

Outputs from 4th ESRC FOOD Seminar – Group 1

Background

This document contains the write up of the discussion during the 4th ESRC FOOD seminar, held in Banbury on the 21st January 2016. It covers group 1, which discussed the activities, behaviours, practices, and perceptions involved in food waste, food safety and healthy eating, in particular where and when are these complementary and where are there trade-offs. The group was facilitated by Dr Nicola Bown and the scribe was Dr Gulbanu Kaptan. There were 11 participants consisting of practitioners, academicians and postgraduate researchers, working on the areas of food waste, food safety, and nutrition.

Structure of the facilitated group work

The group work started with brief introductions of the participants regarding their affiliations, expertise, and interest and was followed by the briefing of the facilitator, group discussion, wrap-up, and agreeing on the outputs.

The discussion outputs

The discussion outputs are summarized as follows:

- Communications have crucial role in reducing food waste and increasing food safety and healthy eating practices.
- Communications that focus on improving storage and cooking skills can help people to reduce waste and improve their food safety and healthy eating practices.
 - In terms of improving the skills of storage and cooking, the role of motivation and self-efficacy have been emphasized (in particular the effect of motivation in reducing food waste).
 - Availability of convenience foods has been shown as a barrier to improve cooking skills.
- Developing simple and clear communication messages can also be helpful to reduce food waste, and increase food safety and healthy eating. In particular, the

consistency of messages from different agencies, and at different points in consumer's lives, was considered to be critical in effective interventions. It was mentioned that the government agencies aim to ensure the consistency in their communications by developing the communications in collaboration with experts from all three areas. However, it was considered that there is still need for further improvement.

- Smaller portion size can particularly be effective to reduce food waste and increase food safety and healthy eating. However, it was mentioned that consumers usually do not welcome smaller portion sizes.
- Consuming leftovers (fresh and frozen) are particular practices that could lead to reduced foods waste but potentially unhealthy and unsafe food consumption, if appropriate freezing, defrosting and reheating practices are not followed.
- Date labelling on food products (e.g., use by/sell by/best before) was highlighted because it may lead confusion among consumers about food waste, safety, and healthy eating practices. However, it was agreed that recent efforts of the government agencies about date labelling have largely prevented potential confusions.
- Cultural and socio-economic factors are also influential on consumers' practices regarding food waste, safety, and healthy eating (for example whether or not it was recommended to wash poultry before cooking to reduce the risk of food borne illness).
- With particular focus on food waste, it was noted that the increased abundance of foods and shopping frequently appears to increase food waste (and potentially overeating); People generally think that food is cheap so food wastage does not concern them too much ; planning and resources (time, money) are important in reducing food waste.

In summary, a number of conflicting issues around food waste, health and safety were identified, including date labelling and leftovers but a number of complementary approaches and strategies were also mentioned, including encouraging reduced portion sizes, education around food and teaching of cooking skills, and supporting the recognition of the (financial and emotional) value of food in consistent communication about food.