

# Appetite for Action

Strategies for reducing  
food waste and carbon  
emissions in food services



# Foreword

Tackling food waste is urgent. It's critical. And it must be a priority if we are to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and the impact of the climate crisis.

COP26 underlined the need to take action – now. At Sodexo, our plans for tackling food waste are ambitious, but we recognise that we will not be able to achieve them unless we bring industry with us. It's why we convened customers, policy makers, industry stakeholders, chefs and academics at a recent roundtable event to discuss strategies for how business can drive change supported by government policy.

Social value exists at the heart of how we do business, which is why we developed our Social Impact Pledge to ensure we hold ourselves to account. We have already pledged to cut food waste by 50% by 2025, putting our ambition ahead of the UN's sustainable development goal to halve food waste globally by 2030. We are completely transparent on our journey, measuring and reporting on this progress. Over the past 12 months we have prevented over 280 tonnes of food waste across the UK – the equivalent of 500,000 meals.

Before the pandemic we were serving one million meals a day across the private and public sector. As part of a bigger supply chain that underpins the British economy from field to fork, we understand the impact we can have if we are to be more climate conscious in our service and delivery. We've thought about this at every stage, and in the UK and Ireland we've worked with WWF and the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) to commit to a decarbonisation of our business by 90% across all three scopes, including both our supply chain and our client sites.

Our net zero ambition is set for our entire portfolio and includes a strategy in which we've asked questions such as how can we support those in our supply chain on their own net zero journeys? How can we assist customers with making better choices and help them to decarbonise?

At Sodexo, we truly do have an Appetite for Action on food waste. This report makes several important recommendations to industry and government on how food waste can be measured and reduced so its impact on carbon emissions is minimised.

Only by working together can we stop feeding the climate crisis.



Sean Haley, Region Chair, Sodexo UK & Ireland



# Foreword

The global food system contributes around a third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but the links between food and climate change are still not widely enough known. The complexities of the food system might affect their understanding, but academics, industry and government can help by embracing those complexities and engaging in cross-sectoral actions and initiatives.

Of all the different elements of the food system that contribute to climate change, perhaps food waste is one of the more easily understandable contributors for the public and supply chain stakeholders. This potential familiarity provides opportunities for system-wide solutions that are still rooted in everyday experience, thus enabling a greater understanding of food's role in climate change, among many other sustainability issues associated with the food system.

It has been refreshing to see how key players, such as Sodexo, a large global food service provider, have taken the initiative to create a space for conversations between stakeholders across the food system to discuss food waste and stimulate further action. The roundtable they hosted allowed us to examine perspectives, experiences and research representing diverse stakeholders, with the aim of setting holistic recommendations to enable future actions towards change. This report collects those perspectives.

For example, how can we better inform all supply chain actors, including consumers, about how food waste can be prevented, managed, and the potential commercial value that would bring?

How can governments introduce standardised guidelines and targets? So far most of the commitments around food waste are voluntary, with companies adhering to pledges such as the

UN Sustainable Development Goals to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030. However, a systemic action plan with clear and consistent guidelines (and enablers), roles and responsibilities, and with specific targets, is lacking.

There is an urgent need for the UK government to step up by providing strong regulatory frameworks which provide guidelines for quantifying, tracking and reporting food waste, to mobilise a sector that wants to do more but does not always know how.

Similarly, influencing behavioural change is key. This report highlights the needs of government actions to engage with the public through nationwide awareness campaigns about food (waste) and its connection with climate change, including this topic in school curricula, promoting training across the sector, and influencing food labelling, among many systemic initiatives.

This report shows how food waste reduction must be embraced across the food system, if the UK is to meet its climate change goals. Food system actors need to engage, and robust frameworks need to be in place, so that everyone along the value chain can work together to reach the common goal of tackling the climate crisis.

**Dr Ximena Schmidt**  
Global Challenges Research Fellow  
Brunel University London



# Contents

- 5 Executive Summary
- 7 Appetite for Action Report Recommendations
- 9 Introduction
- 11 Appetite for Action Roundtable Attendees
- 12 **Chapter 1 -**  
How can rapid change in the food services sector be catalysed?
- 16 **Chapter 2**  
Creating the policy and regulatory framework to better support food waste reduction
- 20 **Chapter 3 -**  
How to better educate the public on food waste
- 24 Appendix
- 25 About the research

# Executive Summary

The world is in an unprecedented climate emergency.

The UN Climate Summit, COP26, in Glasgow November 2021 demonstrated the need for collaboration across states, organisations and individuals to achieve a common goal – collective action to keep the 1.5 degree trajectory goal alive, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and mitigating the effects of global warming.

Whilst the food services industry is one of the largest contributors to the UK's economy, it is also one of the largest contributors to the UK's (GHG) emissions. A key reason for this is the volume of waste it produces.

When looking at a country-level, according to a recent WRAP report, 35% of the UK's total emissions arise from producing and eating the country's food and drink, including emissions overseas for imported food.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the UN has said that if food waste was a country, it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases.<sup>2</sup>

As such, there is urgent need for action. This report is informed by new food sector leader research in the UK, and insights shared by experts from across the food sector value chain during a roundtable convened by Sodexo. The roundtable examined the food waste challenge across the UK food services industry, current approaches to tackling it, and what is needed for necessary change to be delivered.



<sup>1</sup> [https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/WRAP-UK-Food-System-GHG-Emissions-Technical-Report\\_0.pdf](https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/WRAP-UK-Food-System-GHG-Emissions-Technical-Report_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/i3347e/i3347e.pdf>

## A need for greater education

Our research emphasised that the link between food waste and carbon emissions is still not widely understood by the UK's largest organisations. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of senior decision makers in the supply chain and in food procurement are currently not tracking the amount of food their organisation wastes, despite clear evidence of the contribution food waste makes to climate change.

What was also clear from the research was an industry desire for government support to help businesses achieve reductions in food waste. Almost two-thirds (64%) of those polled suggested that direction from government needs to be made clearer through stronger policy and regulation. A similar proportion (62%) said government advice on how to use technology would be helpful whilst 63% also believe carbon labelling on meals would instigate behavioural change.

Our research showed that two-fifths of senior decision-makers believe government consumer awareness campaigns on the impact of food waste would also drive action for industry and wider society. WRAP is making progress in this space and in March 2021 collaborated with Nadiya Hussain, British Bake Off Winner, for its Food Waste Action Week highlighting the role food waste has on climate change. But the onus to educate is not just on government and campaigners, businesses also have their role to play. There are pockets of progress already being made, as 30% of respondents said there is already team training in place on food waste reduction.

Encouragingly, our research did find that 94% of supply chain heads and procurement decision-makers are considering changing their organisation's procurement criteria to reduce food waste within the next 12 months; and 95% of respondents plan on working with suppliers to help them improve their food waste monitoring.





## Appetite for Action Report Recommendations

### Three food waste and carbon emission reduction strategies for food services

We have developed the below recommendations in response to the private and public sector research conducted and perspectives given at our Appetite for Action roundtable where we convened policy makers, industry stakeholders, education specialists, Sodexo customers and chefs.

## Recommendations for organisations

### **1 All organisations should commit to a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030, at the latest.**

This should include a 50% reduction target of total food waste (including inedible parts and leftover waste from plates) once food produce has left the farm; and delivering reductions in food waste even before food produce has left the farm.

### **2 Organisations must deploy technology to track and monitor food waste, which will support new mandatory reporting.**

This will empower staff with a greater understanding of food waste, and they will be better informed around the impact of their choices. Data analysis will also support decisions made around approaches to tackling food waste.

### **3 Organisations can also support consumers in making the right environmental decision through positioning plant-based options first on the menu, carbon labelling on produce, and deliberate, obvious communication on where food has been sourced.**

## Recommendations for government

### **1 Government should commission a dedicated strategy for tackling food waste, building on recommendations within the National Food Strategy.**

Mandatory food waste reporting should form part of this strategy.

### **2 PPN 06/21 should be extended to require public sector suppliers to report on their food waste; the private sector should be encouraged to adopt this approach as well.**

### **3 Government has a responsibility to ensure the public understands the impact of food waste.**

This should start in schools, and government should ensure the impact of food waste is included in the curriculum. This will help to change consumer behaviours, and ensure people have a better education on the impact of food waste on carbon emissions, and what they can do to help tackle it.



# Introduction

The UN Food and Agriculture organisation notes that the global food system accounted for 31% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2019.<sup>3</sup> If food waste was a country then it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, it was a surprise that the food waste crisis was not more central to conversations at COP26, something we hope will be rectified at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh in 2022.

In the UK, according to a recent WRAP report, 35% of total GHG emissions arise from producing and eating the country's food and drink, including emissions overseas for imported food.<sup>5</sup> WRAP has also found that 1.5 million tonnes of food waste (16% of the UK total) derive from manufacturers and 1.1 million tonnes (12%) from hospitality and food service (HaFS).<sup>6</sup>

As a leader in the food services sector, Sodexo has produced this report to galvanise industry-wide action to tackle the food waste crisis. It draws on expertise, insight and ideas shared during a roundtable to discuss barriers to progress and strategies to reduce food waste.

This report also makes use of specially commissioned research among 283 food-focused supply chain heads and procurement decision makers, to understand food buying standards and how food waste is managed within businesses.

The senior stakeholders are among the most influential in the food system, shaping the behaviours of both the private and the public sector. Those polled were part of organisations in the private sector with over £500 million in revenue, and in the public sector with over 250 employees.

## Using these insights, this report addresses three key questions:

- 1 How can rapid change in the food services sector be catalysed to tackle food waste?
- 2 How can government create the policy and regulatory framework to better support this change?
- 3 What needs to be done to educate the public on the impact of food waste on the climate, and their role in supporting its reduction?

“There’s an opportunity now for businesses to be the greatest influencers amongst themselves. There’s already pressure from staff who are conscious about the environment. Let’s work together as a community on this, rather than compete, and find the best solution. The pandemic has offered us a unique opportunity to make a change.”

Tania Kumar  
Head of Decarbonisation  
CBI

Our recommendations in this report put forward key components which could be included within a food waste action plan.

This means tackling food waste before and after the point of sale, the journey from farm to fork, as well as how we can make it easier for consumers to make the most carbon-friendly choice when choosing a meal.

We hope to see actions taken and greater progress made by the time the world convenes again in 2022 for COP27.



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7514en/cb7514en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/i3347e/i3347e.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/WRAP-UK-Food-System-GHG-Emissions-Technical-Report\\_0.pdf](https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/WRAP-UK-Food-System-GHG-Emissions-Technical-Report_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/food-%20surplus-and-%20waste-in-the-%20uk-key-facts-oct-21.pdf>

# Appetite for Action

## Roundtable Attendees

- **Helen Alder**, Head of Product Development, Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply
- **Jeff Ailder**, Senior Policy Advocate, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
- **Paul Anstey**, CEO Government, Sodexo UK&I
- **Claire Atkins-Morris**, Director of Corporate Responsibility, Sodexo UK&I
- **John Barneby**, Chief Operating Officer, Oasis Community Learning
- **Peter Belk**, Circular Economy Director, Business in the Community
- **Wendy Duncan**, Head of R&D, Unilever Food Solutions UK&I
- **Ben Dutson**, Food Innovation Director, Sodexo UK&I
- **Julie Ennis**, CEO Corporate Services, Sodexo UK&I
- **David Edwards**, Director Food Strategy, WWF UK
- **Julian Fris**, Founder & Principal Consultant, Neller Davies
- **Keith James**, Head of Policy and Insights, WRAP
- **Asma Khan**, Celebrity Chef, Owner of The Darjeeling Express
- **Tania Kumar**, Head of Decarbonisation, CBI
- **Baroness McIntosh of Pickering**, former chair, House of Commons Environment Select Committee
- **Peter Owen**, Engineering and Environment Director, Brakes UK & ROI
- **Kat Simmonds**, Chief Executive Officer, Oasis Community Partnerships
- **Dr Ximena Schmidt**, Global Challenges Research Fellow, Brunel University London



# Chapter 1



# How can rapid change in the food services sector be catalysed?

The food services sector fuels the nation, delivering food to schools, universities, hospitals, prisons and all manner of public institutions alongside the corporate sector. But whilst the food services industry is one of the largest contributors to the UK's economy, it is also one of the largest polluters, contributing 35% of the UK's GHG emissions.<sup>7</sup>

One of the key reasons for this is the volume of food waste it produces. While progress is being made, our research reveals that just 60% of respondents said their organisations are making progress against the UN Sustainable Development Goals to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030.

Currently, nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents are not tracking the amount of food their organisation wastes. Additionally, just 26% of respondents prioritise food waste reduction as one of their top criteria in achieving their carbon reduction goals.

This isn't good enough. Clearly a new catalyst is needed to energise the sector to make the changes necessary to tackle food waste.

During the roundtable, there was agreement that any approach to tackling food waste requires a full system evaluation, from field to fork. It also needs a differentiation to be made between food waste before and after produce has left the farm, and specific reduction targets for food waste at each stage – the whole supply chain must be reviewed.

This was emphasised at the roundtable by David Edwards, Director of Food Strategy at WWF UK, who noted “when tackling food waste, we need to investigate where along the supply chain food is being wasted. This will require a collaborative approach from the sector to understand where the pain points are, so appropriate action can be taken.”

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At the roundtable, attendees made clear that a first step is ensuring that food is sourced as seasonally and locally as possible. Asma Khan, chef and owner of The Darjeeling Express, commented:

“Sourcing food locally has not prevented us serving authentically Indian food at the restaurant. I would much rather create dishes using food that does not need to be delivered by air freight, than include jet lagged okra on a menu.”

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Our research showed that sourcing from local suppliers is an approach being pursued by a majority of organisations, with 96% of those surveyed considering increasing their targets for food to be sourced from local suppliers within the next year. As to what local means, our research indicated that organisations define local as within an average 62-mile radius.

There are already initiatives in place to encourage change in this area. The Courtauld Commitment 2030 led by WRAP is a voluntary agreement enabling collaborative action across the entire UK food chain to deliver field to fork reductions in food waste, and is a useful resource for industry to share best practice as we approach the 2030 deadline.

Ultimately, the government will not be able to deliver on its net zero timeline unless the business community is supported by government to take action on food waste.

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Keith James, Head of Policy and Insights at WRAP commented

“We know that food waste has a huge carbon footprint. Working to address it is an opportunity for businesses to make a real impact on net zero goals. Signing up to the Courtauld Commitment is one way to help, but businesses can also learn a lot through resources such as the Guardians of Grub”

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<sup>7</sup> <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/uk-food-system-ghg-emissions>

## Recommendation

All organisations should commit to a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030, at the latest.

This should include a 50% reduction target of total food waste (including inedible parts and leftover waste from plates) once food produce has left the farm; and delivering reductions in food waste even before food produce has left the farm.



The UN says that if food waste was a country, then it would be third largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions

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**60%** of respondents said their organisations are making progress against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030

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**96%** of organisations are considering increasing their targets for food to be sourced from local suppliers within the next year

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## Chapter 2





# Creating the policy and regulatory framework to better support food waste reduction

The interconnected nature of our food system means that food waste cannot be tackled by working in silos – individual actors cannot achieve the radical change needed alone.

Our research revealed that there is still a lack of understanding among respondents as to how they should be managing the food waste crisis. Most of those polled (64%) said direction from government on how industry should reduce food waste needs to be made clearer through stronger policy and regulation. Furthermore, 62% said government guidance for industry needs to include tangible advice, such as how technology can best be deployed to reduce waste.

This was a view echoed by Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, a former chair of the Commons Environment Committee, at the roundtable, when she noted that, “We will only achieve uniformity with the providing of national guidelines by the government. There is currently far too much variation on recommendations around food waste, right down to council level. It is difficult for both consumers and businesses to know what’s needed.”

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As part of its Waste Prevention Programme for England, published earlier this year, DEFRA launched an accompanying consultation on mandatory food waste reporting which assessed whether it should become a requirement for businesses to report on food waste and take action to meet the UN’s sustainable development goal.

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Asma Khan, chef and owner of The Darjeeling Express, commented that, “The government must of course introduce mandatory reporting, but it must be accompanied by incentives. There is currently an imbalance amongst our sector between those cognisant of the issue, and those less so. Reporting will bring awareness to the issue, yes, but those who go on to take action against food waste must be championed, with their learnings shared.”

According to our research, the one-fifth of respondents whose businesses are not yet considering food waste as a specific procurement criterion, said that legislating for public reporting of levels of food waste would drive action in their organisation.

Furthermore, as part of the National Food Strategy, it was recommended that food businesses with over 250 employees should have a legal duty to publish annual data on their sales of various product types as well as food waste. The National Food Strategy referenced the Carbon Disclosure Project, which found that when companies disclose data on their carbon emissions for the first time, just 38% of them have an emission reduction target in place. By the third year they disclose, this increases to 69%.



It’s evident that when organisations are asked to report, change can happen.

The government already has the vehicle through which it could deliver greater regulation on minimising food waste. The Procurement Policy Notes (PPN) exists to share guidance on best practice for public sector procurement. PPN 06/21 requires suppliers to submit a Carbon Reduction Plan which details their organisational carbon footprint and confirms their commitment to achieving net zero by 2050.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/National-Food-Strategy-Recommendations-in-Full.pdf>

## Recommendation

- Government should commission a dedicated strategy for tackling food waste building on recommendations within the National Food Strategy; mandatory food waste reporting should form part of this strategy
- PPN 06/21 should be extended to require public sector suppliers to report on their food waste; the private sector should be encouraged to adopt this approach as well



**64%** said direction from government on how industry should reduce food waste needs to be made clearer through stronger policy and regulation

**74%** of respondents are not tracking the amount of food their organisation wastes

**26%** prioritise food waste reduction as one of their top criteria in achieving their carbon reduction goals

# Chapter 3



# How to better educate the public on food waste

Just 13% of those asked as part of our research said that their employees understand that minimising food waste can help their organisation to achieve net zero carbon emissions.

At the roundtable, Dr Ximena Schmidt, lecturer at Brunel University London, noted that, “Both the government and the food sector must find a way to integrate consumers into the conversation. If we focus just on the preparation of food, it causes great amounts of waste due to a want to meet consumer desires. If we can open dialogue, explaining the consequences of such preparation we will see greater understanding of the issue.”

Two-fifths of the senior decision-makers we polled believe government public awareness campaigns on the impact of food waste would drive action for industry and wider society. But they also want to take more of a leadership role internally, with 27% suggesting they would like their organisation to introduce education campaigns for people using their café, canteen or restaurant, while 23% would like their organisation to introduce education campaigns for chefs and site managers.

Wendy Duncan, Head of R&D, Unilever Food Solutions UKI: “It isn’t just about relating food waste to cost, we need to make the connection between food waste and climate change clear. This requires improving education across industry, and across society as a whole, for all of us as consumers. Communication is also key to achieving this, and more needs to be done to help organisations communicate.”

Some organisations have started to educate employees, with 30% of respondents to our survey suggesting there is already team training on food waste reduction. For those who have not yet started, or want to augment their initiatives, WRAP’s Guardians of Grub is a suite of free operational resources that businesses can use to tackle food waste, including information posters and how-to guides.

But clearly there needs to be a longer-term approach, and this could begin with education in our schools, embedding knowledge of the issue among young learners.

Baroness McIntosh, commented: “We must harness the enthusiasm of school children. If school children are prepared to go litter picking on a Saturday morning, then they are our messengers of the future. We should be including the importance of cleaning our plates and not wasting food on the national curriculum. Children will then go home and pass this on to their parents and families. And as such, be a great driver to reducing food waste.”

The challenge of educating the existing workforce around food waste comes into particularly sharp contrast when viewed through the prism of a changing world of work and workplace, partly catalysed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Food is seen as a reason to bring people together, particularly in a spirit of collaboration that is not easily replicated by remote working. But remote and hybrid working make it harder to plan for feeding workforces, and that uncertainty leads to a risk of greater food waste.

The majority (60%) of people we spoke to said hybrid work environments make it difficult to plan how many diners they'll have each day. Furthermore, 61% are concerned about the loss of a variety of food purchasing options due to a new focus on locally sourced food and 65% said it's possible they could fall short of customer expectations if food choice becomes heavily concerned with food miles.

There's also more that can be done to empower those eating to make more carbon-friendly meal choices. Indeed, 63% of the people we polled said carbon labelling on meals would instigate behavioural change.

WRAP is already making significant headway when it comes to educating the public. Its annual Food Waste Action Week, which was fronted this year by celebrity chef Nadiya Hussain, is a brilliant example of an awareness campaign which directly links food waste and climate change. It should be seen as a building block for the delivery of further business-led campaigns on the issue which capture the public's attention.

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At the roundtable, Asma Khan explained that her restaurant has a zero-waste message and offers best practice – people that book understand that the menu has been delivered to them with the environment in mind.

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## Recommendation

- Organisations must deploy technology to track and monitor food waste, which will support new mandatory reporting. Further, staff will have a greater understanding and be informed around the impact of their choices, and internal decisions can be made around approaches to tackling food waste
- Organisations can also support consumers in making the right environmental decision through positioning plant-based options first on the menu, carbon labelling on produce, and deliberate, obvious communication on where food has been sourced
- Government has a responsibility to ensure the public understands the impacts of food waste. This should start in schools, and government should ensure the impact of food waste is included in the curriculum. This would go a long way to changing longer term consumer behaviours/demand, and ensuring people have a better education on the impact of food waste on carbon emissions, and what they can do to help tackle it

**60%** of people we spoke to said hybrid work environments make it difficult to plan how many diners they'll have each day

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**13%** of the people that we spoke to said that their employees understand that minimising food waste can help their organisation to achieve net zero carbon emissions

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## Appendix

### Best practice food waste tracking, monitoring and reduction from Sodexo

Sodexo is globally deploying WasteWatch a customised, global food waste prevention programme across owned and our clients' sites. Over the past 12 months it has been rolled out to 229 locations in the UK and has helped us to reduce food waste by an average of 50%, equating to over 280 tonnes of food waste in the UK so far. That's the equivalent of over 500,000 meals and to cutting 2,000 metric tonnes of carbon emissions. It has made a demonstrable impact on carbon emissions across the kitchens and restaurants of the clients we operate, and therefore contributing towards our and their net zero goals.

WasteWatch is an automated programme that empowers site staff to capture all food waste data, along with the food items granularity, through every day measurement and monitoring leveraging technology, take action based upon intuitive analytics, and drive cultural and behavioural change across teams in support of ending avoidable food waste rapidly, and easily.



## About the research

### About the research

Research referenced in this report was conducted by Opinion Matters between 13.09.2021 – 20.09.2021, with 282 Head of supply chain, Chief procurement officer (CPO), Head of procurement, Procurement director, Responsible sourcing director or Head of responsible sourcing, Sourcing director, Supply chain director, all roles must be responsible for the procurement of food in UK. Excluding respondents from food retail - to include organisations in the private sector with over £500 million in revenue and in the public sector with over 250 employees.

Opinion Matters abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

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