has also been announced, with eight projects initiated in 2018[3] and significant budget allocated for 2019/20[4]. Funding has also been made available from Scottish and Welsh Governments to the redistribution sector[5].

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[1] *Within this report 'food' is used as shorthand for 'food and drink', and 'food waste' for 'food and drink waste'*

[2] *See Defra's Food and drink waste hierarchy: deal with surplus and waste*

[3] *From Defra's Food Waste Reduction Fund*

[4] *See https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cutting-food-waste-game-changing-fund-opens*

[5] *See https://www.gov.scot/news/emergency-funding-to-tackle-food-insecurity/ and https://gweddill.gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/environment-grants/?lang=en*

WRAP research identified the potential to increase the amount of food redistributed from manufacturers and retailers by around 220,000 tonnes compared to the levels being redistributed in 2015. There will be additional potential from other parts of the supply chain, including primary production and hospitality and food service (HaFS). C2025 signatories have committed to doubling the amounts of food they redistribute by 2020[6].

A methodology for estimating the amount of food surplus being redistributed in the UK was developed with the Surplus Food Redistribution Working Group, and this report provides an assessment of UK-wide surplus food redistribution for 2015 - 2018.

Method

The methodology was the same as that used for previous updates on UK redistribution[7]. Data were collected by a survey distributed to a list of major organisations whose primary business is redistribution of surplus food. The aim was to quantify the amount of surplus food redistributed to these organisations (that is the amounts of surplus food received by them). Organisations were subdivided into two categories:

- Commercial redistribution – businesses that primarily redistribute surplus food for profit.
- Charitable and social redistribution[8] – organisations (including charities and social enterprises) that primarily redistribute food in order to fulfil social or environmental objectives and that do not make a profit on this.

They represent the largest food redistribution organisations in the country, are expected to account for the majority of redistribution of surplus food, and are therefore well suited to tracking changes in redistribution. They are not, however, exhaustive – the survey excludes smaller, local organisations that may receive surplus food directly from food businesses. As the total size of the redistribution sector is unknown no attempt has been made to scale up the estimate; however, the data are broadly comparable with the confidential returns on redistribution from C2025 signatory organisations. For these reasons, the results in this report are likely to slightly underestimate total UK redistribution.

The data explicitly exclude all donations of food that is not surplus. Donations of regular product as part of a company's Corporate Social Responsibility activities, for example, are outside the scope of this report[9].

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[6] *Details can be found on the C2025 Food Redistribution webpages here*

[7] *Surplus food redistribution in the UK; 2015 to 2017*

[8] *Referred to collectively as 'charitable' in the rest of this report*

[9] *Redistribution is the process whereby food that would otherwise have ended up as waste is instead provided for people to eat. This excludes food donated by companies that was not at risk of ending up as waste (i.e. given to charities as part of wider Corporate Social Responsibility objectives) or purchased by customers and added to front of store donation boxes. Food redistribution may take place through formal programs or informal efforts (that may also be referred to as food rescue, recovery, or donation), and received by both charitable organisations (such as FareShare, Food Cycle) and commercial ones (such as Company Shop, Approved Food). Redistribution may take place at any point along the food supply chain, such as at the farm (e.g., field gleaning), the food processing facility, or the food outlet (e.g., supermarket, restaurant).*

Summary

Redistribution has almost doubled since 2015, with an additional £81 million of food surplus being provided, equivalent to an extra 65 million meals a year. Over the three year period to 2018 there have been increases in the supply of surplus food via both charitable and commercial routes, and from all of the three food business sectors where data is available (retail, manufacture and HaFS). However, compared to 2017 growth in redistribution of surplus food has been driven primarily through the charitable route (a 47% increase), and within that primarily as a result in increased supply from the retail sector (responsible for 63% of the increase).

Even with the impressive increases seen over the last three years, this suggests that there is still potential to redistribute around 190,000 tonnes more from these two sectors. Further potential will exist from other parts of the food supply chain, including from HaFS and farming.

Results

Table 1 below shows the number of responses achieved in each year. For 2015 - 2017, all surveys achieved the same number of responses, with eight responses from the charitable redistribution sector and two from commercial food surplus redistributors. The respondents were identical in 2015 and 2016, while in 2017 one charitable respondent dropped out and another organisation submitted a response for the first time. Three additional respondents from the charitable sector answered the 2018 survey, two of which were founded in 2017.

When comparing results between 2015 and 2018 it should be borne in mind that the respondent that was operating in 2015 but first reported 2018 data handled around 200 tonnes in 2018, and it is not known what the equivalent tonnage was in 2015, 2016 or 2017[10]. The charitable organisation that reported 2018 (and 2015, 2016) but not 2017 data handled around 2,000 tonnes of surplus food, or around 6% of the total for that sector. Comparisons of change between 2017 and 2018 (in the text) exclude this particular organisation.

Table 1: Number of responses by year and type of organisation

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Charitable	8	8	8	11
Commercial	2	2	2	2
Total	10	10	10	13

The total redistribution numbers reported are shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

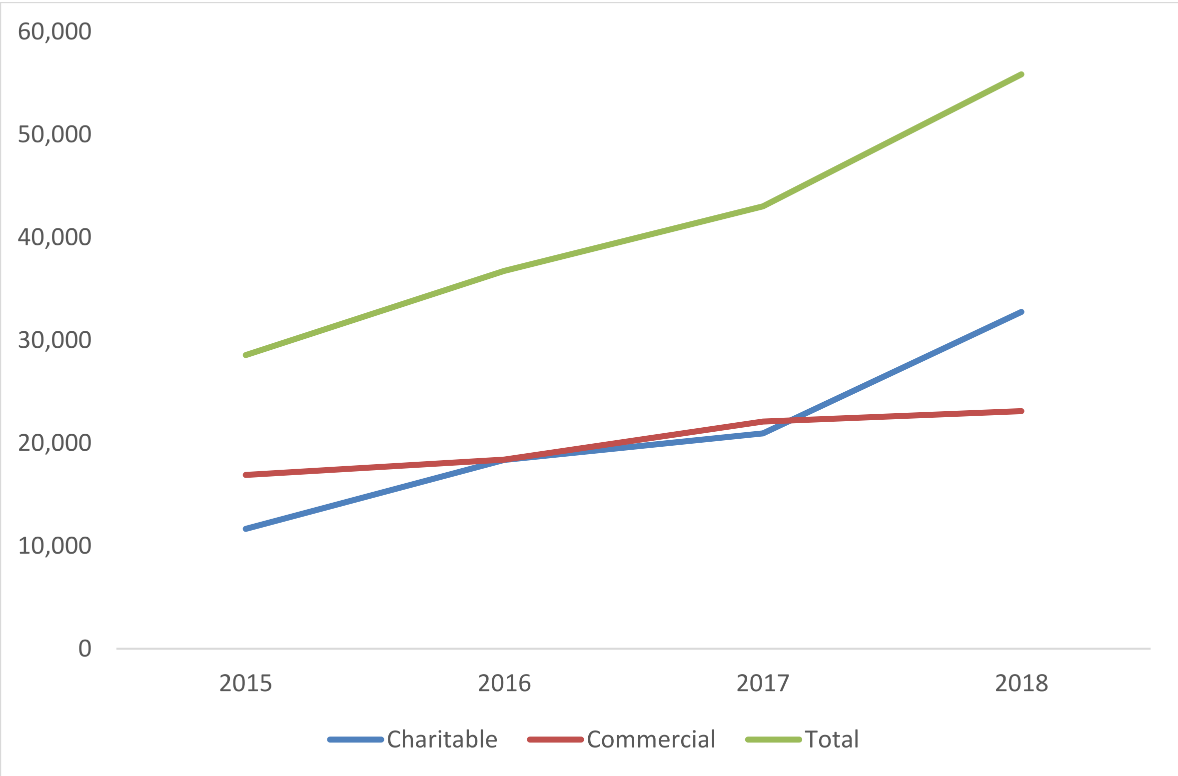
[10] *Including this tonnage in the 2018 results contributes to a more complete picture of UK redistribution, and it's absence in the earlier years data will not significantly affect the analysis of change over time (representing <0.5% of the overall tonnage for the charitable sector)*

Table 2: Tonnes of surplus redistributed by type of organisation and year, 2015-2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2015 to 2018
Charitable	11,655	18,371	20,935	32,753	181%
Commercial	16,900	18,380	22,099	23,104	37%
Total	28,555	36,751	43,034	55,857	96%

Charitable redistribution has increased by around 21,000 tonnes over the three-year period, compared to an increase of around 6,000 tonnes via the commercial sector. The combined increase (27,000 tonnes) represents the equivalent of around 65 million meals a year, bringing the 2018 total to the equivalent of almost 133 million meals[11]. Surplus redistributed via charitable routes made up almost 60% in 2018, compared to just over 40% in 2015.

Figure 1: Tonnes of surplus redistributed by type of organisation and year



Excluding data from the organisation that responded to the 2018 survey but not the 2017 one, an additional 11,000 tonnes of surplus was redistributed in 2018 compared to 2017 (a 25% increase), the equivalent of around 26 million meals a year. This was driven

[11] *Based on the assumption of an average meal weighing 420g (based on the average of a range of typical meal weights, using data derived from Food Portion Sizes, FSA 2008). This does not imply that this many balanced meals could be made from the food surplus, but illustrates what the amount of food surplus might equate to. See [Reporting on the amounts of food surplus redistributed (weight and meal equivalents)](); WRAP guidance)*

primarily by a 47% increase in redistribution from the charitable sector (there was a 5% increase from the commercial sector over this period). The value of the food redistributed in 2018 was £166 million, with the increase from 2015 to 2018 worth £81 million, and 2017 to 2018 worth £32 million[12].

Redistribution has grown significantly from the baseline, with commercial redistribution reporting 37% growth and charitable redistribution reporting 181% growth since 2015. While redistribution of surplus is inherently variable, and some of these observed increases could be due to improved reporting, the results combined with anecdotal evidence and increased interest in and activity on redistribution among C2025 signatories and other businesses, suggest that redistribution of surplus food is increasing rapidly, particularly in the charitable sector.

Table 3 shows the tonnage of food diverted to charitable and commercial redistribution by food sector in 2017 and 2018, and the estimated percentage breakdown of this based on the split of donations. The data for 2015 and 2016 are incomplete, as some redistributors were unable to provide a split by sector supplying the food. The results show that the manufacturing sector is the largest single source of redistributed surplus food, followed by retail, though the gap has narrowed since 2017.

Excluding data from the organisation that only responded to the 2018 survey, surplus redistributed from retail increased by 5,500 tonnes (31%), with manufacturing increasing by 2,400 tonnes (10%) with only modest changes in supply from the HaFS sector. There was a significant tonnage (8% of the total) where the source has not been identified.

Table 3: Total redistribution (charitable and commercial sectors) of surplus food by source (tonnes and % of the total tonnage provided)[13]

Source	2017 tonnage	2018 tonnage	% of the total tonnage 2018
Retail	17,481	24,767	44%
Manufacturing	23,070	25,610	46%
HaFS	1,125	1,043	2%
Other / mixed	1,358	4,437	8%
Total	43,034	55,857	100%

In terms of the types of food surplus received in 2018, charitable organisations reported 70% as ambient (by weight), 29% chilled and 2% frozen. For the commercial sector comparable figures were 49% as ambient, 44% chilled and 7% frozen.

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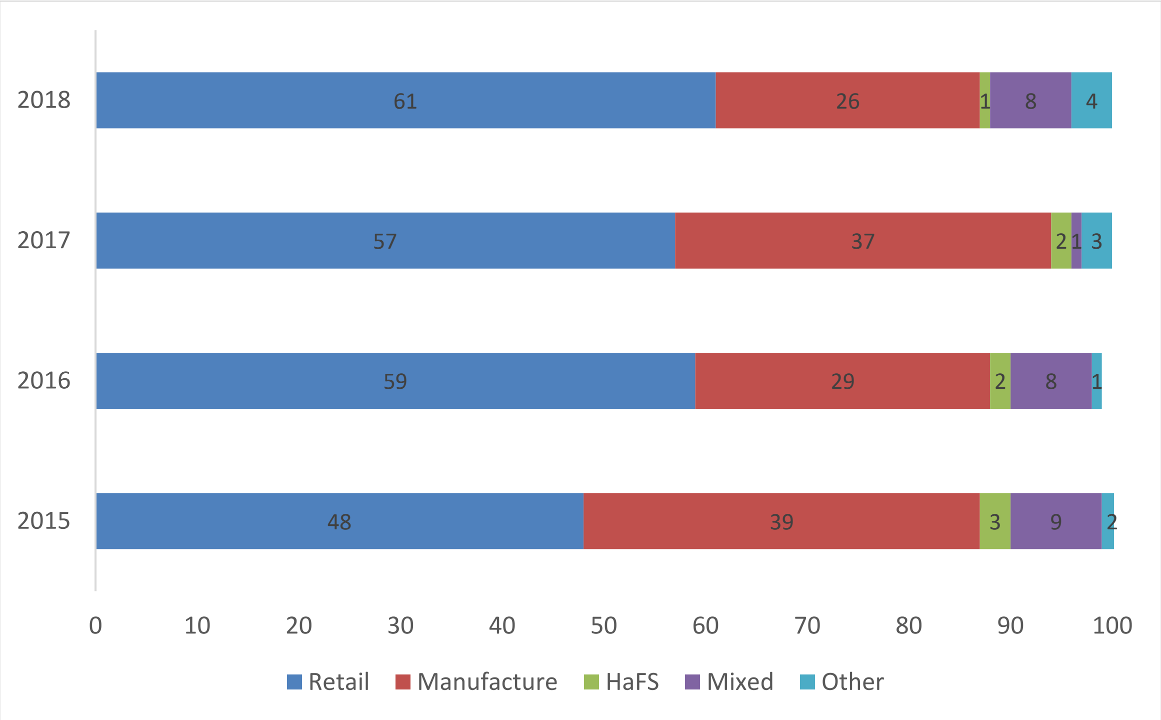
[12] *The value of food surplus redistributed has been estimated using data from the Defra Family Food Survey, on the price paid by consumers for different food items (as described in Household Food Waste in the UK, 2015). It therefore reflects the potential retail cost of purchasing the food redistributed.*

[13] *'Mixed' refers to cases where a redistribution organisation has been unable to determine or disaggregate the sector from which the food was sourced, but where this was retail, manufacture or HaFS. 'Other' refers to surplus food from sources that are not unambiguously in one of these sectors (e.g. logistics, wholesale market etc.)*

The incompleteness of the data means it is not possible to look at changes in the source of surplus food across all respondents. It is, however, possible to do this for the charitable redistribution organisations, as these have been able to provide a more complete record over the four year period. This relative weight of surplus from each of the supply chain sectors is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Breakdown of supply chain source for charitable redistribution only (%)[12]



The breakdown of redistribution via the charitable sector is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Redistribution to charitable organisations by supply chain source, 2015-2018 (tonnes)[12]

Source	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2015 -2017
Retail	5,583	10,907	11,931	19,947	257%
Manufacture	4,539	5,249	7,745	8,514	88%
HaFS	330	432	491	465	41%
Mixed	1,000	1,530	109	2,642	164%
Other	202	253	659	1,185	487%
Total	11,655	18,371	20,935	32,753	181%

Retail is the largest supplier to the charitable redistribution sector, supplying 61% of the total surplus, with the manufacturing sector supplying 26%. The HaFS sector supplies around 1%. This is likely to be an underestimate, as food surplus from this sector often needs to be redistributed and consumed more quickly and this could lead HaFS businesses to make more use of smaller, local organisations[14]. However, evidence from WRAP voluntary agreement reporting (Courtauld 2025 and the Hospitality and Food Service Agreement) suggests that redistribution is likely to be lower than for retail or manufacture (at least in part because of the challenges associated with prepared food).

The supply of surplus food from the retail sector to charities has increased more than three-fold between 2015 and 2018, and by over 50% from 2017 to 2018 (an additional 6,200 tonnes; excluding data from the organisation that only responded to the 2018 survey). Surplus from manufacturing has increased by almost 90% from 2015, but only 8% (600 tonnes) between 2017 and 2018 (again excluding data from the organisation that only responded to the 2018 survey). There are modest increases from HaFS compared to 2015, but the tonnages are relatively small and there is little evidence of progress since 2016 (although there is a significant tonnage where the source has not been identified).

Conclusions

The data suggest that redistribution has almost doubled since 2015 (96% increase), or an additional £81 million of food equivalent to an extra 65 million meals a year. Over the three year period there have been increases in the supply of surplus food via both charitable and commercial routes, and from all of the three food business sectors where data is available (retail, manufacture and HaFS). However, compared to 2017 growth in redistribution of surplus food has been driven primarily through the charitable route (a 47% increase), and within that primarily as a result in increased supply from the retail sector (responsible for 63% of the increase).

Research carried out previously for WRAP revealed that in 2015 around 220,000 tonnes of food surplus suitable for redistribution was in fact going to produce animal feed or to waste (from the retail and manufacturing sectors). Even with the impressive increases seen over the last three years, this suggests that there is still potential to redistribute around 190,000 tonnes more from these two sectors (approximately 80,000 tonnes from retail and 110,000 tonnes from manufacturing) Further potential will exist from other parts of the food supply chain, including from HaFS and farming.

WRAP will continue to work with Governments, food businesses and the redistribution sector to facilitate and track progress, and to determine the impact of the additional interventions and funding aimed at reducing the barriers to redistribution.

[14] *In the final report of the Hospitality and Food Service Agreement, signatories reported redistributing 780 tonnes in 2015*

http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/surplus-food-redistribution-wrap-work

recycle