

# Fighting food waste: ensuring a sustainable food future

Words by Dr Steven Lapidge



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Reducing Australia's annual 7.3 million tonnes of food waste will be key to building a sustainable food system, and it can also ensure we have a food system that is healthy, equitable and circular.

The Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre (FFW CRC) brings together industry, researchers and the community to capitalise on Australia's food waste opportunities. Winning this fight could save Australia \$20 billion per annum in lost food and increase industry profitability, sustainability and food security.

Through our three research and development programs, the FFW CRC aims to reduce food waste across the supply chain, transform unavoidable waste into valuable products, and engage with industry and consumers to create change.

In line with the United Nations sustainable development goals, Australia (through its National Food Waste Strategy) has a target of halving its food waste by 2030. Although this will undoubtedly be a

substantial challenge, the good news is this challenge is solvable by treating food waste as an opportunity – using it as a resource within food businesses and households.

Here in Australia, our journey to reduce food waste is in its early days. We can learn from others and consider what is relevant for the Australian context. For example, the Courtauld Commitment, run by our program's UK-based participant Waste and Resource Action Programme (WRAP), signs up businesses to tackle their food waste issues.

Collectively, the WRAP project has generated a 27 per cent reduction in food waste with a value of £4.7 billion between 2007 and 2018, worth more than \$AU9 billion. WRAP has made this happen through national behaviour change programs like Love Food Hate Waste and Guardians of Grub. It is programs such as these that will help fix our global food system, while at the same time address food waste-related climate change.

Australians are becoming

increasingly aware of the impacts associated with food waste. The FFW CRC recently launched findings from a 5,000-household national survey. These results showed 76 per cent of Australian households were motivated to reduce their food waste, with over half predominately motivated at the thought of saving money.

The survey also showed while Australians prepare an abundance of extra food 'just in case', well over half of Australian households would usually freeze excess food to extend its shelf life. Understanding this household behaviour provides an opportunity for those in the food industry to improve food labelling and packaging which, in itself, could become a competitive advantage for food businesses.

There are some fantastic industry examples already here in Australia of action being taken to reduce food waste. FFW CRC participant Woolworths launched Loafer Ale in September 2019. In this project, surplus bread is brewed with hops,

barley and yeast. Each bottle includes one slice of bread waste, so Australians are helping to reduce food waste by drinking the problem away! Additionally, the beer has been raising funds for Feed Appeal, a not for profit organisation supporting local charities that deliver food relief programs and meals to vulnerable Australians.

The often-forgotten aspect of food waste is the squandering of natural resources including water, arable land, fertilisers, energy, and fuel for transport - all utilised in producing food we don't eat.

At a time when our country is being ravaged by fire and drought, wasting natural resources on food we don't eat should be considered completely unacceptable. What's more, the three million tonnes of food waste rotting in landfill each year in this country creates greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to one million extra cars on the road, further exacerbating climate change. Given 92 per cent of household food waste ends up in landfill, reducing this waste is one way all Australians can contribute to a more suitable climate in the future.

Of course, reducing food waste is not just about protecting our precious resources. Australian farmers currently produce enough food to feed 60 million people each year. Despite this, the Foodbank 2019 Hunger Report identified that one in five Australians are food insecure.

Again, this is an unacceptable scenario in the 'lucky country' and one that all companies in the food industry should work hard to address. Importantly, reducing food waste is now seen as one of the most critical strategies to feeding a global population that will near 10 billion people by 2050.

Over our 10-year journey, we will work with our existing and new partners to deliver

a transformational change in the way industry, governments and the community manage food waste in Australia.

Already, the FFW CRC has more than 20 active research projects that are addressing food waste with both a commodity approach (transforming surplus horticulture, seafood, red meat and dairy) as well as a sector approach (with our packaging and processing industry partners, the food rescue sector, retailers and quick-service restaurants).

Additionally, the CRC's SME

Solutions Centre with Food Innovation Australia Limited specifically focusses on providing matching funding and unparalleled expertise to address food waste within small and medium food businesses. As such, we are looking to work with food businesses of any size.

For more information visit: [fightfoodwastecrc.com.au](http://fightfoodwastecrc.com.au).

*Dr Steven Lapidge is the CEO of the Fight Food Waste CRC.* 



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