



# FOOD WASTE RECYCLING 101



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# BUSINESSES – FOOD WASTE RECYCLING COULD SAVE YOU THOUSANDS

New research has revealed that 99%\* of businesses in the UK either don't know about or if they do, have little or no understanding of the fast-approaching Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Environmental Act which plans to make it a legal requirement in England for companies to recycle food waste. Something that clearly needs to change.

Food waste recycling is mandatory in Scotland and has been since 2016, which means any business that's operating and producing more than 5kg of food waste per week has a legal obligation to recycle by a registered waste carrier service.

This is what the English legislation (proposed to be introduced in 2023) looks likely to enforce, meaning most businesses should be looking to become more educated about food waste recycling and its benefits towards creating a more circular economy.

Yet, due to time constraints, lack of awareness and understanding and multiple priorities when it comes to reducing a business's carbon footprint, there are thousands of companies with little insight and no food waste recycling provision in play.

Here, Grant Keenan, managing director at Keenan Recycling, [www.keenanrecycling.co.uk](http://www.keenanrecycling.co.uk), one of the country's leading food recyclers and who conducted the research, attempts to demystify food waste recycling in a bid to reach more companies that could benefit from servicing their surplus.



**99%\* of UK businesses either don't know about or if they do, have little or no understanding of DEFRA Environmental Act**



**27% of UK businesses said they do not recycle food waste at all**



**38% of UK businesses do not think food waste is a core priority**



# WHAT IS FOOD WASTE RECYCLING?

A 2021 UN report showed that the UK produces around 5.2million tonnes of food waste a year, so it's obvious to say that waste is a country-wide problem and food recycling is a large part of the solution.

For private households, food waste awareness is growing in pace thanks to initiatives, schemes and even apps that facilitate the collection of still edible food waste as well as gradually moving away from a rigid approach to best before dates and visually perfect produce. However, for businesses the situation is still more complex.

Therefore, making any business wise to the many benefits of recycling its food waste by sharing the how, what and why might aid in quicker adoption.

So, what is business food waste? It's the food that is intended for human consumption that is wasted and lost. It can occur anywhere within the entire supply chain from farm stage to harvest right through to consumer household.

When it comes to businesses it can be restaurants generating lots of waste food everyday through to large-scale offices that may only have left over lunch or canteen scraps – it's very diverse.

But in general, most commercial food waste recyclers will collect all types of food waste.

## DOES MY BUSINESS NEED A FOOD WASTE RECYCLING SERVICE/

Typically, for those businesses that sit within the hospitality and food sector it's a no brainer - they will more than likely already have a supplier in play.

**A 2021 UN report showed that the UK produces around 5.2million tonnes of food waste per year.**

This may not be a specific food recycler though, and it has to be stated that, separating food waste from other waste streams will also prevent contamination of other waste, helping with recycling of all the other materials a business may need to service.

So, even if organisations in these sectors have a recycling supplier, it could be more beneficial for the business and the environment to split food waste out.

As said, food waste is everything from employee lunch left-overs through to waste products of industrial food production. Any organisation that has a large-scale workforce and onsite kitchens or food services will likely need a food waste recycling provision.

## WHAT'S THE CURRENT ENGLISH LAW?

At the moment, businesses are only asked that their food waste is securely and safely stored and it's hygienically disposed of, ensuring no cross-contamination with fresh food preparation, with no stipulation that it must be recycled. Soon though, potentially in 2023, it's likely that an Environmental Act driven by DEFRA, will mandate the use of food waste recycling.

This is why there has never been a better time to look at your business' operating practices and introduce simple, easy measures that mean that you are sustainably and legally secure in your food waste policy.

## HOW DO BUSINESSES RECYCLE FOOD WASTE AND WHERE DOES IT GO?

It's not a surprise that commercial food waste recycling works in a slightly different manner to how consumers practice it at home. Many people will compost at home or rely on their council to collect food waste in provided recycling bins, however as you may have experienced not all food waste can be placed into such containers. Items such as potato skin and vegetable peel are more than welcome, whereas animal products such as meat and dairy can be turned away and would need specific treatment.

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## Anaerobic Digestion Process



When it comes to commercial business waste, recycling service providers will help sidestep these complications as they have access to a grander scale of processing facilities.

Part of the Keenan service is to provide a free waste audit for a business to work out the number and size of bins required. These are then delivered to site ready for organisations to simply fill them up and place in the agreed location and time, and pay for collection.

Recyclers that solely focus on food waste, like Keenan, that collect surplus from offices, restaurants, food processors, supermarkets, and other businesses, have specific equipment that enables food waste to be put through a de-packaging pre-treatment. The process utilises turbo separator technology combined with water injection to maximise the separation of organic materials from packaging. The packaging comes out clean ready for disposal, or further recycling. The organic materials recovered are then liquidised and blended, into a 'porridge like' consistency, otherwise known as biofuel.

This biofuel is transported by tankers and is then loaded into Anaerobic Digester tanks, in which it is broken down by anaerobic bacteria over time. This usually takes around 40 days, and may change depending on the AD plant. During this breakdown, methane is produced by the activity of the bacteria. This methane is extracted from the digester and is known as biogas. This biogas can be used for electricity, gas to grid, heating, or even as biomethane for transport.

Once this process is complete, a by-product is left behind, called digestate. Digestate is the fibrous material left over from the food waste, which is then removed and spread to agricultural land as a fertiliser.

So, all in all, there is a lot of good that comes from food waste recycling.



## WHY SHOULD WE RECYCLE FOOD WASTE?

Simply put, by recycling your food waste, you can save some money, help the environment, grow your business's credentials and reduce your carbon footprint.

The alternative to recycling your food waste is to put it in general waste, which gets sent to landfill, there it rots down anaerobically and produces methane (a greenhouse gas) which is 21 times more harmful to the environment than CO<sub>2</sub>. The long-term outlook too is that landfill costs are becoming increasingly expensive – a cost which of course has to be picked up by a business.

Recycling your food waste can also help boost the image of your company. Businesses which embed sustainability within their day-to-day operations are better placed to take advantage of the rise in customer expectation.

Furthermore, taking ownership of your own waste helps minimise demand on already-spread food chains and makes them more sustainable and it will help any business and its staff to minimise costs through greater efficiency.

With pending legislative change and pressure for organisations to make public their own net zero plans, food recycling will be key to how commercial operations function sustainably in the future, the best time to become involved with it is now.

Furthermore, it has to be said again, that separating food waste from other waste streams will also prevent contamination of other waste helping with recycling of all the other materials a business may need to service.

**UK  
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## HOW MUCH COULD A BUSINESS SAVE?

In the recent research conducted by Keenan, it was revealed that on average businesses were spending over £50,862 sending their food waste to landfill, whereas when they were asked about how much they spent on recycling food waste per year the answer was £43,866.34.

Grant Keenan, added:

"If I were to say to you, I'll save you nearly £7,000 for your business tomorrow, I'm sure there would be lots of things that, as a business owner, you could do with that money. That figure represents the average amount a business could save from opting to recycle than send their food waste to landfill.

"A lot of people think it sounds too good to be true, some are time poor and don't have the time to understand the real benefits recycling can bring both financially and to wider business sustainability goals and net zero plans.

"At Keenan we simplify the surplus process and take a lot of the leg work away from busy businesses.

"Something that sets us apart is that we're completely transparent and we give our clients full data of their food waste as we weigh each bin we collect. What this means is that they can clearly demonstrate their carbon emission savings and it gives them real data for their own net zero plans.

"For us, building trust and working in partnership is the most important part of the process, we hope that by debunking some of the myths surrounding food waste recycling, many more businesses across the country will opt to start today and save some money in the process."

**For more information visit:**

**[www.keenanrecycling.co.uk](http://www.keenanrecycling.co.uk) or call 0800 644 6618.**



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