

How to set up a surplus food collection programme: a guide for hospitality businesses



Introduction

Most hospitality businesses create food surpluses; it is seen as a normal part of business. Some of the surplus is reused, recycled, or composted, but there is a far more beneficial solution. Many businesses, from large supermarket chains to small cafés, now donate their surplus food to good causes. In Wales, helping to reduce food poverty is a key aim of the Welsh Government, and redistribution is a way of helping tackle that aim.

There has recently been significant publicity on supermarkets starting to donate their surplus food. Almost all major chains now do it – in some countries such as France it is now illegal for supermarkets to dispose of their food surplus as waste. However, far more food is wasted in the hospitality industry – such as cafés, restaurants, hotels, schools and hospitals – than in the retail sector.

For a hospitality business, donating surplus food can be easy and worthwhile. It can reduce food disposal costs and support a local community's good cause. It can enthuse staff and create goodwill with customers. It takes a little planning to think where food surplus occurs in the business, sort out storage and paperwork, and find a charity or worthwhile cause. Nevertheless, the likely benefits can far outweigh the initial planning.

This guide gives brief but practical information on how to donate surplus food. It is written by people working in the hospitality sector who know the issues facing businesses.

Identifying if your business has surplus food

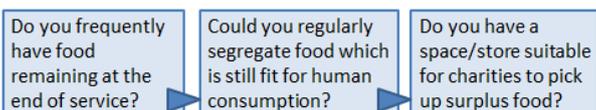
Surplus food is not just the food that a business has not sold at the end of the day - it can occur at a number of points in the food supply chain. These include:

- Delivery Stage – Over-orders, mis-packaging, seasonal items
- Production Stage – offcuts from fresh meat, fruit and vegetables
- Sales Stage – unsold products

We know that the amounts of surplus food a business has may vary significantly from day to day or season to season. That will not be a barrier to setting up a scheme – charities will appreciate that volumes will vary day-to-day.

Considering if a scheme is right for your business

When deciding whether to set up a surplus food collection from your hospitality business you should consider the following steps:



Increasing numbers of businesses now donate their surplus food to charity, and we know many more are interested in getting involved.

In the retail sector these range from large supermarkets to local shops. In the hospitality sector there are examples of large chains donating their surplus unsold products. Many smaller restaurants, cafés and hotels donate their surplus food, sometimes informally, sometimes through a proper scheme. More large organisations, such as colleges and universities, are also starting schemes.

What will happen to my surplus food?

It depends what it is and where it goes. Some surplus food is delivered directly by charities to individuals and family end users who will consume it straight away. Some food, particularly ambient products, can go to the likes of Food Banks who may store it and sort it first. Other foods, such as raw products, are used by community cafés or faith groups, to cook the food to prepare meals for their local communities.

How should I store my surplus food?

Many businesses start by setting up a simple shelving unit, using grocery or cardboard boxes to collect surplus food. This is best situated close to the kitchens and the rear access to make collections easy. Ambient and dry foodstuffs are the easiest to collect and store. However, some businesses go further and have a freezer to store more products. Depending on the process, the business may want to label the boxes that are being donated – to list what it contains, dates, its value or where it is from.

Finding the right partner for you

If you have decided that a surplus food collection programme is right for your business, then the next step is to identify local charities or similar organisations that could benefit from receiving the surplus food that you wish to donate. The types of organisations that are currently benefiting from using surplus food are listed below, though other types of organisations might also wish to redistribute surplus food.

- Community support organisations
- Homelessness organisations
- Children's/ young people's charities
- Organisations for those in crisis
- Food banks
- Charities for older people

There are some technology systems and apps that are designed to connect food surplus providers and charities, for example [Plan Zheroes](#) and [Olio](#). The geographic area in which you would identify charity partners will depend on the size of your business, the amount of the surplus food that you will generate on an average day, and the type of food available (e.g. cooked, fresh or ambient food). The greater the amount and value of food the further a charity is likely to be able to travel to collect the food. Most charities however also have limited resources, so longer travel distances are unlikely to be realistic even for collections from larger businesses. Your business may have already been approached by charities requesting food donations, and this would be a good place to start. Alternatively, you can identify charities in each UK local authority region serving different groups by searching on the [Charity Commission website](#). Homelessness charities in each local authority of the UK can be found on the [Homeless UK website](#). Commercial directories such as Yell and Cylex are also useful to find charities in different towns and near any postcode in the UK.

Once you have identified candidate charity partners the next step is to draw up a list of those to contact. The list should include up to ten charities to give you the best opportunity of finding a partner that can both benefit from receiving the amount of food that you are likely to donate daily and is able to collect from your store at the times that the food is available. The websites of each shortlisted charity can be used to identify an appropriate person to contact in the first instance. Once in contact with the charity you will usually be guided to the right point of contact to discuss the potential for the charity to accept and use surplus food.

Opening the door to a successful partnership

Although some charities or similar organisations have already been involved in surplus food distribution projects locally or elsewhere in the UK, you will find that many have not. You will therefore need to explain the key benefit that the charity will regularly receive free, good quality, food for its clients. You will also need to outline the main points of a scheme which include:

- Collecting the food and food safety once collected will be the responsibility of the charity.
- Collection times are often after service – for example after lunch or the evening meal.
- The range and amount of food available will vary daily and the charity will not know the quantity or type in advance.
- Regular and frequent collection is required if a surplus food project is to be successful.

At this stage, it will also be important to decide the number of charities that you would like to involve in the project. This will depend on the frequency and amount of food that you are likely to have as surplus; the amount of food that can be used by each charity; and the ability of each charity to collect at the agreed frequency. You may therefore wish to have different charities collecting on set days of the week, or more than one charity collecting on the same day. Involving more than one charity also spreads the benefit within the community and keeps the project going if one charity drops out for any reason.

Good communication is very important to create positive relationships – most businesses identify one staff member to be responsible for redistribution.

Defining procedures and agreements

If your business has already been involved in surplus food donation projects, you are likely to have access to appropriate procedures and agreements. If not you will need to draw up the procedures and associated agreement. Links to easily implemented documents are provided at the end of this guide. The procedures to be set up or already used by your business for the donation of surplus food are likely to include:

- The requirement for the charity partners to complete an application form to receive surplus food, requiring information on the charity and possibly a charity number.
- The signature of a Service Level Agreement (**SLA**) between your business and the chosen charity partners.
- Agreement of additional local arrangements for the food collections not contained in the SLA.

The SLA will cover a range of legal and practical aspects of the surplus food project, potentially including the following:

- Responsibilities for the transportation, receipt, storage and security of donated food.
- Conditions on where and how food can be consumed.
- Restrictions on the exchange of donated food.
- The option for monitoring the charity by the food surplus provider.
- The requirement for staff handling food to be knowledgeable in food hygiene.
- The need for collection staff or volunteers to carry identification.

An example SLA can be downloaded [here](#). Local arrangements such as collection days and times, and contact details in case of problems in supplying or collecting food, may form part of the main agreement or could be agreed separately between the charity partners and your company. Whatever the procedure it is important that your agreement and associated procedures require the charity partners to:

- Arrive at the agreed time on each collection day.
- Have appropriate transport to carry the amount and type of food that might be available.
- Be able to get fresh produce and other food nearing its use by date to those requiring the food quickly, or be able to freeze items as appropriate.
- Have good lines of communication if there is no food to collect or if the charity cannot collect on a given day.

Monitoring and evaluation

Your SLA with the partner charities can include the requirement for monitoring, and the data required can take several forms. It could be a simple register to indicate that surplus food was collected by the charity partners on a given day or the charity partner signing a checklist of food items collected. Alternatively, it could entail your charity partners weighing food subsequent to collection and providing the daily weights to you for a fixed period of time.

The benefit of a more formal monitoring approach, including weighing of food, is that it provides reliable data to demonstrate the schemes effectiveness and a

sense check on the business's efficiency. It is also useful information for promoting the scheme and generating positive publicity for the organisations involved.

Lessons from other projects

There are many food businesses just like yours that have been effective in establishing successful relationships with charities and similar organisations to donate good quality food to people in need. To help make your project even more of a success, don't forget to:

- Provide clear and succinct information to relevant members of your staff on the procedures for the segregation and collection of the surplus food and the logistical arrangements.
- Ensure there are good points of contacts between your business and the partner charities and that there is regular liaison.
- Work closely with your charity partner and communicate the benefit of surplus food redistribution to staff so that they better understand the value of the project to the individual charity and the wider community.
- Communicate and celebrate the success of your surplus donations and the positive impact it has in your community.
- Encourage your staff to visit your charity partners, reinforcing the social message of surplus food redistribution and its benefits.

Relevant legislation

Food needs to be fit to eat when it is collected – it can be eaten past its 'Best Before' date but not past its 'Eat By' or 'Use By' date. Freezing food on its Use By date can lengthen its life. Most catering and hospitality businesses will already be aware that foodstuffs can last far beyond their Best Before dates – it is how the food is stored or prepared which is important.

When the surplus food is collected by the charity or organisation it is then their responsibility to keep it safe – they will need to make sure they transport it, store it and cook it properly. Charities should ensure their volunteers and staff have the appropriate food hygiene training. Some charities will also have been inspected by the local Environmental Health Officer.

Businesses should sign an agreement with their chosen charity, which can be accessed below. Alternatively, our [food redistribution webpage](#) provides detailed information and documentation.

Other support

There are many ways you can further help your chosen charity partner. For example:

- Look to work in networks to encourage other hospitality businesses to get involved and generate more surplus food.
- Work with your suppliers, such as local farmers and producers, to help make their surplus food available.
- Consider allowing your kitchen facilities to be used in non-peak periods to create community meals using surplus food. Refer to the links below for further details.

The main help though is to not keep it a secret. Surplus food is a natural consequence of running a hospitality business – the more people who know a business provides surplus food will encourage others to take part.

Summary

Setting up a surplus food project can have real benefits for those in need in your local community and can help local charities to assist these vulnerable groups. The guidance outlined in this document gives you a straightforward process for establishing successful and sustainable projects and provides a route for regularly providing good quality food to those local people in need. WRAP guidance is also available for charities and retailers on how to set up successful surplus food redistribution projects.

Further information and templates

1. WRAP's food redistribution webpages: www.wrap.org.uk/content/foodredistribution
2. 'How-to' guides to set up redistribution partnerships for retailers and charities in Wales: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/piloting-retail-store-surplus-food-redistribution-and-use-wales>
3. A template for a document containing typical additional local arrangements and contact details is available here <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/piloting-retail-store-surplus-food-redistribution-and-use-wales>

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