



Reducing food waste and optimising food pantries - Gary Sharman

How do stakeholders consider that food waste be minimised and donations optimised in food pantry settings?



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BACKGROUND:

This project was prompted by the council's provision of brown bins.

Seeing unopened products going straight into waste, suggested a lack of efficiency in how families are using food. Food pantries are part of the food redistribution system and therefore a good setting to investigate food waste perceptions and ideas.

METHOD:

- Semi-structured group interviews and shopping observations
- Five participants recruited through Facebook & pantry
- Local residents in the Southampton area: three women, two men, mixed in terms of age and ethnicity
- All participants were regular users of the marketplace in Weston and had also used a variety of other food aid outlets in the area.
- Observations of stocking and logistics in supermarkets

FINDINGS:

- **Participants were generally very positive** about the service provided by food pantries and very appreciative of the help provided.
- **Items that food pantries need to stock more of:** milk, eggs, margarine, breakfast cereals (for children)
- **Food that gets wasted in retail and never makes it to the food pantry:** berries and other soft fruits because they cannot be out of the fridge for very long.
- **Food wasted in the food pantry:** potatoes are reportedly the most wasted item – bulk deliveries hides produce that has gone bad & pantries have to dispose of them.
- **Food transportation is an issue:** fresh food from a retail reliable chilled source is often transported in non-refrigerated vans and/or is left waiting to be picked up or delivered. So, the food may not be fit for consumption by the time it gets to the food pantry.



“Customer service and kindness is really important at the food pantry, the volunteers make the whole day complete”

“People would still go, even if there weren't any food.”

How could we reduce waste?

- **Use supermarket “cooling areas” 1hr/week for food pantries and users to come directly**
- Improve transport for fresh food
- Greater use of fridges in food pantries
- Marketplace colour coding system: allow people with dietary restrictions to swap to access more foods they can eat

How could we make it easier to get food into food pantries via donation?

Holidaymakers often buy too much food and leave it behind – set up food donations bins at holiday / caravan parks.

THANKS:

- Southampton City Mission,
- Southampton Voluntary Services
- *Images: wiki commons*