Foodwaste

Within the sustainable food movement, a particular concern is the large amount of waste occurring at every stage of the food chain and its ecological and social repercussions. Many factors contribute to food waste and recent reports estimate that wasted food costs each Irish household approximately €700 annually (EPA, 2011). The findings outlined on this factsheet highlight public attitudes and behaviour towards food waste in Irish households.

Efforts to reduce household food waste

A significant majority of respondents (89%, n=1333) agreed with the statement ‘I try to reduce the amount of food waste my household produces’.

Reasons food is thrown away

Just over a third of all participants (n=535) claimed to never throw food away. As indicated in Figure 5.1, the most common reasons for throwing food away are:

- ‘Too much is bought’ and it expires 27% (n=396)
- Food goes off because of ‘a change in plans’ 21% (n=305)

Incidence of household composting

- Less than half (46%, n=685) of all respondents reported that their household composted.
- With regards to housing tenure, 50% (n=537) of those who are owner occupiers compost their food waste, compared to 38% (n=112) of those who rent (see Figure 5.2).
Encouraging composting

Of the 54% of the sample (n=804) who are not currently engaged in composting:
- 11% (n=89) agreed that there was nothing which would encourage them to start composting in the future.
- Just under one third (n=247) said that the availability of ‘more information’ would encourage them to start.
- A further 22% stated ‘better facilities’ would encourage them (n=177)
- 17% reported that the availability of ‘more space’ would encourage them to compost (n=137) (see Figure 5.3).

Implications

Although a significant proportion of respondents claim that they try to reduce the amount of food which their household produce, it is clear that there is still an unacceptable level of food waste in Ireland, with only one third claiming that they never throw food away. It appears respondents on lower incomes are less likely to try to reduce their food waste and this issue potentially merits further investigation. Of the food which is thrown away, it could be argued that the factors chosen by respondents for disposing of food waste could be averted through better planning and household efficiency. Furthermore, of the food which is wasted, the results show that too few respondents attempt to close the waste loop by composting. The incidence of household composting is clearly influenced by housing tenure, with perhaps the degree of permanency influencing respondents’ composting habits. A notable percentage of householders appear to be unwilling to start composting for any reason. This suggests that mere measures of encouragement may not be enough for the implementation of more sustainable household waste practices.

References

- Environmental Protection Agency (2011). *Stop Food Waste*. Available at: www.stopfoodwaste.ie