



**A taste of the
problem
Camden
Challenge Prize
2025**

**Business food
waste and food
surplus**

A taste of the problem

the research behind the challenges

If you're thinking about applying to the Camden Challenge Prize 2025, we hope this document gives you a helpful look into the problem areas it's responding to.

This is a summary of the research carried out by a team of researchers and designers at Camden council. Our aim was to make sense of the root causes of food waste and food surplus from Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) businesses and define the right challenge to tackle for Camden's first challenge prize. Think of it as our version of *mise en place* - we've gathered the ingredients and laid everything out, so you can crack on with the cooking and innovating!

Of course, there's always more to learn, and we may have missed a few ingredients, but this should give you a strong flavour of what we uncovered during our research and how it shaped each challenge.

You can use this document to:



Understand the root causes behind each Challenge



Explore the insights that informed each challenge



Access useful links and resources to dig deeper into the topic



Short on time?

If you just want the highlights, we recommend pages 14, 22 & 38.

The Challenges

Camden Challenge Prize 2025



Challenge 1: **Reducing food surplus**

Enable businesses to reduce surplus by getting a grasp on how much surplus and waste is created, addressing overproduction or helping them respond more effectively to consumer trends.



Challenge 2: **Influencing workplace cultures and practices**

Shift workplace culture and practices so that reducing food surplus and waste becomes a natural part of daily routines and decisions.



Challenge 3: **Managing food waste**

Reduce the amount of food waste from businesses that ends up at landfill, either by supporting businesses to segregate their food waste or providing alternative opportunities for extracting value from food waste.

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- 02** Setting the table - problem overview
- 03** Full menu - the insights behind each Challenge
- 04** Off menu - appendix: glossary, sources

01

A slice of the action

Introducing the research, our approach
and how to navigate the insights in this
document

A slice of the action

Introducing our research approach

Camden Council officers Liliad Adair (Senior Design Researcher) and Disha Mittal (Service Designer) carried out the research that informed the Challenges. We conducted 2 rounds of research. The first round focused on conversations with subject matter experts from across the food system. The second round focused on conversations with people who work directly in the Hospitality and Food Service Sector (HaFS) and waste management companies.

The insights in this document reflect the experiences of those we heard from. It does not represent the experience of everyone in the hospitality and service sector. Many of the views we gathered match what we found in wider local and national reports, some of which are referenced in this document.

Research activities included:

9 conversations with Camden Council staff working in Environmental Services, Food Safety, Sustainability, Camden's missions and Community Partnerships.

14 interviews with chefs, caterers, waste management experts, and professionals from the food redistribution industry

4 site visits

to restaurants, market stalls, and supermarkets in Camden

Extensive secondary research drawing on local and national reports

Our problem tree of insights

As part of our analysis to understand what leads to the creation of food surplus and food waste, we mapped our findings into a problem tree - a tool commonly used to identify the root causes and effects of a given issue and understand the system that contributes to the problem.

Our **problem tree is organised into three distinct “plots”** - each a group of interconnected leaves and branches that trace back to a central problem:

1. Creation of food surplus
2. Creation of food waste
3. Food waste ends up in landfill

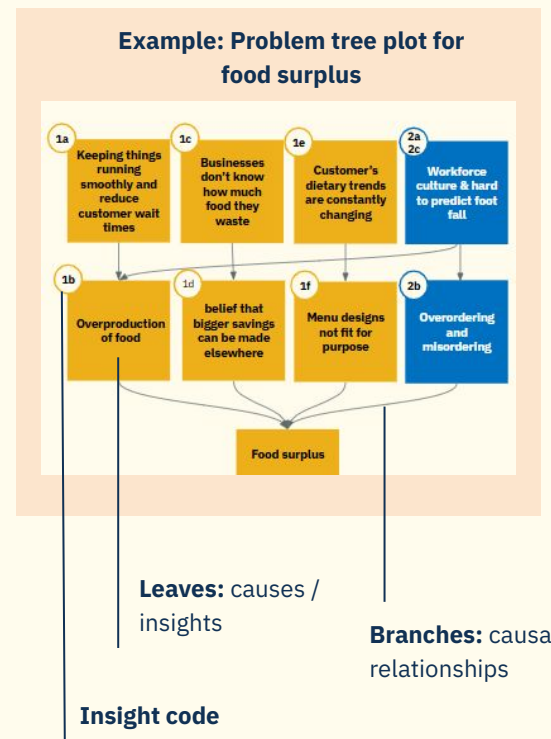
Each of these plots informed one of the 3 core Challenges for the Prize.

Within each plot, **individual leaves represent specific causes or insights**. These are labeled using a coding system: ‘1a, 1b, 1c...’ for food surplus, ‘2a, 2b, 2c...’ for food waste, ‘3a, 3b, 3c...’ for managing food waste

Branches connect the leaves, illustrating causal relationships and chains of effect.

This insight document is organised around these 3 plots. You’ll find the same coding used on the problem tree diagrams and in the sections where the insights are explored.

You can view the full problem tree in the appendix (page 50).



02

Setting the table

Background and context to the problem

Scale of the problem

In the UK:

12%

of all food waste in the UK comes from the Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) sector.

75%

of the food wasted from the HaFS sector in the UK is edible, and therefore avoidable.

£3.2B

Is the value of the food thrown away by the UK HaFS sector, which is 18% of the food purchased by it. The breakdown of this food is: 34% from consumer plates, 21% from spoilage and 45% from food preparation.

In London:

285,600

tonnes of food is wasted by the Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector in London every year.

17%

Only 17% of London's food waste and food loss is processed into renewable energy (by the process of anaerobic digestion).

253,378

UK homes can be powered by the carbon saved, if all of London's food waste was sent to anaerobic digestion.

The reality Hospitality and Food Service businesses face

The ultimate aim of hospitality and food service businesses is to make enough money to survive and hopefully turn a profit. The sector was already facing challenges before the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a major setback and many businesses are still trying to recover.

Right now, the focus seems to be on staying afloat by making things run more smoothly: saving staff time, reducing effort, taking more orders, and keeping customers happy. There is appetite for managing food surplus or waste but it can seem like a lower priority, or an extra burden. This is especially the case for small, independent businesses - unless being sustainable is already a big part of what they do.

“In an ideal world, all these systems are amazing, but you need the space, time, and infrastructure. Most restaurants are understaffed and don't have the resources for this... Ideally, restaurants would create minimal surplus and repurpose scraps into useful products, but the reality is that most are understaffed and lack time to deal with scraps... Novel ideas for dealing with waste are needed, but realistically, most restaurants are stretched too thin.”

- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

Where, when and why a business may reduce food surplus and waste

Despite the many reasons outlined in this document for why a business may struggle with food waste and surplus reduction, there are also common examples of where, when, and why a business might, sometimes inadvertently, reduce surplus and waste and manage waste efficiently:



Maximising profit means getting the most out of each ingredient - using every bit of cheese, minimising toppings - not necessarily to avoid waste for environmental reasons, but to make each portion more cost-effective.



In kitchens, staff might aim to avoid food waste because it's time-consuming and inefficient to throw away food and prepare more.



A threat of a fine can be an incentive to segregate food waste carefully and properly from other waste.

03

The Full Menu

All of the insights behind each of the 3
Challenges



The research insights that shaped Challenge 1: Reducing food surplus

Enable businesses to reduce surplus by getting a grasp on how much surplus and waste is created, addressing overproduction or helping them respond more effectively to consumer trends.



What causes food surplus?

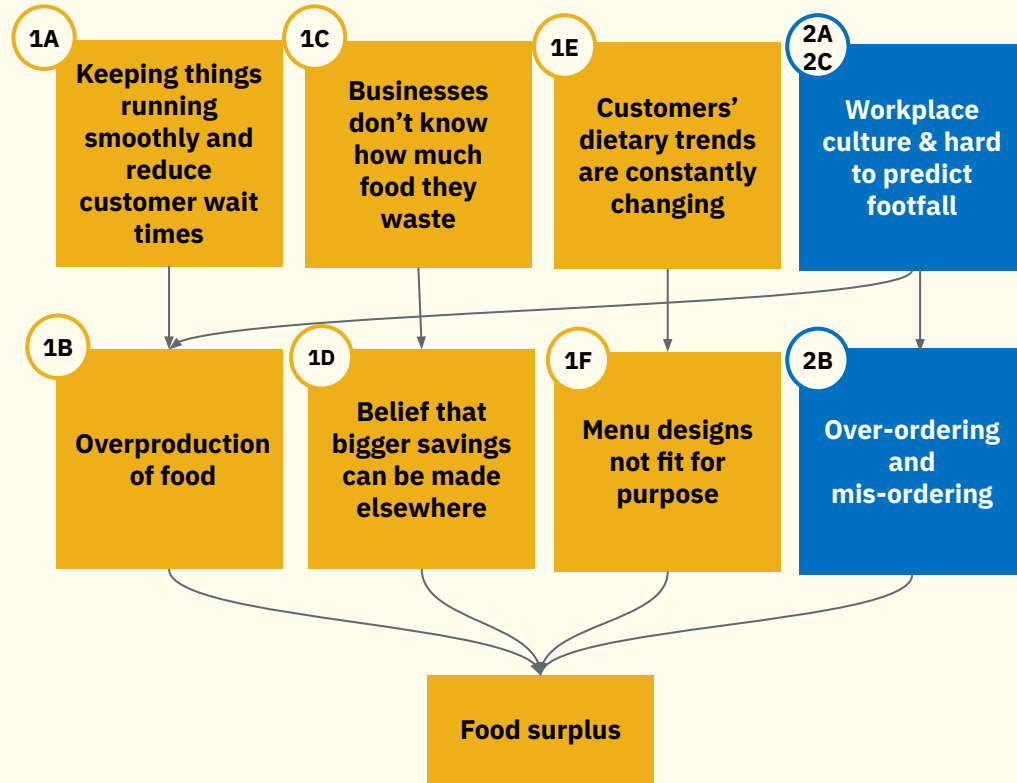
The ultimate priority for Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector businesses is to keep things **running smoothly and reduce how long customers have to wait for their orders** (1A). This can lead to an **overproduction of food** (1B).

Businesses also often don't know how much food they waste (1C), which can influence **a belief that reducing food waste doesn't reduce costs and bigger savings can be made elsewhere** (1D).

Customers' dietary trends are constantly changing (1E). This can lead to **menu designs that are not fit for purpose** (1F) and also don't allow easy incorporation of leftover food into menus.

Workplace culture and customer footfall being hard to predict (2A, 2C) can also mean staff end up **overproducing food** (1B) and **over-ordering and mis-ordering ingredients** (2B).

Together, these factors create a system that **creates food surplus**.



Problem tree of insights - food surplus plot

The ultimate priority for Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector businesses is to keep things **running smoothly and reduce how long customers have to wait for their orders.** This can lead to **overproduction of food**, which in turn leaves businesses with **food surplus.**

Overproduction is a deliberate strategy to save time and serve customers faster.

In small food businesses, especially busy ones like market stalls, making too much food isn't always accidental. Staff cook extra to serve customers faster, especially when they're understaffed, as this keeps things running smoothly and quickly. This shows a built-in conflict: it's often seen as more important to be efficient and keep customers happy than to avoid wasting food. It can actually seem cheaper to make too much and waste some than to carefully make just the right amount.

"As a small business, you cook a batch so you're ready to go quickly... You could get another member of staff cooking as you serve.. You'd cook more because you don't want the queue to be so long"

- Lisa King, Former street food business owner

To avoid lost sales or disappointed customers, many food businesses produce more than they need.

While this ensures customers are served quickly and shelves stay full for aesthetic purposes, it results in large volumes of unsold, good food being thrown away each day. This problem is biggest in places like bakeries on busy high streets, where customers expect to see full displays and plenty of choice.

Businesses **don't often know how much food they waste**, which can influence a **belief that reducing food waste doesn't reduce costs and bigger savings can be made elsewhere.**

Many food businesses don't track how much food they throw away, often because waste goes straight into bin bags and isn't measured.

Bigger kitchens may use tools like sales reports to plan better and cut waste, while small businesses with simple menus often rely on experience to avoid leftovers. In both cases, without clear tracking, it's hard to know exactly how much is being wasted, making it harder to know where to start with addressing it.

"I'm quite unique- less than 5 employees... [I only make] 5-6 diff creams/spread on pastries. People who work in the food sector, tend to know how much they need - by the end I knew how much needed for ricotta and pear filling" - Leonardo Kellaway, Market stall operator, Babalicious

"You don't see what's in the bins as it's in bags" - Rachel Bailey, Head of Environmental Services, Camden Council

Tackling food waste is deprioritised because ingredients are cheap - labour, rent and time are the real cost drivers.

For many small food businesses, food costs are so low relative to labour and overheads that waste is not seen as a financial concern. As a result, efforts to reduce costs focus more on staffing, efficiency, and rent, rather than minimising food waste.

"The priority is profit for your staff. Food waste is a second order problem."
- Leonardo Kellaway, Market stall operator, Babalicious

Customers' dietary trends are constantly changing. This can lead to **menu designs that are not fit for purpose** and also don't allow easy incorporation of leftover food into menus

Unpredictable consumer trends and behaviours increase the likelihood of food surplus and waste.

Evolving diet preferences such as 'Keto', or plant-based diets and strict allergen separation requirements mean food businesses must constantly adapt, often without the time, knowledge or infrastructure to do so efficiently. These trends often outpace a business's ability to plan, source and serve flexibly.

"Our stuff [ingredients] was imported from Athens so we couldn't import gluten-free pita.."

- Lisa King, Former street food business owner

Customers' dietary trends are constantly changing. This can lead to **menu designs that are not fit for purpose** and also don't allow easy incorporation of leftover food into menus.

Menu structure, type and consistency play a crucial role in food waste and customers' expectations.

Tasting menus tend to generate less waste due to their fixed portions and predictable preparation, while à la carte formats lead to more waste, especially when ingredients are cooked ahead of time and the menu changes frequently. Chain restaurants, which rely on standardised, repetitive dishes may benefit from less waste through consistent operational processes.

"If you have a tasting menu, you'd make less waste" - Adam Boon, Chef

"Some chain restaurants, like Nando's likely don't have much waste because they do the same thing repeatedly, like chicken and chips."

- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

Rigid, fixed menus limit the ability to creatively repurpose surplus food, contributing to potential waste despite best intentions.

Chain restaurants keep waste low by using cheap ingredients and sticking to fixed menus. Strict rules around allergens and calorie counts mean new dishes must be carefully planned and approved. This makes it harder for chain restaurants to go 'off-menu' and repurpose leftover ingredients into new meals to serve, leaving restaurants with surplus food.

"...At places like [chain restaurants], it can take weeks or even months to get new dishes on the menu because the purchasing manager has to cost them out and make sure the recipes aren't too expensive." - Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook



Examples of existing innovations

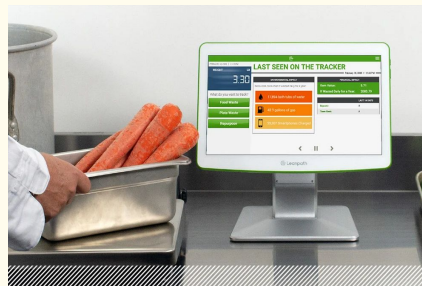
Here are 2 examples of innovative ideas others have come up with to **reduce food surplus**.

They're here to spark your imagination, inspire you, and maybe even pique your curiosity.



OrderMark

aggregates online orders into one platform, helping kitchens manage order flow and reduce over-prepping.



LeanPath

uses smart scales and software to track exactly what food is wasted in commercial kitchens, making waste visible and actionable.



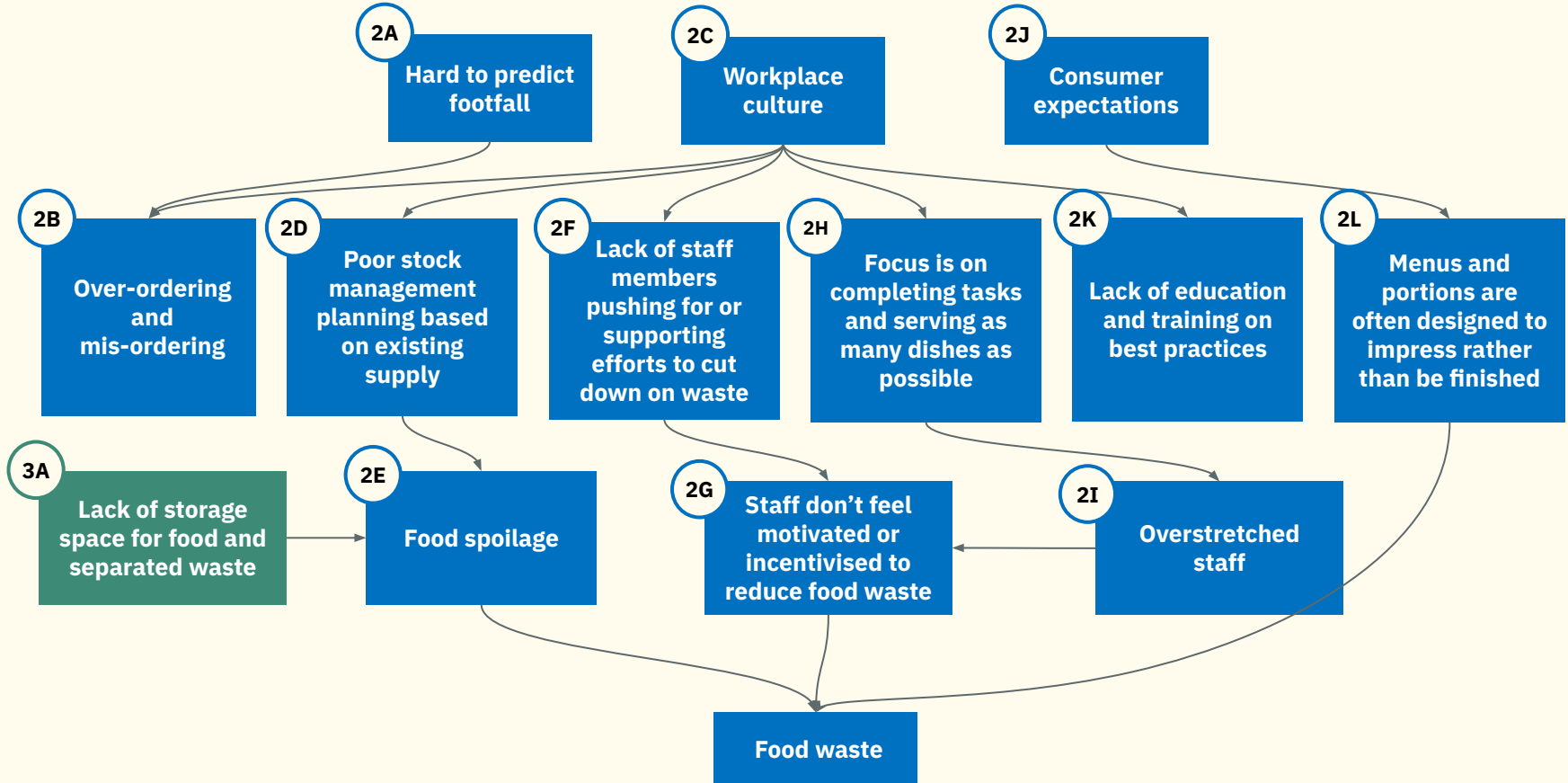
The research insights that shaped Challenge 2: Influencing workplace cultures and practices

Shift workplace culture and practices so that reducing food surplus and waste becomes a natural part of daily routines and decisions



What causes food waste?

Problem tree of insights - 'food waste' plot



What causes food waste?

Accurately **predicting customer footfall** (2A) is difficult, which often leads to **over-ordering and mis-ordering** (2B) food items. This results in surplus stock and can lead to food waste.

Workplace culture (2C) plays a major role in how food waste is managed. **Poor stock management planning** (2D) and **a lack of storage space** (3A) can lead to **food spoilage** (2E).

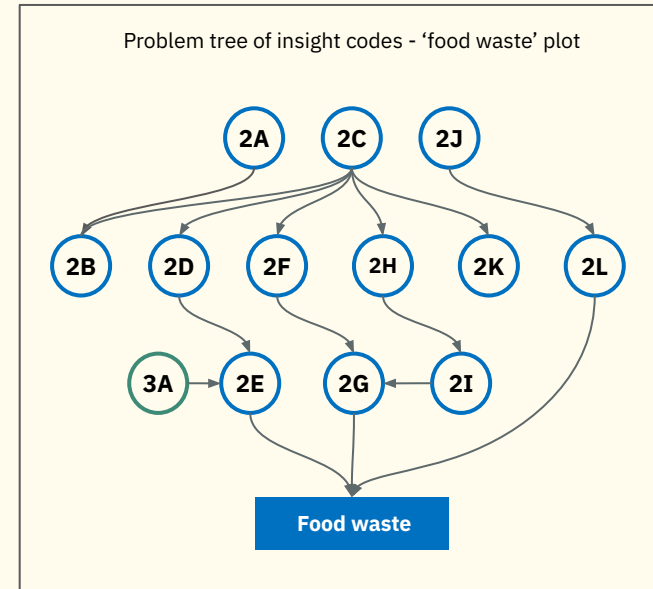
A **workplace culture** (2C) that doesn't prioritise waste reduction means **staff are less likely to support or push for initiatives to cut down on waste** (2F).

In many workplaces, the **focus is on completing tasks and serving as many dishes as possible** (2H). This can leave staff **overstretched, unmotivated, and without incentives to reduce food waste** (2I, 2G).

Across the sector there is a **lack of education and training around best practices** (2I, 2G) as well as limited awareness of existing resources.

Additionally, meeting **consumer expectations** (2J) is often prioritised over sustainability. **Menus and portions are often designed to impress rather than be finished** (2L).

Together, these factors create a system that **generates food waste**.



Accurately **predicting customer footfall is difficult**, which often leads to **over-ordering and mis-ordering** food items. This results in **surplus** stock and can lead to **food waste**.

It's tough for food businesses to know exactly how many customers they'll get each day, and getting it wrong can lead to food surplus and food waste.

Changes in weather, public holidays, social media trends or national events can cause big swings in footfall. One day there might be hardly any customers, and the next there's a big rush. Careful menu planning and only buying what's needed are key, but in a fast-changing environment, it's not always easy.

"Special events like Valentine's Day cause unpredictable demand, leading to more food waste when items are over-ordered." - Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

"The catering volume can change significantly depending on exhibitions or events. For example, on a busy day, we serve up to 75,000 meals across multiple outlets.... There are days when more food is wasted, such as when the weather is nice, and fewer people want to go inside... It's difficult to manage food waste because of unpredictable customer behavior. One minute, there may be ten people, and then 35 people show up unexpectedly." - Angela, Graysons Venues

"At one venue where I worked, there was a sudden downpour it would bring thousands of people inside, resulting in a rush for food."
- Angela, Graysons Venues

"You never know when you'll get lunchtime or after work rush.. The weather was a big thing, holidays, different trends" - Lisa King, Former street food business owner

Accurately **predicting customer footfall is difficult**, which often leads to **over-ordering and mis-ordering** food items. This results in **surplus** stock and can lead to **food waste**.

Unpredictable demand, poor planning, and rigid ordering systems all add up to wasted food.

Food waste often happens because it's hard to predict how much will sell, especially for street food or pop-ups where one rainy day can mean lots of unsold food. Sometimes staff will order more just to be safe, especially after being caught out with too little in the past.

"Possible challenges in businesses; If it's a rainy day and stuff doesn't get sold they're left with all that stuff"

- Market Development Manager,
Camden Council

In some kitchens, poor communication, simple mistakes or sticking to rules leads to waste.

Mistakes due to ordering systems can mean too much of the same ingredient gets bought. Over-ordering leads to waste, especially with fresh food, such as berries, that spoil quickly. Food can also sometimes be thrown away just because it looks not as expected or 'a bit off', wasn't used in time, or can't be reused due to health and safety rules.

"Cooked food that's not served is often thrown away due to contamination concerns, even if it's still good."

- Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

"If things are over-ordered, perishable stuff would be thrown out - berries would go mushy and be chucked. Good food going to waste - when something doesn't look right. If it's a bit damaged or soft, instantly thrown. Wouldn't just cut off the bad bit." - Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

Workplace culture plays a major role in how food waste is managed. **Poor stock management planning** based on what's currently in stock can lead to **food spoilage**.

The workplace culture within hospitality and food service business strongly affects how food waste is managed.

When leadership doesn't prioritise sustainability, even if staff care they'll often follow suit - they'll either ignore the issue or become desensitised to waste. Food businesses also grapple with the risk of being shut down for failing a health and safety inspection, which can influence what kitchens prioritise. Fear of inspections can lead staff to throw food away just to be safe.

"Paranoia about health and safety inspectors coming in and shutting it down so people throw stuff away."

- Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

Workplace culture plays a major role in how food waste is managed. **Poor stock management planning and a lack of storage space** can lead to **food spoilage**.

Food often gets wasted in kitchens if there's no proper system for tracking what's in stock or when it goes off.

Ingredients are sometimes decanted into unlabelled or inconsistently labelled containers, making it hard for other staff to know how old they are. Without reliable tracking, people are more likely to throw food away because they can't trust their nose or sight alone.

There's rarely a plan for using what's already available.

Ingredients that could still be eaten, like dry goods might be thrown away because there's no process for using them up for staff meals or letting staff take them home, which other restaurants may have in place to ensure less food goes to waste.

Freezing can really help reduce waste, but not everyone has the space.

Some small food businesses manage well by freezing in batches, but others lack freezer space or the organisation to plan around frozen stock.

Food often goes off before it can be used.

In busy kitchens, ingredients like dairy, berries, and other perishables are commonly wasted because they aren't used in time are mislabelled, or not stored properly. Staff may not trust when ingredients were opened, and without a clear system, edible food is thrown away just to be safe.

A **workplace culture** that doesn't prioritise waste reduction means **staff are less likely to support or push for initiatives to cut down on waste.**

Without staff who are actively pushing for change, food waste reduction efforts often fall short.

In many food businesses, cutting down on waste depends on having motivated individuals or teams who care enough to take action. Managing waste or tackling sustainable efforts more broadly takes time, passion and effort. Without dedicated roles, such as “*food waste champions*”, there’s often no one to keep efforts on track, and tasks like reusing leftovers or setting up separate waste bins are easily overlooked.

Challenge 2: Influencing workplace culture and practices

“Back-of-house teams manage cleaning supplies and cross-contamination, but food waste, like plastic, was not properly segregated.”

- Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

“But in most places I work, I see food waste and plastic waste mixed together early in the day. I can't remember a restaurant that sticks to properly separating waste.”

- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

In many workplaces, the focus is on **completing tasks and serving as many dishes as possible.** This can leave staff **overstretched, unmotivated, and without incentives to reduce food waste.**

In busy kitchens, the main focus is often on serving meals quickly and keeping up with demand.

This means that good habits like repurposing leftover food or reducing waste can get pushed aside. While using scraps or leftovers in creative ways, like for staff meals the next day, can save money and reduce waste, it's not always a priority. Luxury hotels often fall short not due to lack of care, but because the focus is on guest experience, not back-of-house waste systems. The pressure to keep up with service to please customers often outweighs efforts to be more sustainable.

“The concept of saving scraps for reuse can save money in the long run, but restaurants are often focused on getting through their tasks rather than repurposing waste.”- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

“Despite being luxury hotels, waste management was poor; the focus was on customer service, but waste segregation was neglected” - Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

In many workplaces, the focus is on **completing tasks and serving as many dishes as possible.** This can leave staff **overstretched, unmotivated, and without incentives to reduce food waste.**

In busy, high-volume restaurants with large teams, kitchen staff can be overworked and lack the time, mental focus and physical energy to manage food waste properly.

Without proper systems in place, managing food waste effectively will depend on each person noticing issues and changing their individual and collective behaviour. Long hours and intense pressure means that food is likely to get thrown in the closest bin, not always a food waste one. Food can often get thrown away out of convenience even if it could be reused. It can be easier to track food waste and use up leftovers in quieter businesses with smaller kitchens and fewer staff.

“[The bakery] where I am now is smaller scale so makes food waste system easier to manage. Ethos is better and they’re more conscientious. Better food separation system, and we use offcuts of fruits and veg for other purposes like dehydrating or cordials and syrups” - Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

“[Staff] laziness, being overstretched, would have prevented them complying [with waste regulations]. People don’t have time and mental capacity to care about these things as they work ridiculous hours.” - Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

In many workplaces, the focus is on **completing tasks and serving as many dishes as possible.** This can leave staff **overstretched, unmotivated, and without incentives to reduce food waste.**

Staff can feel unmotivated to reduce food waste because the benefits of doing so are not visible.

In fast-paced kitchens, food waste can feel like 'someone else's problem', especially when there's no reward or recognition for reducing it. There's a perception that if staff understand how reducing waste can save money and improve kitchen efficiency, they're more likely to engage.

"Everything in a restaurant is about getting as much value for what you're buying" - Adam Boon, Chef

"I'd focus on the fact that no-one is reusing ingredients. Using the narrative you're wasting lots of money might make restaurants care and think about financial implications." - Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

In many workplaces, the focus is on **completing tasks and serving as many dishes as possible.** This can leave staff **overstretched, unmotivated, and without incentives to reduce food waste.**

Shifting to a solutions-focused mindset, rather than a problem-focused one, could help more staff feel engaged and motivated to take action.

Creative solutions, like reusing leftovers or making use of vegetable offcuts, are perhaps more likely from teams who feel empowered and included.

“Encouraging staff to think about what can be done with leftover food, like using extra vegetables or potatoes, makes a big difference... It's essential to approach waste reduction with an opportunity mindset rather than focusing on the problem. Chefs and front-of-house staff are motivated to reduce food waste if they understand the reasons and see the results of their efforts.... It's important to involve staff in the process of reducing food waste so they come up with their own solutions...A chef at the British Library came up with a great idea using leftover food, like making onion powder from onion skins. It's an example of creative thinking in response to food waste training.” - Angela, Graysons Venues

Across the sector there is **a lack of education and training around best practices**, as well as limited awareness of existing resources.

Staff often lack the skills, knowledge, or motivation to reduce food waste.

Larger or better-funded restaurants are more likely to have more staff training, but smaller businesses and market traders struggle to fund this. Without the right resources, staff are more likely to struggle to even know where to start. Ongoing, hands-on training, especially from experienced chefs who care about finding solutions and have gone through the likes of culinary school, is seen as essential to building good habits and practices among other kitchen staff. Even for those who can fund it, training alone is not the answer; businesses require tailored support, inspiration and encouragement from others across the sector.

“The tendency to throw away food is higher when individuals don’t know how to use it before it expires... People often throw away food because they don’t know what to do with it, so education on cooking skills is essential...Cooking skills are crucial for reducing food waste, and people need to learn how to handle ingredients and leftovers” - Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

“Being able to accommodate food waste if there is food waste; supporting traders to manage the food. [Help them to] change menus with the seasons. In summer customers want food to go to a park and eat; in winter - more soups, hot boxes”- Lisa King, Former street food business owner

Meeting **consumer expectations** is often prioritised over sustainability. **Menus and portions are often designed to impress rather than be finished.**

Customers expect large quantities and tend to over-order, which puts pressure on businesses to meet these expectations with big servings and plenty of stock.

Food businesses feel they must always keep shelves, menus and plates looking full to meet customer expectations.

There's a strong belief that customers expect abundance even if that creates food surplus or waste. In places like pubs and restaurants, diners may order more than they can eat and leave food behind, which leads to plate waste. This shows how customer habits also contribute to the food waste created by businesses.

“Overbuying or being greedy when choosing food is a big contributor to food waste. People often waste food just because they can buy more than they need.” - Angela, Graysons Venues

Meeting **consumer expectations** is often prioritised over sustainability. **Menus and portions are often designed to impress rather than be finished.**

Customers often know less about food waste than other types of waste, like plastic, so they tend to care less about it.

While many people are quick to cut down on plastic and carry reusable water bottles, food waste doesn't get the same attention. There's a lack of awareness about how harmful it is for the environment, and being mindful about food waste just doesn't seem as appealing. If customers don't show they care, businesses may feel less pressure to focus on solving the problem.

"If I have a plastic bottle, I know it's bad. But people don't think about food waste in the same way... loads of my friends self identify as being environmentally conscious - they have their reusable water bottles and tote bags - but food waste just hasn't taken off in the same way."

- Anonymous



Examples of existing innovations

Here are 2 examples of innovative ideas others have come up with **to influence workplace cultures and practices**.

They're here to spark your imagination, inspire you, and maybe even pique your curiosity.



Winnow Solutions

uses AI-powered smart scales combined with kitchen staff input to track food waste in professional kitchens, giving actionable insights to reduce waste and save money.



FreshTag

FreshTag, a start-up founded in London by designer Rui Xu has created an intelligent label that changes colour with the passage of time or due to a change in storage conditions reduces the freshness of the food.



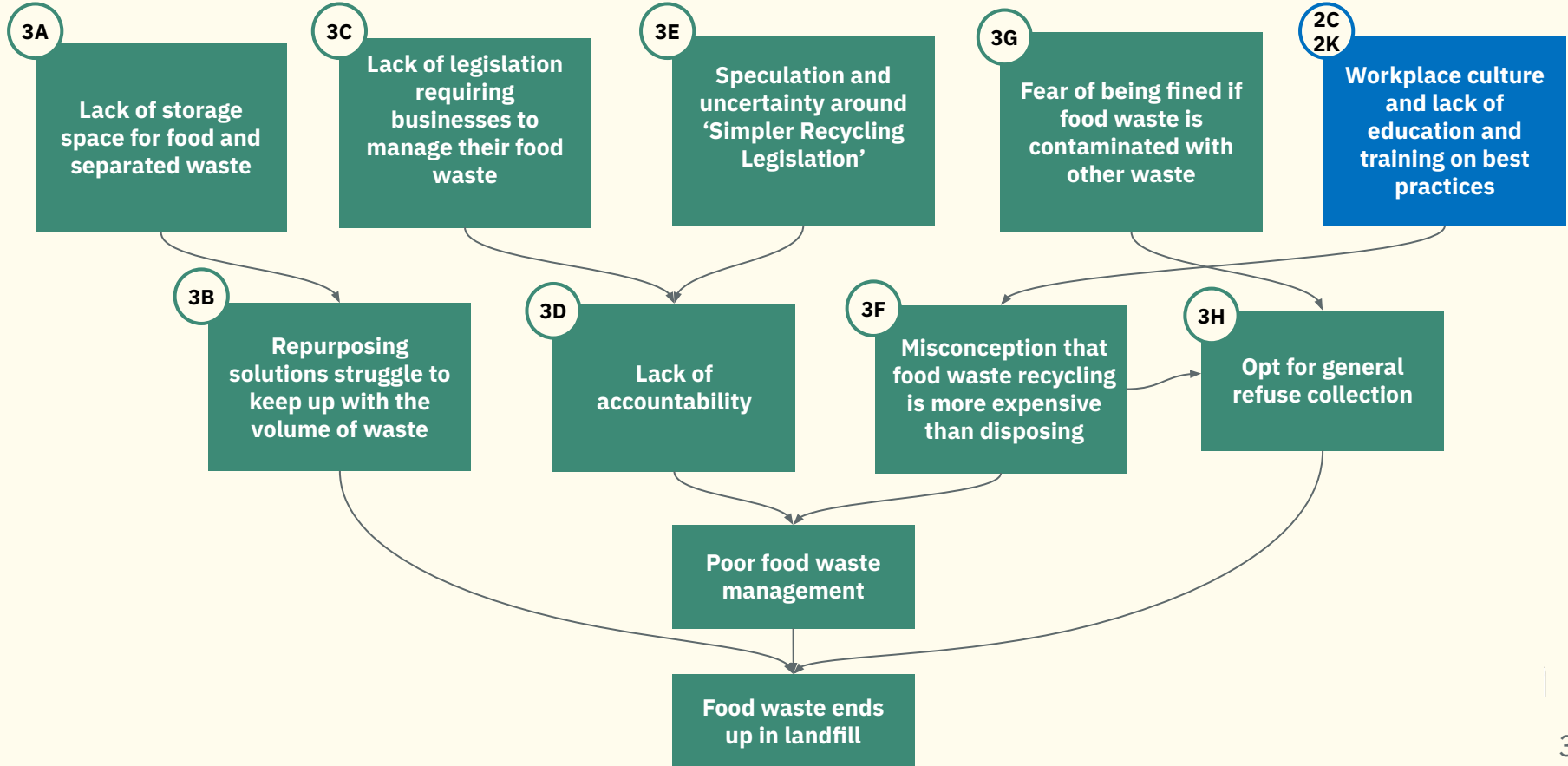
The research insights that shaped Challenge 3: Managing food waste

Reduce the amount of food waste from businesses that ends up at landfill, either by supporting businesses to segregate their food waste or providing alternative opportunities for extracting value from food waste.



What causes food waste to end up in landfill?

Problem tree of insights - 'food waste to end up in landfill' plot



What causes food waste to end up in landfill?

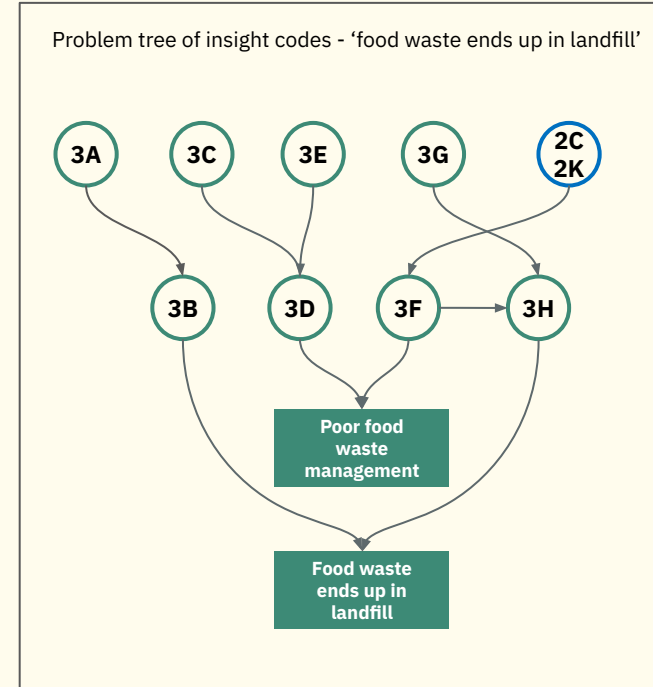
Many Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector businesses, especially in London, **lack the space to store food and separated waste** (3A).

Solutions that repurpose food waste also require space and **often struggle to keep up with the volume of waste** (3B).

Until April 2025, there was **a lack of legislation requiring businesses to manage their food waste** (3C), which led to a **lack of accountability** (3D). Even now, despite the introduction of the [Simpler Recycling Legislation](#), there's **speculation and uncertainty** (3E), which could still contribute to a **lack of accountability among businesses** (3D).

Additionally, **workplace culture** and **lack of education and training on best practices** (2C, 2K) can lead to **misconceptions around food waste management** (3F). Some businesses also **fear being fined if their food waste ends up being contaminated** (3G) with other materials. These reasons may be why businesses **opt for general refuse collection** (3H).

Together, these factors create a system that means there's **poor management of food waste** and **food waste ends up in landfill**



Many Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector businesses, especially in London, **lack the space to store food and separated waste.**

Many small food businesses don't have enough fridge or freezer space, so food has to be used quickly or it gets thrown away.

This can happen when menus change or fridges need to be cleared for new stock. Without proper storage, fresh food like fruit, vegetables, and meat goes off faster.

"On big cleaning days there's loads of stuff thrown out to free up space in fridge, or if we change our menu." - Laure Garrard, Baker, Bakery

"There's not adequate storage for businesses, could we provide fridges for things to be stored in?" - Market Development Manager, Camden Council

Many food businesses, especially in London, struggle to separate food waste from other types of waste because they don't have the space.

Small restaurants, cafes and takeaways often operate in tight environments with no room for extra bins or storage areas as properly separating all types of waste (food, recycling, general waste) takes up a lot of room.

"Space is a big issue in restaurants. If you're strict about food waste, you need a whole holding area and a system for transporting it for composting or recycling." - Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

Many Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) Sector businesses, especially in London, **lack the space to store food and separated waste.**

High street businesses are likely to struggle with space to segregate and store food waste; they may use bin bags for their food waste as they take up less space.

High street food businesses often don't have enough space for proper food waste bins, so many end up using bin bags instead, which isn't ideal as the bags break easily and attract vermin and pests. Under the new Simpler Recycling Legislation, putting food waste in bin bags won't be allowed. There's an opportunity to support businesses as they adapt to the new rules and a gap in solutions that work for high street businesses where space is constrained.

Solutions that repurpose food waste also require space and often **struggle to keep up with the volume of waste.**

Repurposing solutions require space and can't keep up with the amount of waste.

While there are great ideas for reusing and repurposing food and packaging waste, like composting, making products from surplus or waste, or sending leftovers to local community gardens, these solutions may struggle with the sheer amount of waste produced. Even small restaurants create large volumes daily, and without enough space, time, or consistent support, we heard examples of reuse schemes that quickly became overwhelmed or had to stop altogether.

"I worked at a [London based restaurant's] test kitchen, where specific trucks came once a week to collect the food waste. However, that scheme only lasted about six or seven months due to the practical challenges... The test kitchen's food waste was taken to a local veg garden, but there was too much waste to manage effectively."

- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

Until April 2025, there was a lack of legislation requiring businesses to manage their food waste, which led to a **lack of accountability.**

While there are strict rules and regulations around food hygiene and safety and the local infrastructure to support this through the likes of spot inspections, the same has not been in place for addressing food waste.

Before April 2025, there was no legal obligation for any business to separate food waste from other types of waste. Now businesses are required to separate any food waste generated and have this collected so it can be repurposed into energy, such as being sent to anaerobic digesters.

“Businesses are not required to report on food waste, leading to a lack of motivation to address the issue.”

- Carlos Queremel, Future Neighbourhoods Project Lead, Camden Council

Because businesses haven't been required by law to report how much food they waste, many haven't felt the need to take action.

Without rules or pressure from the government, disposing of food waste responsibly can fall to the bottom of the priority list. If no one is checking or holding them responsible, it's easy for food waste to be ignored and end up in landfill. If adhered to by businesses, the new legislation could mean more food waste being processed into energy instead of filling landfill or burnt at an incinerator facility. Support for businesses to adjust their practices in line with the new legislation will be essential.

Despite the introduction of the **Simpler Recycling Legislation**, there's **speculation and uncertainty**, which could still contribute to a **lack of accountability** among businesses.

Lack of awareness about the new Simpler Recycling Legislation.

As of April 2025, any business with more than 10 employees will be legally obligated to separate their food waste from their general waste and ensure it's collected. While this sounds like a good step forward, most people we spoke to had more questions than answers. There was uncertainty around what exactly needs to be separated (like coffee grounds or packaging), what kinds of checks will be carried out and by whom. None of the chefs we spoke to were aware of the legislation, which raised questions around the education required to help businesses adapt to this and adjust staff behaviour to accommodate new practices.

"Who's gonna legislate on the new legislation .. Will they have enough money per borough - staff - to check through the bins - how will it get policed?"

- Adam Boon, Chef

"There are questions around how public venues will handle segregation – will they need to separate it on-site, or will it be sorted later at a recycling plant?"

- Angela, Graysons Venues

Despite the introduction of the **Simpler Recycling Legislation**, there's **speculation and uncertainty**, which could still contribute to a **lack of accountability** among businesses.

Speculation around whether the legislation will make a difference to 'business as usual' exists because it's not clear who or how it will be monitored.

Some think the threat of fines might push businesses to take food waste more seriously, especially if it costs more to ignore the rules than to follow them. However, there's a lot of uncertainty about who will actually enforce the new food waste rules and whether it'll be enforced at all. If businesses realise no one's checking, there's a risk they'll ignore the rules. For the legislation to have real impact, enforcement needs to be clear, consistent, and properly funded.

"Recycling laws depend on enforcement; if the law is easy to bypass, people will do so, but strict enforcement encourages compliance."
- Andrea Fioretti, Chef, 5 Star Luxury Hotel

Workplace culture and lack of education and training on best practices can lead to **misconceptions around food waste management.**

Many businesses wrongly assume that food waste collections are more expensive than general refuse collection services, leading them to avoid food waste collections altogether.

Some businesses believe they have to pay extra for councils to collect food waste, so they skip it and opt for independent waste collectors. There's also a common misconception that food waste bins are more expensive than general waste bins. In reality, council rates for collection are often competitive and food waste bins typically offering a higher weight allowance, and lower cost per kilogram. When food waste is incorrectly disposed of in general waste bins, it not only raises the overall weight of general waste but also causes businesses to hit their weight limit more frequently, driving up costs unnecessarily.

Example costs to businesses for waste collections

According to one waste collection provider (anonymous), food waste collection is 33% cheaper than general waste collection:

- A 240 litre food bin costs £12.62 per lift. There is a 70kg weight limit, so is £0.18 p/kg
- A 240 litre refuse bin costs £8.01 per lift. There is a 30kg weight limit, so is £0.27 p/kg

Workplace culture and lack of education and training on best practices can lead to **misconceptions around food waste management.**

Restaurant staff and chefs aren't always sure what happens to food waste after it's collected.

This can create some doubt about whether separating waste actually makes a difference. Even when people do the right thing by sorting waste, they're unsure if it's handled properly. This lack of transparency can make staff less likely to put effort into sorting and reducing waste. One chef wondered whether if people could see the benefits of their business' food waste being used locally, there might be more incentive to repurpose what they waste as the benefits of separating and recycling would be clear. This may also make the business seem more sustainability conscious, appealing more to customers.

"Yeah, and on that, who, what, where, when, why, where does the food go to? What happens to the food? Because there's a lot of good stuff happening when the food gets taken away, but that's not information that's easily accessed." - Angela, Graysons Venues

"I just want to know because sometimes it feels like a Band-Aid solution. People might say, "Okay, we need to deal with waste," and they separate it, which is great. But is the problem being dealt with on the other end? Because if it's all just going to the same place and getting mixed up, what's the point?" - Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook

"Restaurants that care about sustainability, you don't know where the waste is going. - When I was in Hackney and we used first mile, and we put food waste (from guests) we don't know where it's going" - Adam Boon, Chef

Some businesses also **fear being fined** if their food waste ends up being contaminated with other materials. This may be why businesses **opt for general refuse collection**.

Small mistakes like putting waste in the wrong bin can lead to potential fines; general refuse waste allows more room for error so can be seen as the ‘safest’ option to put your waste in.

Waste management companies allow for a certain waste contamination threshold, so a certain amount of other types of waste is acceptable in a specific waste bin. If these thresholds are crossed, the company refuses to pick up the waste and issues a fine. The fear of making mistakes with waste segregation means businesses may opt for general refuse services instead of food waste collection services.

Businesses need waste collection services to make regular collections at flexible times.

Leaving rubbish out for too long can attract pests like rats or flies, which is bad for business and hygiene. Restaurants need the large volumes of waste collected regularly and at times that work best for their routines, so they’re likely to opt for the service that can offer them this.

“The amount of waste even a small restaurant produces daily is huge. Waste needs to be taken out regularly, or it can lead to issues like attracting pests.”

- Ixta Belfrage, Food Writer and Cook



Examples of existing innovations

Here are 2 examples of innovative ideas others have come up with **to manage food waste**.

They're here to spark your imagination, inspire you, and maybe even pique your curiosity.



Ananas Anam

processes waste pineapple leaves into textile to make products.



ReGrained

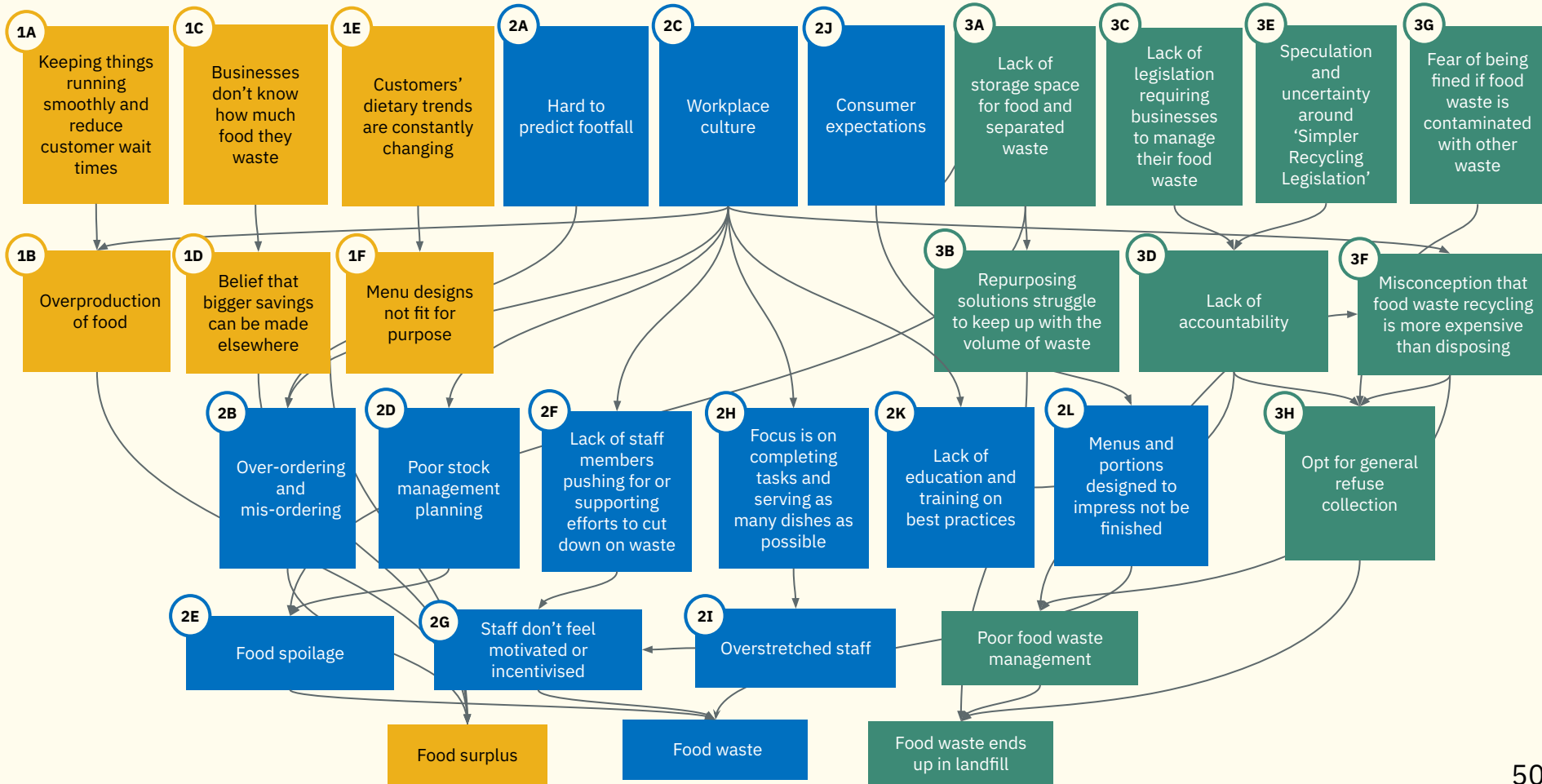
upcycles brewer's waste, also known as brewer's grain or spent grain (a by-product of the brewing process) to make protein bars.

04

Off Menu - appendix

Who we spoke to, additional
resources and glossary

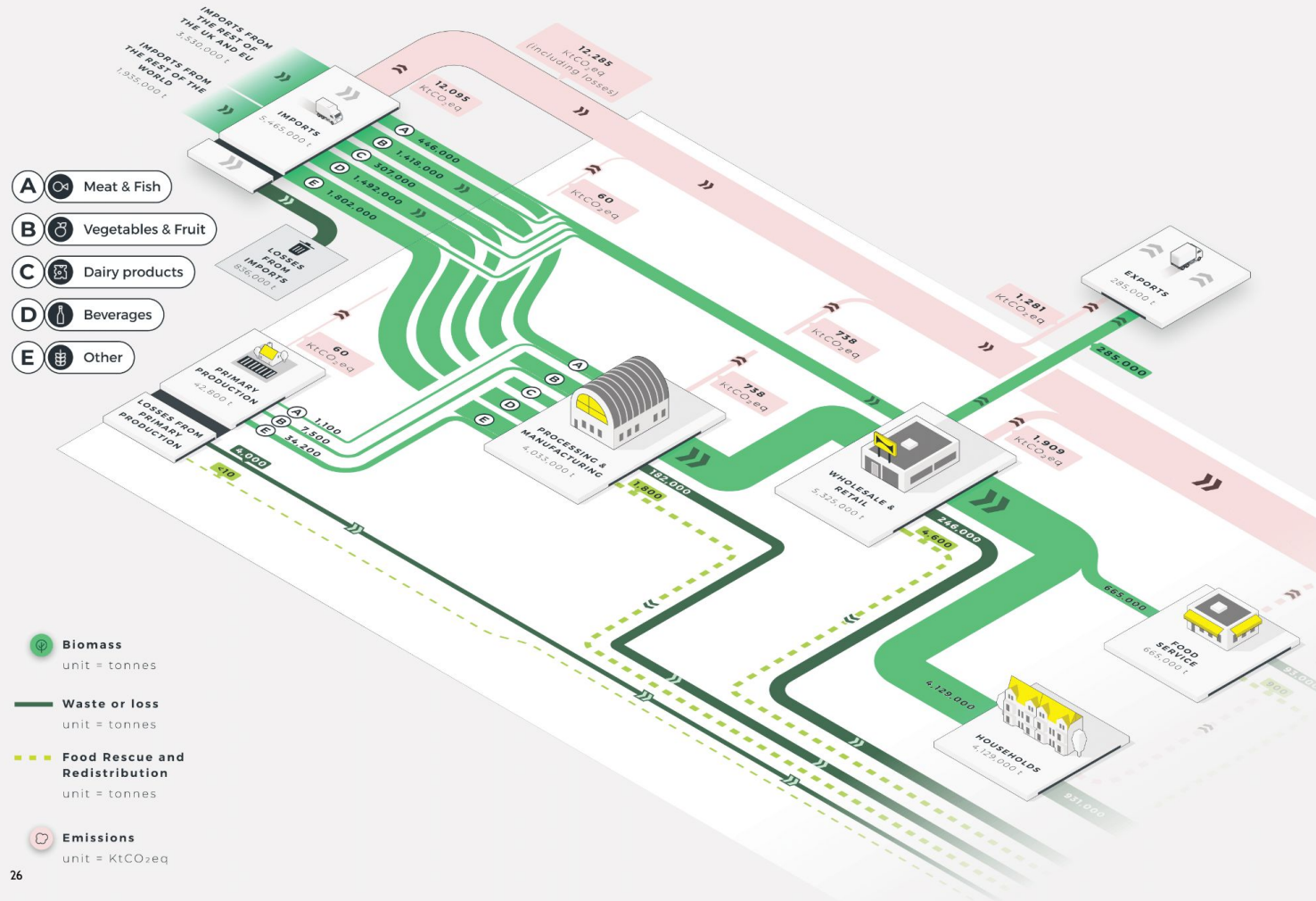
The full Problem Tree - what causes food surplus, food waste and food waste to end up in landfill?



The material flows and consumption-based emissions of London's food sector: ReLondon

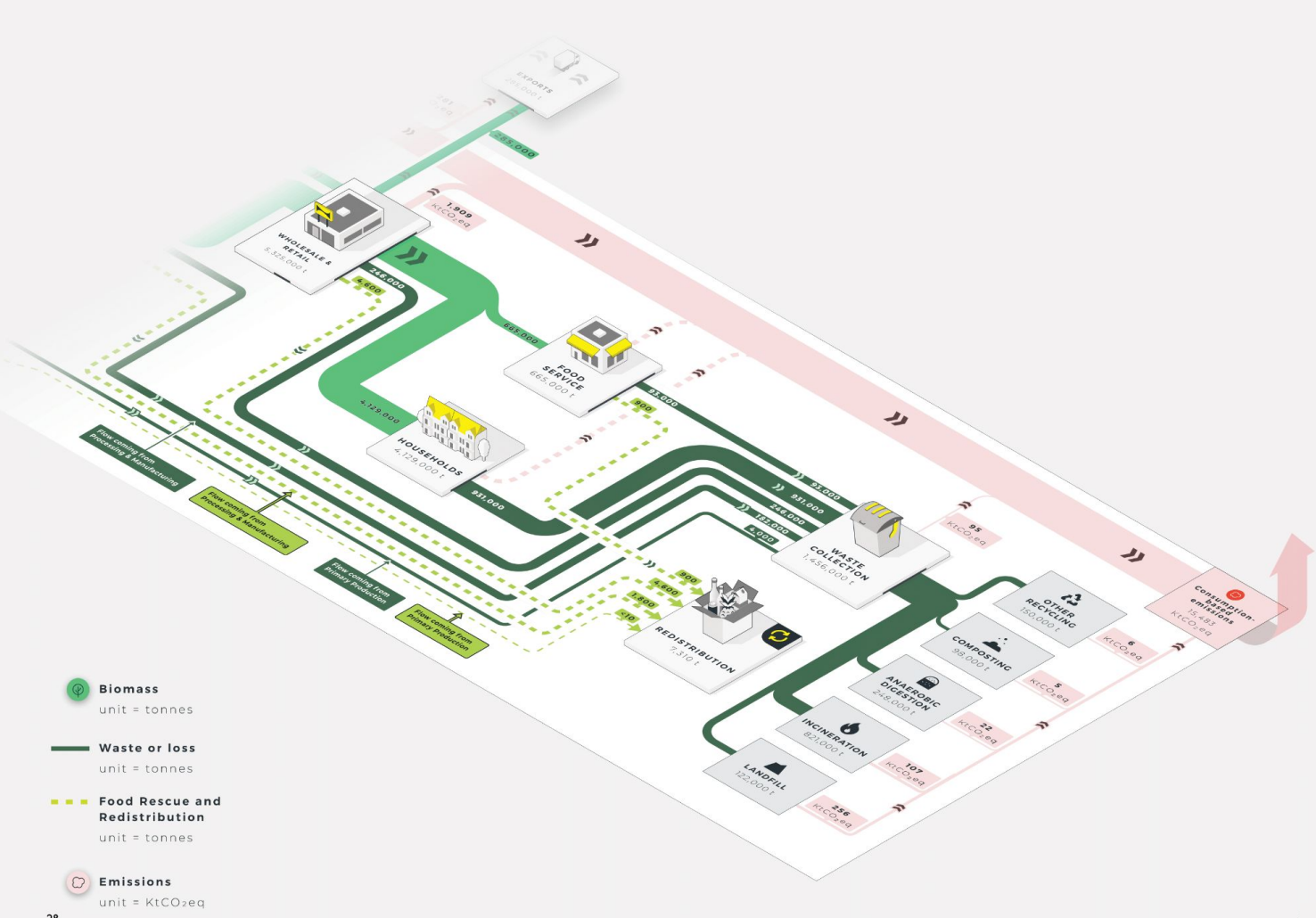
This diagram is taken from the [ReLondon report on London's food footprint](#).

The map (on this page and the next) shows food flows across London, linking them to consumption-based emissions. It also highlights how food waste moves through the supply chain and is treated, using methods like anaerobic digestion, composting, incineration, landfill, and other recycling techniques.



The material flows and consumption-based emissions of London's food sector: ReLondon

This diagram is taken from the [ReLondon report on London's food footprint](#).



Sources

The statistics mentioned in this document have been referenced from the following sources. If you would like the source of a specific statistic, feel free to write to us at camdenchallengeprize@camden.gov.uk.

- [A Wasted Opportunity: Reducing and Managing London's Food Waste](#)
- [The Food Waste Reduction Roadmap Progress Report 2022](#)
- [The case for creating Ultra-Low and Local Circular Food Waste Zones in Camden and beyond](#)
- [London's food footprint: An analysis of material flows, consumption-based emissions, and levers for climate action](#)
- [How to Reduce Restaurant Food Waste: The Ultimate Guide](#)
- [Food waste in the UK - House of Lords Library](#)
- [Food waste in restaurants: What we know - Fourth](#)
- [Food Waste Regulations in 2025: Key Changes and Impacts for Businesses - Affordable Waste Management](#)
- [Cost of living crisis: Amount of food wasted by UK households revealed as charity warns 'things going into bins that could be going into bellies' | UK News | Sky News](#)



Further reading

Hungry for more? A selection of organisations and reading we found useful and you may too.

1. [WRAP](#)
2. [Guardians of Grub](#)
3. [ReLondon](#)
4. [The Sustainable Restaurant Association](#)
5. [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#)
6. [EIT Food](#)
7. [Food Ethics Council](#)

Glossary

The Camden Challenge Prize uses some terms that you might not be familiar with. Here you can find explanations specific to the Challenge Prize. If there is anything else you do not understand, get in touch with us by email at camdenchallengeprize@camden.gov.uk and we'll be happy to explain more.

Camden's Missions: Missions are the long-term goals for the future of our borough that were developed in collaboration with people across Camden. Camden has identified 10 big issues facing the borough, which include 4 Camden Missions and 6 Camden Challenges.

Challenge Prize: A Challenge Prize, also known as an innovation prize or inducement prize, is a reward offered to individuals or teams who solve a specific problem or achieve a defined goal, usually in fields like science, technology, public policy or social innovation. Unlike traditional grants or contracts, a challenge prize does not fund the process of research or development up front; it incentivizes innovation by offering a prize only upon successful completion of the challenge.

Food Mission: This is one of 4 Camden Missions. It sets out that by 2030, everyone will eat well every day with nutritious, affordable and sustainable food.

Food surplus: This primarily refers to edible food that becomes available for redistribution or other beneficial uses, rather than being discarded as waste.

Food waste: This predominantly refers to edible food that's discarded. Spoilage is a common reason for food waste, but it can also result from an excessive supply of food due to fluctuating market trends and changes in consumer eating habits.

Hospitality and Food Service Sector: The Hospitality and Food Service (HaFS) sector is defined by the activities related to serving food and beverages to people consuming them outside of the household. Examples of businesses in this sector include restaurants, cafés, catering services, canteens, takeaways, hotels, pubs and market traders.

Innovation: Innovation simply means doing something in a new, creative, or more effective way.

Offshoot: This is a company or activity that has developed from one that already existed.



Thank you

If you have any questions feel free to contact
camdenchallengeprize@camden.gov.uk

