

Supermarket Food Waste Data in the Spotlight

By Janet Haugan, on November 3rd, 2013

UK-based supermarket giant Tesco published data on its food waste last month, revealing just how much food is wasted on the journey from farm to table. The study measured the waste footprint of 25 of Tesco's best-selling products, examining waste that occurred in the store as well as waste caused by customers after they bought the food. Tesco reported that its stores and distribution centers generated 28,500 tons of food waste in the first half of this year, and though the absolute quantities of waste are astounding, the percentage of food items that is wasted is the real issue: of all the bagged salad Tesco puts out for purchase, 68% ends up in the trash; 40% of all apples get thrown away; 47% of bakery items never make it to the table; the list goes on.



Tesco is the first major UK supermarket to publish these figures, and it begs the question: how much are other retailers wasting? If recent numbers from the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are any indication, it must be substantial—WRAP estimated in 2011 that the UK generates 15 million metric tons of food waste each year.

Thankfully, it appears that Tesco's report shocked the company just as much as it did the public. Tesco is taking action to reduce food waste in its supermarkets by doing things like ending multi-buys on large bags of salad and removing "display until" labels from fruits and vegetables.

This recent coverage emphasizes the urgency for supermarkets and retailers to focus on food waste prevention. While many stores have systems in place to quantify throw at a high level, they are missing out on two critical components: building a waste-aware culture and providing the data granularity that is necessary to enact change.