



Food Waste - Is packaging the problem or part of the solution?

Perhaps the tide is finally changing for packaging and packaging's place in society. WRAP, having been instrumental in founding the Courtauld Commitment which calls for reductions in packaging, have now found through its latest 'Food We Waste' report that reducing waste should not focus on packaging.

Retailer signatories to the Courtauld Commitment have pledged to reduce packaging by up to 25% over up to a five year period ending in 2012. The new 'Food We Waste' report launched in London on 8th May 2008 concludes that we waste 32%, £10.2bn, of the food we buy. Of this £2.3bn is thrown away untouched and still in its original packaging. The report also concludes that the most wasteful social group are single person households that produce 50% more food waste per person than dual occupancy or family occupancy households.

What does this tell us? Well it certainly seems to indicate that we buy too much food and that perhaps food has in recent years been too cheap, driving us to buy too much and not to plan our consumption particularly carefully. It also seems to indicate strongly that packaged food is not available in the smaller sizes most suited to single person consumption. Smaller portion sizes means more packaging per unit weight of product. In addition you can only conclude that if the preservation properties of packaging were further enhanced and shelf life increased some of the 1.5mt going to waste untouched and still in its original packaging would be saved.

The WRAP 'Food We Waste' focuses on household waste, but what is really staggering is that waste further up the supply chain is additional to this. If we add the 1.6mt of food waste generated by retailers (as reported by the Sustainable Development Commission) untouched by consumers and the majority in packaged format we reach the conclusion that 15% of the food going through the retail supply chain is wasted untouched and often in its packaging.

Food waste from the catering sector will only add to the magnitude of this issue.

My point is this; why are government, government supported organizations, retailers, brand owners and the media calling for and supporting initiatives to reduce packaging against an objective of reducing environmental impact when food waste is the real issue.

Packaging is part of the solution not the problem.

Edge is proposing a multi client project, currently open for participation and sponsorship, that aims to discover best practice in prevention of waste, optimisation of packaging, and therefore minimization of environmental burden. [Click here](#) to see the full proposal.