Understanding food surplus redistribution
– Frequently asked questions

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What is food surplus redistribution?

Even the most efficient food businesses generate surplus food. Redistribution involves sending surplus food and drink to feed people, preventing it from becoming waste or being used as animal feed.

This can be done through a range of channels including commercial outlets, charities and community groups.

Why is it important?

- **Social Case** – 16% of adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland are experiencing food insecurity. A range of organisations, including charities and community groups, help this group meet their needs for food and provide other vital services for vulnerable members of society. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a significant increase in the demand for these services. Redistribution is a major source of food for charities and community organisations, saving them millions of pounds a year.

- **Environmental Case** – Food loss and waste accounts for 8% of global greenhouse emissions. Reducing food loss and waste is a key opportunity for businesses to drive progress towards achieving Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Business Case** – Every £1 invested in reducing food waste generates an average return of £14. Partnering with a redistribution organisation can result in cost savings through improved management of surplus and waste streams. Redistributing surplus food is an opportunity to drive colleague engagement and build stronger relationships with local communities. Taking positive action on food waste reduction and food surplus redistribution can also positively impact on brand reputation.
Why does food surplus occur?
There are many causes of food surplus, including:

- Forecasting and ordering
- Crop flushes caused by weather
- Product falling outside specifications
- Labelling errors

Will redistribution of surplus food cost my business anything?
Research has shown on average, for every £1 invested in reducing food waste generates an average return of £14. Partnering with a redistribution organisation can result in cost savings through improved management of surplus and waste streams.

Redistributing surplus food is an opportunity to drive colleague engagement and build stronger relationships with local communities. Taking positive action on food waste reduction and food surplus redistribution can also positively impact on brand reputation.

What are the risks to redistributing surplus food?
The biggest concerns about redistributing food surplus relate to food safety and brand integrity. However, each year hundreds of millions of meals are redistributed safely and securely. This means these risks are already being very well managed.

WRAP, the Food Standards Agency and Defra have released labelling guidance for food surplus redistribution and advice on how long after the ‘Best Before’ date different foods can be expected to be suitable for redistribution. This guidance is here.

The Food Standards Agency has also provided guidance on food law including safety and hygiene and record-keeping and traceability, here.

To learn more about managing risks in food surplus redistribution visit How to redistribute your food surplus on IGD.com.
Which foods can I redistribute?

All types of products and ingredients can be redistributed as long as they are safe for human consumption and labelled accordingly. Food cannot be redistributed if its ‘use by’ date has expired. The only exception to this is if the food has gone through a safe freezing or cooking process, before the ‘use by’ date has passed, and has been appropriately re-labelled.

Both branded and retailer own-label products can be redistributed. For own label products its important that the relevant retailer policies and practices are adhered to. WRAP has developed Best Practice guidance to help support manufacturers that want to redistribute retailer own-label products which is available [here](#).

A list of food categories that can be redistributed is provided below. You should discuss with your chosen redistribution partner(s) which categories they would be happy to accept.

### Food Categories:
- Ambient general grocery (e.g. pasta and rice)
- Baby and toddler food
- Bakery (including uncooked)
- Cereals and snack bars
- Cakes and biscuits
- Dairy products (e.g. cheese, milk, yoghurts)
- Desserts
- Drinks
- Fish and seafood (including prepared and frozen)
- Food to go (e.g. sandwiches, soups and salads)
- Fruit and vegetables (including frozen)
- Ice cream and frozen desserts
- Meat and other protein (including frozen)
- Plant based and vegetarian food
- Pies, pasties and pizzas (including frozen)
- Pet food
- Readymade meals and prepared foods (ambient, chilled or frozen)
- Seasonal food (e.g. mince pies, hot cross buns)
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Which foods cannot be redistributed?
The following foods cannot be redistributed:

- Food with an expired ‘use by’ date (Unless it has been frozen before the ‘use by’ date has passed, and has been appropriately re-labelled) before the expiry date
- Food that has not been kept at the appropriate temperature
- Food that has damaged packaging that presents the possibility of contamination
- Food that lacks information on allergens
- Food that has been served to a customer
What are the different types of redistribution partner?

Redistribution organisations in the UK typically fall into one of the following three categories:

- **Commercial**
  
  These organisations pay a fee for surplus products and then redistribute, usually charging their customers or members a heavily discounted price.

  This helps people at risk of food insecurity to save money on their food bills which they can spend on other items. It also means that the surplus food is prevented from going to either waste or animal feed.

  This approach can help manufacturers recover some costs.

- **Charitable/Community**
  
  Most redistribution is done through charitable and community organisations that use surplus food to support their service users.

  Surplus food helps alleviate food insecurity, saves charities and community organisations money and helps drive engagement with core activities and programmes.

  Some charities act as a wholesaler and distribute the products to front line charity and community organisations. Others manage the full end-to-end process from surplus supplier to end beneficiary.

- **Digital**
  
  A growing number of organisations are offering technology-based solutions to match surplus with recipients.

  These solutions enable a business to have many potential recipients for their surplus, while maintaining one direct redistribution relationship.

  Digital providers include both commercial models and organisations which support local charities and community organisations.
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How do I find redistribution partner(s) that are right for me?
For further information on the capabilities of food surplus redistribution organisations and case studies showing how they work in partnership with industry to deliver social impact visit Finding a redistribution partner on IGD.com.

How do I know where my food is going?
Most redistribution organisations can offer you a site visit to show you how your food is being handled and how it is benefiting the end user.

Discuss with your redistribution partner the data and information you require for reporting purposes.

Guidance to ensure accurate and consistent measurement and reporting of food surplus redistribution has been provided by WRAP and is here.

How will I know my product won’t be sold by a third party?
Redistribution organisations have processes in place to prevent your product being sold to a third party. This should be discussed, reviewed and embedded within any agreement.

What process should I follow to begin redistributing surplus food?
Based on conversations with industry partners, we have identified five stages for successfully accelerating food surplus redistribution in a food business. More information on the process is here.
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Do I need a formal agreement in place?
It is best to set up a formal agreement with your redistribution partner(s).

The agreement should clearly outline both parties’ tasks and responsibilities including preparation, storage and transport.

For more information on how to set up a formal agreement visit Finding a redistribution partner on IGD.com.

Who should I involve in my business?
Initiating or accelerating food surplus redistribution in any organisation will require a degree of change and should be led from the top. Consider establishing a cross-functional team with a clear mandate from senior leadership. Typical functions to include are: corporate responsibility, technical, operations, logistics, legal, IT, finance; project management/business change support.

Who can I contact if I have any further queries?
Contacts for general information include:

- IGD – askigd@igd.com
- WRAP – surplus@wrap.org.uk

If you have any additional questions that you feel should be added to these FAQs, please get in touch: sustainability@igd.com