

Food waste increases, undermining net zero progress

4 years ago



The majority of food buyers have reported a surge in food waste, putting extra pressure on the UK's largest organisations, with conflict in Ukraine, Covid-related labour shortages and rising costs impacting progress to net zero.

- Nearly nine out of ten (85%) food supply chain heads say the pandemic has caused long-term damage to their supply chain, from which they are yet to recover
- Nearly a third (32%) believe their supply chain will not return to optimum efficiency for a full year
- 44% are impacted by labour shortages and 38% by freight challenges in their supply chain
- Over a third (35%) have also said they will be forced to continue increasing their prices due to the difficulties in managing their supply chain

Unprecedented pressure on supply chains has led to food buyers in the UK's biggest organisations reporting a 60% increase in food waste over the last six months. This surge casts doubt on the food industry's ability to meet the [UN's Sustainable Development Goal](#) to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030, and hampers progress to net zero.

This is according to a new study commissioned by [Sodexo UK & Ireland](#) evaluating how large organisations are navigating the current supply chain crisis and its impact on food waste and carbon emissions. It found 83% of respondents say they have created a more resilient supply chain after the pandemic; however, food waste is increasing for a majority of companies.

Sodexo's research shows that to increase their resilience, UK food supply chain heads are increasingly diversifying their supplier base by working with smaller suppliers, with over a third (38%) doing so. 35% are also looking to source more food domestically.

SMEs form the backbone of this approach with 81% saying the current supply chain crisis has emphasised the need to source more from SMEs. Some suppliers are eager to collaborate further, with 38% agreeing that the sharing of best practice with SME partners in the supply chain to improve efficiencies will best help address the UK's supply chain challenges.

Commenting on the findings Aoife Wycherley, Head of Supply Chain & Food Procurement at Sodexo UK &

Ireland, said:

“Diversifying the food supply chain is essential for building resilience. SMEs can enable greater agility because they’re more flexible, innovative and, tend to drive domestic food sourcing which, in turn, can reduce carbon by cutting down on air and freight usage.

“This makes having SMEs in the supply chain essential for those that need to maintain supply and meet climate targets.

“Carbon data reporting is, however, a huge burden for small businesses, and we need greater industry collaboration from large organisations to support them with this challenge in order to achieve net zero in the supply chain.”

Today’s findings come as Sodexo continues its work with SMEs. These account for three-quarters of its supply chain and for 44% of its spend, enhancing its resilience to continue delivering meals to customers, despite the external market shocks the industry is facing.

Food waste feeding the climate crisis

Reducing food waste is a critical part of minimising carbon emissions in the supply chain. Despite this, over one third (35%) of respondents admit to deprioritising food waste due to the ongoing challenges in the supply chain over the past year. A similar proportion (34%), however, do support the introduction of mandatory food waste reporting which is proposed in the Government’s recently [published food strategy](#).

Claire Atkins-Morris, Director of Corporate Responsibility at Sodexo UK & Ireland, commented,

“We welcome the Government’s decision to consult on mandatory food waste reporting, something which we’ve been calling for in our Appetite for Action campaign.

“The first step towards cutting food waste is tracking and monitoring. More broadly, we urge government to take a holistic approach to all areas which will determine the success of net zero policy making, including food waste, carbon reduction and supply chain resilience.

“The strategy must be broader than focusing on renewable energy and the introduction of electric vehicles.”

Sodexo, which [has pledged](#) to cut its own food waste by 50% by 2025 and achieve net zero by 2045 – found that achieving net zero emissions has become the most important priority for 80% of respondents. Sodexo reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 38.5% in FY21, (against a 2017 baseline measurement of 1.16million tonnes of carbon) across Scopes 1, 2 and 3 which includes emissions from the supply chain. The research also found two-fifths (40%) of food supply chain heads are calling on businesses to adopt net zero policies to future proof a supply chain adhering to science.

Sodexo partnered with WRAP last year in support of the first ever [Food Waste Action Week](#) to tackle food waste and help save the planet. Sodexo is also a signatory of The Courtauld Commitment 2030, a voluntary agreement that enables collaborative action across the entire UK food chain to deliver farm-to-fork reductions in food waste.