

Too much *and too little?*

Debates on surplus food redistribution



Endorsements

The organisations listed below are very pleased to support the publication of this report. They believe it will make a valuable contribution to the debate about how to tackle food poverty and look forward to participating in the debates which it will instigate.

Centre for Food Policy	National Homeless Alliance
Child Poverty Action Group	Northern Ireland Community Development and Health Network
Community Nutrition Group	Nutrition Advisory Report for Elderly People
Consumer Research	Oxfam GB
Food Commission	Save the Children
Friends of the Earth	South West London Community NHS Trust
King's Fund	The Children's Society
National Association of Teachers of Home Economics / Design and Technology Association	The Food Network at the University of Bradford
National Council of Women	UK Public Health Alliance
National Farmers Union of England and Wales	

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by Corinna Hawkes and Jacqui Webster



Working Party on Food Poverty

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Summary

Throughout the food production and distribution system there is food that is not sold through normal retailing channels, such as products approaching their use-by date, goods with faulty packaging and agricultural produce taken off the market to stabilise prices. This food is termed 'surplus'.

Surplus food redistribution schemes exist to redistribute this food to people who have poor access to food. Food is redistributed via homelessness projects, charities such as the Salvation Army, local authority projects and schools.

Comparison with North America and Europe shows that the relative number of surplus food redistribution schemes in the UK is low. However, the major schemes are expanding, and there are signs that the redistribution of surplus will gain momentum, and expand unchecked as it has in other countries.

Such expansion is unwelcome in that it indicates that Britain has an increasing inability to provide all its citizens with adequate mechanisms, financial or social, to obtain food in culturally acceptable ways. A debate needs to be instigated and further research undertaken so that the development of such schemes is either halted or supported by appropriate policies.

The main schemes in the UK are Crisis FareShare, which collects perishable surplus foods from manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers and distributes via charities to homeless people, and Grocery Aid (formerly Provision), an Institute of Grocery Distribution scheme that channels non-perishable foods from the grocery industry to people in need. Two smaller, local schemes are FoodDelivery, in Portsmouth, and the South and West Lancashire Food Bank, in Skelmersdale. Finally, there is the Intervention Board, the only programme run by a government agency, which redistributes withdrawn agricultural surplus to charities and persons receiving public assistance,

schools, prisons, hospitals and old people's homes.

Although figures remain approximate, it is estimated that over 3000 tonnes of food are distributed in the UK to people in need each year, via more than 500 charities. This contributes to a total of around 152,000 meals per week (around 8 million meals per year). The operating cost of Crisis FareShare, Grocery Aid, FoodDelivery and the South and West Lancashire Food Bank is over £1 million. It was not possible to obtain figures from the Intervention Board.

There are also a number of smaller, more direct store-charity liaisons, the most prominent being the surplus food donations by local Marks & Spencer's stores to the Salvation Army, children's homes and homelessness centres. Since its successful partnership with Crisis FareShare, Sainsbury is now also expanding its more direct store-charity links. Supermarkets are increasingly keen to become involved in such schemes as alternatives to disposing of waste. Landfill taxes are increasing, and soon an EU law will ban disposal of food in landfills. Donation also can be beneficial for staff morale and public relations, as food donations are seen to be a socially responsible way to help those in need.

The Intervention Board, the UK government agency responsible for the withdrawal and redistribution of surplus agricultural produce, deals with huge quantities of surplus. In 1998 it issued guidelines to help redistribution to charities, but many practical problems associated with redistributing such large amounts remain. Coventry City Council is in the process of starting up a pilot scheme to co-ordinate the distribution of surplus to charities throughout the area.

The private surplus redistribution schemes provide food to charities which serve meals on site. They rarely give out food as parcels direct to individuals to take home. This is in part related to very strict adherence to food safety regulations.

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However the Intervention Board is able to provide EU surplus to individuals.

In the U.S., the Food Stamps Program is seen as the most important source of food for people on low incomes. But this federal food assistance has not eliminated the need for private food redistribution programmes. The government has gradually cut back on the Food Stamps Program and encouraged charitable donations of surplus from corporate donors with a tax break. It also has Good Samaritan Food Donation laws to protect donors from liability. In the U.S. private charities redistribute around 660,000 tonnes of food to 26 million people per year.

The movement in Canada followed that of the U.S. and is dominated by food banks. As in the U.S., the movement grew during a time of increasing poverty and decreasing social spending. In 1997 4500 tonnes of food were distributed to over 3 million people. The situation is different to the U.S. in that Canada has no Food Stamps Program and no tax incentives for donors.

There is an extensive network of food banks in Europe, co-ordinated by the European Federation of Food Banks, which had 136 members in 1997 (including one in Dublin). The EU Surplus Food Scheme contributes up to a third of food bank supplies (although only 2.3% of fruit and vegetables withdrawn are distributed in this way). The rest of the food is made up of donations from food retailers.

The efficacy of surplus food redistribution is currently being debated in North America. Questions have been raised as to whether food redistribution actually perpetuates food poverty, rather than promoting empowerment and long-term solutions. It is thus vital that both the long and short-term effects of such schemes are examined in the UK. The debates around surplus food redistribution are summarised here.

Proponents of surplus food redistribution see it as a win-win situation - feeding those in need while saving waste. Critics say food insecurity should be addressed as an entirely different issue to waste disposal. But is there a moral and practical imperative to save wasted food while people are in need? And do the two issues in fact merge to create a workable solution to a difficult problem, or should they be kept separate?

Many people in the UK suffer from food poverty of some type. Is it better to use surplus food to amend this situation, while at the same time seeking longer-term solutions to the problem? Or, should such schemes be avoided, because in the long-term redistribution schemes may be problematic and difficult to reverse once people become dependent on them?

Surplus food redistribution is seen as a stop-gap, 'band-aid' solution by most of those who work in the schemes. But does it undermine its own emergency element by deflecting public and political attention from the need for long-term reform of the structural causes of deprivation? Or does it in fact highlight the problems, and so kick-start governments into action? Are surplus food redistribution schemes in fact in a powerful position to raise awareness of the structural causes of the problem?

Most surplus food redistribution is carried out by private schemes. Does this undermine the safety net of public welfare by unwittingly replacing it, so playing into the hands of governments who wish to save money on welfare? Or is the redistribution of surplus an unbureaucratic way to help those who will inevitably slip through the safety net? If surplus food redistribution schemes are to exist, should local government, as opposed to private charities, run them as part of their welfare policy?

Surplus food is mainly distributed as 'handouts.' Does this divert attention and funding from community-based food initiatives? Would it be

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better to redirect the money which funds redistribution to community self-help schemes? Or could the surplus food be used as part of community food initiatives such as cooking classes? Are there lessons to be learnt in this 'handout' versus 'self-help' debate from the analysis of emergency food aid to poorer nations?

There are benefits to food retailers when they donate their surplus. So what is the aim of the retailer when it donates surplus? Financial benefits and corporate kudos, or an educated contribution to problems of deprivation? Why do retailers have so much surplus anyway? If they have costed surplus into prices borne by the consumer, are they really part of the solution - or part of the problem?

There are many different ways to redistribute surplus food. Are some ways better than others? Should we be encouraging certain schemes - those which have potential to boost the nutritional intake of the recipients at a local level, for example, while arguing against others - perhaps national schemes which have no particular understanding of food insecurity issues? How can, or how should, the benefits of the different schemes be evaluated?

In the UK, most surplus food is redistributed to charities to supplement their supplies bought with charity funds, or donated 'harvest-festival' style. Are the arguments against surplus food redistribution also arguments against any 'handout' based food charity, whether the food is surplus or not? How does the surplus nature of the food affect the nature of the debate?

Many advocates of surplus food redistribution see it as a practical solution; others see it as a political minefield. So should the issue of surplus food redistribution be argued in a political context, or a non-ideological, practical one?

Critics of surplus food redistribution have assessed the situation in North America, a situation very different from the UK. For example,

North America has a very different system of government and welfare. Also, 'hunger' is a much-talked about issue, whereas in the UK, the problem is rarely named as 'hunger', but as 'homelessness' or 'poverty'. Do such differences render the criticisms irrelevant to this country, or can they shine light on what might happen in the UK? For example, will welfare reform in the UK favour privatised surplus food redistribution in the future as the U.S. government does now?

Recommendations

The key question to be answered is whether surplus food redistribution should be judged as a political or practical issue. Politically, we have argued that food redistribution is not an effective way to resolve problems associated with poverty and food, nor with excess food production, and as such we would not recommend such initiatives as long-term solutions to food poverty. However, these initiatives are already established and used by members of the public and any suggestion that they might be removed will be seen as, and experienced, as a retrograde step. Our recommendations are therefore as follows:

There should be a wider debate on the long-term implications of surplus food redistribution and how it relates to welfare provision and to longer-term structural responses to food poverty. This debate should be aired throughout the redistribution chain, from those eating the food to those donating it.

Government should undertake to maintain social security provision, by adopting minimum income standards that take into account the amount of money required to purchase a healthy diet, and not allow this to be substituted for by surplus food redistribution.

The question of why surplus food exists in the first place needs to be placed under greater public scrutiny and policies to reduce waste need to be implemented.

Those involved in surplus food redistribution schemes should play a role in advocating longer-term solutions to food poverty and homelessness as well as distributing surplus food. The donors should not have any influence over the campaigning views the recipients may choose to take.

The relationship between surplus food redistribution and community food initiatives needs to be explored further with the people involved.

Policies should be developed to ensure that the work of community food projects is not undermined by the development of organisations distributing surplus food.

There should be a more thorough assessment of the costs, effectiveness and efficiency of surplus food redistribution schemes, including the Intervention Board scheme, and the impact they have on local agencies.

Further research is needed at all levels to aid the above recommendations, including a closer examination of the situation in the rest of Europe.

There should be improved liaison on these issues at national, European and international level between and within the voluntary sector, government and the private sector.

1 Introduction

Surplus is produced throughout food production and distribution systems. Examples abound: agricultural products are withdrawn from the market for price stabilisation; dry goods packed in erroneous packaging are removed from sale; unsold sandwiches and fresh food are disposed of at the end of the day. Most finds its way to landfill - a costly form of waste disposal with a negative environmental impact. Yet much of this surplus food is perfectly edible and does not need to be thrown away.

...while food is so plentiful it is discarded, people remain hungry. Thus arises an emotive paradox: want amidst plenty.

At the same time, there are many people suffering from food poverty; people who lack access, for whatever reason, to an adequate food supply. So while food is so plentiful it is discarded, people remain hungry. Thus

arises an emotive paradox: want amidst plenty. Within this apparent paradox a practical solution has arisen: methods of redistributing surplus food away from the dustbin towards those in need. Such surplus food redistribution schemes now exist all over the industrialised world. But is this a solution to food poverty?¹

When the Institute of Grocery Distribution was setting up their surplus redistribution scheme, Provision (now Grocery Aid), in 1991, Tim Lang, a member of the National Food Alliance (NFA) working party on food poverty, wrote a letter to its Director to try and discourage the scheme. Basing his analysis on similar schemes in Canada and the U.S., he wrote: "Both critics and supporters agree that schemes which were set up in the heat of the moment as crisis solutions have ended up being institutionalised. The net result is that problems the schemes sought to eradicate are not resolved, even if some paper is thrown over the cracks."

When the Director of the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) visited Sustain (then the NFA), over three years ago, she echoed these concerns. She praised the UK movement to address food poverty, which was based on a strong network of community

food projects. This contrasted sharply to the situation in Canada, she said, where millions of Canadians now relied on surplus food redistribution (via food banks).

Since this visit, Sustain has continued to develop and expand the food poverty network,² which promotes and supports community food projects such as food co-operatives, community cafes and cooking clubs. It works with a range of partners to develop appropriate policies to promote and support these projects and to tackle the structural and cultural causes of food poverty.

More recently, however, it has become aware that the surplus food redistribution schemes (also termed 'food recovery') that the Director of the CAFB cautioned against, are rapidly on the increase in the UK. There is a surprisingly high number of food projects that receive free food from such schemes on the food and low income database of the food poverty network. Crisis FareShare, established to collect and distribute surplus foods from retailers to homeless people in London, is now developing a franchise scheme to operate in other cities. Grocery Aid (formerly Provision), the grocery industry's project to 'channel surplus food to those in need', is looking at ways of making its current distribution systems more efficient with a view to expanding in the future. New, more effective ways of distributing the fruit and vegetables withdrawn by the government's Intervention Board are being piloted, a recommendation of the 1998 Inequalities in Health (Acheson) Report. And the retail industry, at first a reluctant partner, is now keen to take an active role

Food poverty can be defined in various ways.¹ Here it is defined as 'the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so'. In the United States, the term **food insecurity**, with a similar definition, is used more often. It is defined as the 'limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited and uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways'. It includes **hunger**, 'the uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food. The recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food'.

Introduction

in these schemes, both as an alternative to increasingly costly landfill taxes for waste, and to promote its image as a socially responsible actor doing its part to tackle food poverty. At the same time the welfare state is undergoing a period of change and government is positively promoting public-private

partnerships. It seems that everything is in place for surplus food redistribution schemes to expand unchecked in the UK, as they have in other countries.

So it is vital that both the long-term and the short-term effects of such schemes are

examined. The comments by the Director of CAFB raise several interesting issues in a debate that has not been fully aired. Is surplus food redistribution beneficial or detrimental to food security? Should food redistribution schemes be encouraged and supported? If so, how? If discouraged, what are the alternatives? Is the money allocated to surplus food redistribution well spent? Little work has been done on these issues in the UK. Whilst there are clear differences between the situation in the U.S. and Canada and that developing here, what happened in North America could shine light on what might happen in the future.

It is important that a debate is instigated and further research undertaken, so that the development of such schemes to tackle food poverty is either halted or supported by appropriate policies. It is important that people involved in such schemes, including those providing food (such as retailers or the Intervention Board), those re-distributing the food (such as Crisis FareShare and Grocery Aid), beneficiaries (such as the Salvation Army, homeless centres or community food projects) and those who may be promoting or supporting such schemes (such as national and local government, health authorities, voluntary organisations and community groups) are aware of the many complex arguments for and against such schemes. Such a debate is important not only for those directly involved with surplus food

redistribution, but also several government departments. Measures to deal with food poverty are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and the Social Exclusion Unit, while homelessness and other welfare issues are dealt with by the Department for Social Security and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). The DETR also deal with another subject of this report, waste disposal. The efficacy of the Intervention Board is of direct interest to its associated body, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Finally, it is likely that the newly established Food Standards Agency will have a role to play in taking forward this debate and developing appropriate policies.

This document aims to provide a basis and stimulus for this debate by explaining:

what food redistribution schemes exist and how they work;

how much food is redistributed in this way and who benefits;

how the UK situation compares to other countries;

some of the arguments for and against such schemes.

This report sets out the main methods of redistributing surplus food and analyses their effectiveness, efficiency and the rights and wrongs of such schemes. Each of the UK schemes is described, followed by the statistics of how much surplus food is redistributed and to whom. The situation is then compared with other countries. These earlier sections are used as the basis for the subsequent discussion. The arguments for and against, both practical and political, are presented. All sources are listed in the reference section at the end of the report.

2 Surplus food redistribution: methods and food types

Many different types of surplus foods are redistributed, and there are many different ways to redistribute it. A simple classification is given below.³

2.1 Types of redistributed surplus food

Unprofitable agricultural crops, either not harvested (termed 'field gleaning' in the U.S.) or withdrawn from the market post-harvest

An old phenomenon, from wheat mountains during the 1930s American Depression, through the EC butter mountain, the surpluses are produced in response to guaranteed prices. This stimulates production well above demand, potentially resulting in a flooded market. Therefore, to prevent prices from crashing, the product is withdrawn from the market.

Non-perishable processed foods

Mislabelling of foods with a long shelf-life such as tins, dry goods and jars prevents sale by manufacturers, wholesalers and retailer even though the food is edible. Other examples include packaging damage, incorrect packaging, out-of-date promotions, cancelled orders, and short-dating (product is too close to use-by to make it worth the retailer buying it from the manufacturer).

Perishable fresh foods

Fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, chilled ready meals, dairy products and meat from retailers may be on its sell-by but before its use-by at the end of the day. It cannot be sold but remains safe to eat. Also, agricultural producers or importers may be unable to sell their produce to supermarkets because the fruits or vegetables are the wrong shape or size. In other cases, perishable foods may be short-dated.

Perishable prepared foods

These include sandwiches, cakes and pastries, and other prepared meals, from cafes, sandwich stores and restaurants that would otherwise go stale.

2.2 Methods of redistributing surplus food

The four main methods of redistributing surplus food are described below. Details of the different schemes in the UK are given in section 3.

2.2.1 Middlemen: transporting surplus perishable fresh and prepared food to charities

Surplus fresh and prepared food can be collected when it is at its sell-by date. It then must be redistributed immediately so it can be eaten before its use-by date, that same day or the next (loose produce has no labelled use-by so must be given away before it goes rotten). The organisations set up to fulfil this task are essentially middlemen between donor and recipient, providing an infrastructure aiming to increase the efficiency of the service, and ensure food safety.

The recipients are usually charities, sometimes local authorities. The food may be given to the recipients in its original form - sandwiches for a homeless shelter, for example, or cooked for a hot meal in a day centre.

A recent report in the UK showed that supermarkets generate a significant amount of surplus perishable food.⁴ There are two schemes that redistribute supermarket surplus: Crisis FareShare in London, with six franchises around the country, and FoodDelivery, on a smaller scale in Portsmouth.

2.2.2 Surplus perishables transported direct from donor to charity

Surplus perishables are picked up directly from the donor by the charity, with no 'middlemen' or much infrastructure involved (examples in section 3.2).

Surplus food redistribution: methods and food types

2.2.3 Food banks

A food bank is: "a centralized warehouse or clearing house registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing surplus food, free of charge, to front line agencies which provide supplementary food and meals to the hungry."⁵ Food banks deal with faulty non-perishable processed foods with a long shelf-life such as tins, dry goods and jars. Manufacturers, wholesalers and supermarkets donate to the food bank which then redistributes to charities, government agencies or, (out of the UK), individuals. Food banks also receive non-surplus food, donated from harvest festivals, individual donations, churches etc.

On a universal basis, food banks are the most common way to redistribute surplus food (there are hundreds worldwide). The methods of operation and funding vary enormously. There is only one official food bank in the UK, the South and West Lancashire Food Bank. Also, one of the two main surplus food redistributors in the UK, Grocery Aid, is listed in the 1998 International Food Bank Directory.⁶ However, Grocery Aid does not call itself a food bank because it differs from the American model where food is given from the bank to food pantries (agencies that distribute food as parcels to take home). Still, because it approximates to the definition of a food bank defined above, it is listed as one here (see section 3.3.1).

2.2.4 Redistribution of agricultural surplus

A government body usually deals with agricultural surplus removed from the market. In the UK the Intervention Board carries out this task, withdrawing products when prices fall below certain levels (details given in section 3.4).

3 Middlemen

3.1.1 Crisis FareShare

Crisis FareShare⁷ was set up in 1994 by the charity Crisis, as one of a range of programmes dealing with homeless people in the UK. Three issues spearheaded the launch. One was the simple fact that homeless people needed food. Second, a large amount of surplus food from retailers was going to waste. Third, research carried out at the time showed that three out of five homeless people had no intake of fresh fruit and vegetables.⁸ Crisis FareShare was set up to meet all these needs. The target group was, and remains, homeless people.

The scheme was piloted in London, but now has franchises in Southampton (since summer 1998), Kirklees (December 1998) and Birmingham (March 1999). Manchester and South Yorkshire (Barnsley) started redistributing food in September and December 1999 respectively, and Edinburgh started operation in March 2000. Franchises are used to maintain the local nature of Crisis FareShare - local businesses supplying local homeless people with food - while providing a central source of information on funding and other practical issues. Before each franchise is set up, a viability study is carried out to assess whether there is a need for the service and willing donors. Once set up, the franchise management can encourage donations from local companies, while relationships with national supermarkets are co-ordinated from London. For example, Birmingham Crisis FareShare has forged links with a local organic food importer and a distribution warehouse - but still mainly relies on Sainsbury's. The reason for the location of each franchise varies, but primarily reflects 'Rough Sleepers Initiative' zones, coupled with impetus from homelessness workers aware of Crisis FareShare.

The infrastructure of Crisis FareShare has developed over the years. Core funding is from the National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB), corporate donations (Sainsbury's), and the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. Local projects also have some local authority funding (Southampton and Birmingham). In Kirklees, the scheme was entirely financed by the local authority.

Currently annual operating costs are around £70,000 per scheme.

Crisis FareShare was set up with the support of Marks and Spencer's, the New Covent Garden Soup Company and Pret à Manger. They also now have a working relationship with Sainsbury's, which not only donates food (any new franchisee opening can be guaranteed donations), but provides assistance such as training, and the secondment of a manager (from April 1997, originally with a two-year contract). Yet some relationships between franchises and local store managers are rather weak, probably because donations are negotiated at a national level. So far, there are a total of 39 Sainsbury's stores involved - an increase from 21 in June 1999, with four more just linked in Edinburgh in March 2000. In August 1999 formal links between Asda and Crisis FareShare were set up.

The relationship between Sainsbury's and Crisis FareShare, along with other regular donors such as Pret à Manger and Boots, was built up largely owing to confidence in Crisis FareShare's strict adherence to food safety regulations (thus protecting the retailers from prosecution) and because the retailers feel that Crisis FareShare is well managed and extremely reliable - food will always be collected at the specified time and it regularly checks the projects involved.

Each Crisis FareShare scheme has a manager and, with the exception of Kirklees, an assistant, and either volunteer or New Deal drivers. Surplus food is collected at specified times from a network of donors, mainly Sainsbury's, Pret à Manger, Marks and Spencer's and Boots, in refrigerated vans. The type and amount of food collected varies daily, and depends also on the degree of cooperation by the store. All the food brought in is sorted and then listed using some specially developed computer software. The food is stored in fridges and freezers while the managers phone around the recipient projects to see what food they want. According to what is available, the food is then packed into trays to suit project requirements, and delivered the following morning. There is no pressure on the recipients to accept it. The

Middlemen

amount of deliveries varies between the schemes. There are two per week in London to 34 projects, for example, but four in Birmingham to 12.

So far Crisis FareShare donates to 60 agencies (charities and some local authorities) including 33 in London, contributing to approximately 17,427 meals per week. All recipients have some connection with homelessness, whether it be a shelter for rough sleepers, a hostel, or a counselling centre for those in temporary accommodation. FareShare aims to ensure that all recipients have ready-established food provision schemes, so the food from FareShare supplements the other supplies, substituting, for example, fresh potatoes for dried, adding in fresh vegetables, or providing an extra meal. The fact that clients are homeless, coupled with food safety concerns, means that agencies rarely distribute food as parcels (agencies are contractually obliged to serve food on site).

3.1.2 FoodDelivery

FoodDelivery⁹ was set up in December 1996. It was effectively set up by Portsmouth City Council as part of its anti-poverty strategy. (Portsmouth suffers from particular deprivation due to unemployment. The navy, on which the city relied, is much smaller than previously and the dockyards have closed.) A study showed that five out of seven of Portsmouth's disadvantaged people never ate fruit and vegetables and, being aware of Crisis FareShare, the council thought such a scheme might work in Portsmouth (it did not have the option of becoming a Crisis FareShare franchise because the system had not yet been set up). An IBM manager carried out a free feasibility study, showing that thirty stores would be willing to donate surplus, and that charities would welcome the food. The City Council then asked the Portsmouth Council of Community Service (PCCS), an independent charity which runs community schemes such as Rape Crisis and the Rough Sleepers Initiative, to run the food redistribution programme, and FoodDelivery was set up. The co-ordinator of FoodDelivery visited Crisis FareShare in London to get an idea of how it operated.

Food Delivery's aim is to: "give the disadvantaged in the city access to a healthier diet by distributing surplus, high quality fresh food from warehouses, shops, hotels and restaurants to centres which provide meals to the homeless and low income groups (including pensioners)." It is fully funded by Portsmouth City Council, to the tune of £43,000 per year. It has three members of staff including the co-ordinator, David Wilesmith. The other staff used to be volunteers but are now paid to prevent them from having to enter a Welfare to Work programme. They operate from a small low-rental garage in Portsmouth, with a cheap (unrefrigerated) Ford Transit van. All refrigerators and the other equipment are second-hand, and a computer was donated by IBM.

About three times a day, food is collected from donors, brought in, sorted, and sent out to recipients. Forms are filled in at point of donation, the food is weighed when brought in, and details of the food items for each charity are recorded. David Wilesmith sorts the food and decides who will need what. Food that looks bad or is after its use-by date is thrown away, while food that is before its sell-by date is put in the crates for sending out that day. Food not yet near the sell-by date may be stored for later use. The scheme operates Mondays to Fridays because most hostels have prearranged meals at the weekend, and many other charities do not provide food on those days.

FoodDelivery has five food donors: Marks and Spencer's, Tesco, Safeway, Sainsbury's and Food Larder (a wholesaler). The main and original donor was Marks and Spencer's, which was donating directly to charities before FoodDelivery was set up. Obtaining the trust of the supermarkets was essential, and the other donors eventually agreed to donate because they saw the scheme was reliable. Many stores which said in the feasibility study that they would donate do not. Also, FoodDelivery originally tried to obtain food from Grocery Aid (see 3.3.1), but it did not have a distribution depot so far south. It is also aware of the Intervention Board, but this distributes food in quantities too large for the FoodDelivery storage facilities.

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The amount of food from each store, indeed whether the stores donate surplus food, is often dependent on individuals. For example, the amount of food given varies with the manager on duty at Marks and Spencer's.

FoodDelivery contributes to meals for between 12-15,000 people a week via 27 charities (having started with just eight). With the influence of Crisis FareShare, the original idea was to provide food for homeless shelters, but the recipients soon spread to include other disadvantaged groups. Food Delivery has a policy of not serving charities that started providing food because of the existence of FoodDelivery, but instead aims to sustain existing food provision of charities that already have the necessary infrastructure.

When Crisis FareShare set up its franchise system, it invited FoodDelivery to join but it refused. It didn't want to deal exclusively with homeless people and the administration for a new franchise was considerable for it as a small organisation. There are two key service differences between FoodDelivery and Crisis FareShare: a) food is not stored overnight but immediately sent out to recipients, so there is no need for a refrigerated van; b) the recipients are not telephoned in advance to find out what they want. Also, FoodDelivery has not gained from the automatic links with Sainsbury's available to Crisis FareShare franchisees, so have developed its own links with donors.

3.2 Direct store - charity liaison

Surplus food redistribution in the UK is not all carried out by special organisations. There are also less structured links between retailers and charities. In these instances, charities come direct to the store to pick up left-over food. The main case of this is Marks and Spencer's, where donations are encouraged from Head Office, but links are managed locally. Consequently, surplus food donations are common

practice for all Marks and Spencer's stores. Details of the redistribution vary between stores, but there is a general pattern: food - mainly bread, cakes, chilled foods and produce - is sent to the staff shop or cafeteria for sale. Anything still remaining is packaged up and given to recipient projects in the evening. There are contracts with the charities, who are subject to spot-checks to guarantee food safety. Recipients include the Salvation Army, children's homes and homeless shelters.¹⁰

Sainsbury's have also now linked 39 stores around the country with local charities, seven more than August 1999¹¹ (and in addition to the 35 Crisis FareShare links). This represents a policy reversal from the 1980s, when previous attempts to redistribute food on a more ad hoc basis had raised food safety and security issues. In fact, it was only in 1998-99, after its successful partnership with Crisis FareShare, that Sainsbury's tried again. It is now 'pushing the boat out' in an attempt to expand informal networks, and trying to link all stores and depots to charities where feasible. "We're almost at the 80 mark with the supermarkets (out of 419)," says James McKechnie, Group Waste Manager at Sainsbury's. "Realistically, it will take 2-3 years to link them all."¹² A partnership is currently on trial with two meals-on-wheels schemes of the Women's Royal Voluntary Scheme (WRVS), to link stores in areas where Crisis FareShare is not operating. In 1999 Sainsbury's, which regards donation as being non-competitive, raised the food donation issue with the British Retail Consortium (BRC), and invited its rivals to join it. The suggestion is to have 'milk-rounds' from all food stores (not just Sainsbury's) in a local area in order to increase quantities available to charity. The suggestions have had a positive response, with the BRC being generally supportive of the idea.¹³

Details of other surplus food donations are listed in the report *Waste not, Want not*.¹⁴ This showed that wastage from hotels on an individual basis was small, and rarely, if ever, redistributed. Some small food retailers, such as sandwich stores, gave away surplus to local homeless people or the Salvation Army. The majority, however, threw it away or gave it for pig

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feed. A number of organisations were telephoned for this report to see if the situation had changed since 1997 when the report was written. It was thought that, since Crisis FareShare is now more well-known and landfill costs have increased, more food might be redistributed. However, there seems to be no clear trend in terms of whether more food is redistributed. Garfunkels' policy is to throw food away, while Greggs Bakery sends surplus for pig food. Some food chains, such as Pizza Express, report negligible waste while others are hoping to distribute surplus in the future.

3.3 Food banks

3.3.1 Grocery Aid (formerly Provision)

Provision¹⁵ was set up in 1993 by the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD), an industry body made up of subscribing members (including manufacturers and retailers). An 'Industry Initiative' (that is, totally established by the grocery industry), it became a fully-fledged charity in 1997. Its mission is: "To provide for the needy, products from the food and grocery trade, which improve the quality of their everyday life" and to "channel surplus food to those in need." Provision was renamed 'Grocery Aid' in October 1999, to mark a broadening and restructuring of its service.

To initiate the scheme, Provision asked manufacturers to donate surplus products. These surplus products are now distributed from four Grocery Aid depots (Manchester, Bristol, Durham and Broxburn, Scotland) and one Salvation Army depot (London). The depots are spaces in warehouses provided by companies such as Safeway (Bristol) and Elddis (Durham). Sponsored employees or secondees from the industry manage the warehouses. In most cases, the donating companies transport the goods to the depots. As this is not always possible, some companies provide subsidised transport to the depot (for example, TNT, Tibbet & Britten). The charities call into the depot every two weeks by arrangement and make their choice of food and household products on the understanding that the food types will vary. On

average, each charity receives £7,000 worth of products per year.

Grocery Aid is funded through charitable donations from the food and grocery industry. Manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers may offer funds, warehouse space, or second managers. These 'gifts in kind' account for 50% of the costs and the remaining 50% is obtained from industry fund-raising events (Christmas balls, etc). In 1998, including both 'gifts in kind' and cash, Provision cost £550,000 to run.

Grocery Aid receives, or has received, food from around 200 manufacturers and retailers including Birds Eye, Wall's, Campbells and Waitrose. Closer connections have recently been forged with Sainsbury's depots. Mostly ambient (i.e. non-chilled) goods in packets and tins are donated, but Grocery Aid also accepts frozen food, toiletries and household goods. It also receives one-off donations from various places - the European Union (EU) Surplus Food Scheme, for example. Although the products constantly vary, main items include cereals, cake mixes, sauces, pickles and EU beef. None of the items are beyond use by dates, although some may have an insufficient shelf life for the trade. All products are traceable through the EU Scheme's batch coding system, and physical security measures mean no products are illegally sold. Since inception, Grocery Aid has distributed around £15m worth of products.

Grocery Aid currently serves 378 charities, contributing to approximately 6 million meals per year, reaching some 10,000 people per week. There is a waiting list of around 100 (many charities are not able to join simply because they are too far away from the depots - FoodDelivery is one example). The charities must be registered with Grocery Aid. When they register they are risk assessed for food safety and hygiene to determine what range of goods they can receive. In addition, charities are given advice on food safety and how to become low risk when handling food. A variety of organisations benefit from Grocery Aid, including: organisations for homeless people, rehabilitation centres, refugees, the disabled, children's homes (the NSPCC) and the Salvation Army. In fact, the Salvation Army receives most of its surplus

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food from Grocery Aid. Grocery Aid does not give to pantries which distribute food as parcels, to prevent food being used after its use-by date, or being illegally sold.

An informal relationship does exist between Crisis FareShare and Grocery Aid. For example, if Grocery Aid is offered fresh foods it passes them on if possible, and vice versa.

The restructuring of Provision into Grocery Aid in late 1999 was part of its ongoing plan of expansion to serve a greater number of charities. It hopes to build on the achievements of previous years 'with renewed vigour', and to 'help even more people and get the whole industry involved'.

3.3.2 The South and West Lancashire Food Bank

The South and West Lancashire Food Bank,¹⁶ based in Skelmersdale, was set up as a registered charity in January 1995. The founder was a Catholic priest who had worked with the Dublin City Food Bank (DCFB). Upon moving to Lancashire, he contacted the local voluntary service scheme. A steering group was set up to assess feasibility, and found that charities would welcome a food bank. Money was raised from the grant-making trust Barings, and the food bank set up with the aim of: "The relief of poverty through providing food aid and relief goods to the needy and destitute in particular within a 25 mile radius of Skelmersdale."

Initially, Provision (now Grocery Aid) supplied the food. The South and West Lancashire Food Bank co-ordinator collected food from Provision by van, and drove to an arranged distribution point. The recipients then drove to the distribution point to pick up the products.

Provision later backed out because it was unhappy about third party distribution. The South and West Lancashire Food Bank then found storage space and other donors which were all food retailers or warehousing companies with local outlets (e.g. Heinz

in Wigan, Billingtons sugar in Liverpool, Pataks in Haydock). The post office donated a van. The scheme has now secured £44,000 over three years from the NLCB (until December 2000). This funds a 28-hour week for a manager, but is not sufficient to cover running costs. A membership fee of £50 per year (bringing in around £850 per year) was introduced in 1998 to help cover costs. (A minority of charities subsequently withdrew, but most find it worthwhile.) The food bank also takes food donations, mainly from churches, and financial contributions from local companies.

The majority of the food donated is tinned pasta, sauces (curry, pasta, cheese), frozen pizza, soft drinks, crisps, and also toiletries. The donations (74 in 1998) are driven to the food bank where they are stored (in a bungalow, and sometimes at a local butcher if freezer space runs out). The registered users are then called and pick up the food by appointment. Members are all from the North West of England, and include homeless people's shelters, old people's charities, women's refuges, youth and community schemes, drug rehabilitation centres and Local Authority Family Support Services. Each application for membership is considered by the food bank committee, and accepted only if the organisation is felt to be in keeping with the aims of the food bank.

Most recipients supplement what they receive from the bank with food from other sources. For example, if they receive pasta sauces they buy pasta, or rice if they get tinned curry. Some recipients have expanded their food provision since the food bank opened, and in some cases initiated a food scheme.

The food bank is the only UK member of the European Federation of Food Banks (see section 4.3).

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3.4 Redistribution of agricultural surplus

3.4.1 The Intervention Board

The European Union (EU) Surplus Food Scheme was introduced to reduce surplus intervention stocks and to contribute to the well being of deprived EU citizens.¹⁷ In the UK, the Intervention Board¹⁸ is the government agency responsible for the withdrawal and redistribution of this surplus. Farmers are paid compensation at fixed, flat rates for produce withdrawn, with money obtained from the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

There is a list of products that can be withdrawn. Between 1987-95 and 1997-98 the UK participated in the Surplus Food Scheme for beef, though this ceased after the BSE scare and 'disappointing uptake' of the scheme by charities. In late 1997, the Food Commission revealed that fruit and vegetables withdrawn from the market in the UK (apples, pears and cauliflowers) could also be redistributed, but were being used for animal feed and composting.¹⁹ For 25 years, EC regulation 1035/72 had allowed distribution to charities and persons receiving public assistance, schools, prisons, hospitals and old people's homes. But it was only revision of the regulation to 2200/96 during 1996 CAP reform that charities etc. were given clear priority over other means of disposal. In December 1998,²⁰ following implementation of the regulation, the Intervention Board issued guidelines on distribution to charities. Potential recipients must apply to the Intervention Board, satisfy certain eligibility criteria, and be prepared to accept at least one pallet weighing 750 kilograms (50 boxes, with around 5000-6000 pieces of fruit).

Timing of withdrawal, and therefore distribution, is irregular. Produce is delivered with the aid of volunteers to a point where the recipient must pick it up. Although names and numbers of recipients are unknown for data protection reasons, throughout 1999, interest in the scheme increased. For example, Coventry City Council is in the process of starting up a pilot scheme to co-ordinate the distribution of

Intervention Board surplus to charities throughout the area.²¹ A community project in Plymouth is another recipient.²² Both recipients interviewed faced practical problems of redistributing such large quantities of perishable food at one time.

Between December 1998 and August 1999, the Board distributed nearly 515 tonnes of food to charities, schools and institutions. This is less than distributed in other European countries because there are much lower quantities withdrawn - possibly because only four out of the sixteen products eligible for withdrawal are grown in the UK (the fourth being tomatoes), and probably because of different farming structures.²³

3.5 How much food is redistributed, how many people benefit, and at what price?

All figures, summarised in Table 1, are approximate and given on an annual basis (details of calculations are provided in the references).

3.5.1 The amount of redistributed surplus food

In the UK, it is impossible to assess the amount of food redistributed accurately in terms of weight, cost, proportion of total food or otherwise. This is because different schemes have different ways of keeping figures, and some (the informal sector) keep none at all. The Intervention Board is concerned that because its scheme has only been running for six months, its figures could be misleading and the actual annual amount could be considerably more or less. The following figures should, therefore, be treated as approximate.

Grocery Aid: 2000 tonnes per year, 130,000 cases. Since 1993 total tonnage distributed is 12,000. Cash value of around £2.5 million per year²⁴

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Crisis FareShare: 434 tonnes, cash value approx. £500 thousand²⁵

London: 257 tonnes

Southampton: 84 tonnes

Birmingham: 78 tonnes

Kirklees: 15 tonnes

South and West Lancashire Food Bank: Between 20-27 tonnes. Cash value approx. £25 thousand²⁶

FoodDelivery: Between 56-75 tonnes. Cash value around £70,000²⁷

Intervention Board: Apples 168 tonnes; Pears 108 tonnes; Cauliflowers 372 tonnes; other 37 tonnes; Total 685 tonnes. Cash value around £1 million²⁸

Total: over 3195 tonnes. Cash value around (this does not include informal redistribution)

3.5.2 How many people benefit?

Similarly, exact figures on the numbers of people receiving surplus food have not been calculated by the schemes. However there are figures on how many recipients there are, and approximations on how many meals the food contributes to (with the exception of the Intervention Board which cannot give out the names of recipients for data protection reasons).

Grocery Aid: 378 charities, contributing to approx. 6.24 million meals per year²⁹

Crisis FareShare: 60 charities, contributing to approx. 91 thousand meals per year³⁰

London 34, contributing to approx. 168,000 meals per year

Birmingham 12, contributing to approx. 19,680 meals per year

Southampton 7, contributing to approx. 19,380 meals per year

Kirklees 9, contributing to approx. 2064 meals per year

South and West Lancashire Food Bank: 35 charities in 1999 (numbers of meals served as yet unknown)³¹

FoodDelivery: 27 charities, contributing to over 70 thousand meals per year

There are also many charities which benefit through informal links and the Intervention Board.³²

Total counted charities: approximately 500

Total meals: at least 8 million per year

The recipients of the food vary. Most are homelessness charities, but also included are: women's refuges, old peoples charities, disability charities, children's charities, schools with breakfast clubs, rehabilitation centres, youth and community centres and local authorities.

Table 1: Surplus Food Redistribution in the UK: the figures so far

Scheme	Tonnes food redistributed / yr	Equivalent value of food £ / yr	Charities served	Meals contributed to / yr	Operating cost (£ / yr)
Grocery Aid	2000	2.5 million	378	6.24 million	550 thousand
Intervention Board	685	over 1 million	-	-	-
Crisis FareShare	434	500 thousand	60	over 900 thousand	490 thousand
FoodDelivery	56-75	70 thousand	27	over 700 thousand	43 thousand
South and West Lancashire Foodbank	20-27	25 thousand	35	-	16 thousand
TOTAL	3195	over 4 million	> 500	over 8 million	over 1.1 million

Please note most figures are approximate and thus for rough guidance only

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3.5.3 The Cost of redistribution

Again, analysis of costs is sketchy. Approximately, per year

Grocery Aid: £550,000³³

Crisis FareShare: £490,000³⁴

FoodDelivery: £43,000³⁵

South and West Lancashire Food Bank: £16,653³⁶

It was not possible to obtain figures from the Intervention Board

Total: approximately £1.1 million pa

These are estimations of cost that do not always take into account all the voluntary time that is contributed to such schemes, the cost of donated warehouses and other equipment or facilities, or the actual costs of the food.

Each year, over £1 million of cash is used to distribute over £4 million pounds worth of food.

The equivalent by weight of 14 million sandwiches, or 20 million apples are redistributed in the UK every year.

“There are more sandwiches wasted in London than there are homeless people to eat them.”

Karen Bradford, Programme Manager, Crisis FareShare

4 A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

4.1 United States

According to 1998 estimates, food insecurity, including hunger, is a problem for 10 million American households (9.7%).³⁷ Surplus food redistribution has long been used to ease this problem, and is carried out both by private organisations, and at a federal and state level.

At the core of government assistance is the Food Stamps Program, set up in the late 1930s. Families on relief purchased orange-coloured stamps. For their face value, the stamps could be used to buy food, and for every \$1 dollar spent, the family received 50 cents worth of blue stamps. The blue stamps could be used to purchase food items designated as surplus by the Secretary of Agriculture. The programme ran until World War II, but it wasn't until John F. Kennedy was elected in the 1960s that it was restarted. This time the surplus component was removed, and a stamp was just worth more than the purchasing price. Despite eligibility expansions in the 1970s, the Reagan era saw legislative action to slow the growth of food stamp eligibility and save on costs. At the same time, Congress insisted that government-owned surplus be distributed to food kitchens and similar, and in the late 1980s the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) started to deliver surplus to food banks.³⁸ The government still sees the Food Stamps Program as central to its fight against food insecurity, and considers it the most important source of food for people on low incomes in the U.S.³⁹

Yet federal food assistance has not eliminated the need for private food distribution programmes. In 1966, a Catholic deacon and John van Hengel, an associate who worked in a St. Vincent de Paul dining room, set up the world's first food bank, St. Mary's in Phoenix, Arizona.⁴⁰ The movement expanded in 1975 with the founding of Second Harvest, an umbrella organisation, which used government funds to spread the food bank idea from Phoenix to other American cities.⁴¹ There are now 189 food banks affiliated to Second Harvest, many of which are faith-based. The food banking movement has become enormous: Second Harvest is now one of

the ten largest charities in the U.S. The movement has expanded in other ways too. For example, the first food bank, St Mary's, has expanded from a 450 m² warehouse to 11,000m². In 1986, Food Banking Inc. was founded by John van Hengel, "dedicated to teaching other countries how to feed the hungry". It now functions as International Food Banking Services Inc., which serves and supports the continuous growth of the private sector's efforts in food banking around the world.⁴²

The primary motivation for the food banks was 'emergency food' - that is, for natural disasters, and those people in temporary crisis situations. But as government cut back on the Food Stamp Program, while encouraging redistribution of surplus via food banks, the movement continued to grow. Moreover, a law, established in 1969 and refined in 1976, encouraged charitable donations of surplus from corporate donors with a tax break (section 2135 of the Tax Reform Act of 1976 permits deductions of cost plus 50% of any appreciated value). In 1996 the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act was passed which protects donors from liability - if the food product causes harm, for example. The Act encouraged further donations.⁴³ In 1997 the USDA funded a National Summit on Food Recovery, and produced a document, *A Citizen's Guide to Food Recovery*, to encourage further redistribution of the 27% of U.S. food it now estimates is wasted.⁴⁴ This food mainly goes to the unemployed, households in which a member of the family is working but on a low income - the 'working poor', children, single parent families and homeless people. Often recipients become 'regulars' rather than being served in a one-off emergency situation.⁴⁵

Second Harvest aims to feed the 31 million Americans it estimates are at risk of hunger, via 50,000+ local charitable agencies. In contrast to the UK, food is mainly given to food pantries for redistribution as parcels or direct to individual households, though soup kitchens and shelters, which provide on-site meals, also benefit. The food banks take donations from corporations, local food retailers and

A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

individuals. Corporate food and financial donations are the most important, particularly those from Philip Morris and its company Kraft Foods. The hundreds of other donors include multinational companies such as Nestlé and Kellogg's. In 1999 Second Harvest received 1009 million pounds of food product donations (around 458 thousand tonnes). This has steadily increased from 756 million pounds (around 343 thousand tonnes) in 1994, and now reaches 26 million people.⁴⁶

A proportion of the food redistributed by food banks is not surplus. There are many types of other fund and food-raising initiatives such as the annual 'Walk for Hunger,' donations at supermarket checkouts, and regular can drives. A recent example was the 'Stamp Out Hunger' food drive on May 8 1999. Cards were placed in mailboxes to encourage people to donate food via the mailbox. The postal workers then collected the food for food bank redistribution.⁴⁷

As well as food banks, there are many more organisations that distribute surplus food in the U.S. A summary of the four main national associations is provided in Table 2. Foodchain is the second largest organisation, a network of more than 150 community-based hunger-relief programs, which originated with City Harvest in New York. The programs focus on delivering perishable food, which provides a nutritional balance not available in the packaged food gathered by the food banks.⁴⁸ Surplus food is collected from restaurants, caterers, cafeterias, grocery stores, and other food businesses, and delivered to more than 15,000 social service agencies providing meal programs or food assistance for the poor. In 1998, the scheme rescued 200 million pounds of food (nearly 91 thousand tonnes), a figure projected to increase to 250 million pounds (around 113 thousand tonnes) by 2003. Recipients are mainly community social service agencies, for whom the food helps stretch meagre budgets. Like Second Harvest, donors include major multinationals, such as Philip Morris and Coca Cola. Foodchain is currently considering a merger with Second Harvest.

From the Wholesaler to the Hungry also distributes large quantities of fresh food - around 221 million pounds (100 thousand tonnes) in 1998. Founded in

1991, based on a prototype of a scheme in Los Angeles, the project focuses specifically on food surplus from wholesalers (often owing to cosmetic flaws). The two project leaders, based on the University of Southern California's School of Medicine's work to improve the diets of low-income people, establish partnerships between wholesalers and existing food distribution agencies such as food banks. Funding comes from corporations and foundations, largely the Kraft's Fresh Produce Initiative, which donates \$2 million per year to charitable fresh produce programmes. There are now 82 Wholesaler to the Hungry produce programmes across the U.S., with 17 more under development.⁴⁹

The Society of St Andrew is the fourth largest organisation in terms of tonnage (see Table 2). Founded by two Methodist ministers in 1979, it is faith-based but non-denominational. It has five offices, with a national base in Virginia, funded by churches, foundations and individuals. Large farmers, agri-business, smallholders, even individual gardeners all participate. The Society has two main schemes, the potato project and a gleaning network. The Potato Project co-ordinates growers, packers and distributors to release 'graded-out' potatoes. After shipping to food banks and similar agencies, they are distributed within a few days. The Gleaning Network co-ordinates volunteers in five states to glean produce from fields after harvest. In 1998 17,500 volunteers participated, providing around ten thousand tonnes of food to thousands of charitable agencies.⁵⁰

In total, Second Harvest, Foodchain, From the Wholesaler to the Hungry and the Society for St. Andrew provide approximately 660 thousand tonnes of food for people on low-incomes.

The U.S. also has many community food initiatives, some of which have links with surplus food redistribution. For example, the Philip Morris 'Fight Against Hunger' funds schemes that teach cooking skills to users of Foodchain's community kitchens using surplus food.⁵¹

A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

4.2 Canada

To a large extent, surplus food redistribution in Canada has followed the U.S. example, and is dominated by food banks, again with a religious basis.⁵² The movement is younger - the first food bank started in 1981 in Edmonton, Alberta, and then rapidly proliferated in an ad-hoc manner. In 1989 the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) was formed. Membership of CAFB steadily rose, reaching 193 in 1999, serving about 80% of Canada's food

bank clientele.⁵³ The food banks now benefit from a National Food Sharing System, set up by the CAFB in 1995, to facilitate the sharing and distribution of major food industry donations across the country. Donors include Heinz, Campbell Soup and Procter and Gamble.⁵⁴ The donated food is redistributed from the food banks to around 2000 agencies, mainly food pantries. Food banks tend to be church, community or union based.⁵⁵ There are also schemes around the country that redistribute perishable foods from restaurants and grocery stores, such as Second

Table 2: National surplus food redistribution schemes in the United States

Type of food	Non-perishable processed food	Perishable and prepared food	Perishable produce	Agricultural surplus
Organisation	Second Harvest (food banks umbrella organisation)	Foodchain (food 'rescue' umbrella organisation)	From the Wholesaler to the Hungry	Society of St. Andrew
Number of outlets	189	> 150	82	5 (offices)
Amount of food distributed (approx.)	458 thousand tonnes	91 thousand tonnes	100 thousand tonnes	9 -11 thousand tonnes
Recipient agencies	50,000	15,000	Not known	Thousands
Examples of donors	Nestle, Kelloggs, Kraft	Pizza Hut, KFC, Marriot hotels, Starbucks, local restaurants	Wholesale produce markets, USDA	Large farmers, agri-business, small holders, gardens
Type of food	Mainly non-perishable food such as tins, jars, packets	Fresh food left over from supermarkets, but also from restaurants, caterers, cafes	Wholesale - produce not yet sold to retailers	Agricultural produce from 'field gleaning,' packing sheds and distributors. Mainly potatoes.
Notes	Very diverse - some food banks grow their own food; many take donations from the public; others work with community-based programs. Has started to distribute perishables.	Examples include organisations such as City Harvest Pepsi Food Service, Fare Start, Lazarus at the Gate, Meal Share, Food for Survival. Aim to provide nutritious food not available at food banks	Works with existing food redistribution agencies	Works with existing food redistribution agencies.

A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

Harvest (not to be confused with the U.S. food bank network).

Food banks in Canada originated during a time of high and increasing unemployment and poverty. At the same time, there was a decrease in social spending at all levels of government.⁵⁶ In 1992, food handouts were given to two million Canadians, including people on social assistance (the majority), the working poor, and single parent families.⁵⁷ By 1997, this number had reached three million, 40% of whom were children.⁵⁸ In 1997, 4500 tonnes of food were distributed, both dry and perishable, with one-third frozen.⁵⁹

There are, however, several key differences between the food banking movement in Canada and the U.S. First, Canada has no tax incentives for donors, which means the food bank-corporate relationships are weaker. Second, there is no financial assistance from government.⁶⁰ Third, although there are Good Samaritan Laws in most provinces, the legal system (as in the UK) is less geared towards litigation. Thus, the Good Samaritan Law has relatively little impact in encouraging donations, because it does not affect the more significant, non-legal disincentives.⁶¹ There are also differences at an organisational level. The CAFB, while analogous to America's Second Harvest, is much smaller, with only three full-time members of staff. It is also less corporate, with a greater emphasis on its community base. Finally, welfare is different in Canada - again more similar to the UK - with no Food Stamps Program. Canada does, however, have a community food movement 'helping people to help themselves' with donated food via schemes such as community kitchens and participant managed food programmes.⁶²

4.3 Europe

In contrast to the UK, surplus food redistribution in other parts of Europe is food bank dominated. An extensive network exists throughout Europe in France (73), Spain (31), Italy (15), Belgium (9), Poland (8),

Portugal (4), Greece (1), Ireland (1), Czechoslovakia (1) and Romania (1). Most are members of the European Federation of Food Banks (EFFB). The South and West Lancashire Food Bank is the only UK member.⁶³ In 1997, there were 136 food banks affiliated to this Federation, an increase of 20% since 1985.

The EFFB has its roots in Paris. In 1984, Francis Lopez, a volunteer of the Food Bank of Edmonton, Canada, and a close friend of John van Hengel, set up the first French food bank. Lopez, now dubbed the 'Father of European Food Banking', soon encouraged further development in Belgium and Italy. The EFFB followed in 1986, to foster links between the French and Belgian food banks, and food banks proliferated in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Poland.⁶⁴ Collectively, in 1996, the EFFB dispatched 67,657 tonnes of food to 8000 charities, a 45% increase from 1995.⁶⁵

A major source of food in the rest of Europe is agricultural surplus, provided direct to food banks by schemes similar to the UK's Intervention Board. There are three Surplus Food Schemes in the EU run by the agriculture department. The first programme, set up in the 1970s, was aimed at reducing the 'butter-mountain'. The second, for staples, started redistributing beef, rice and olive oil in 1982. Since Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform in 1996, the inventory of basic staples has fallen to nothing as surpluses are exported with subsidy. The third, more recent programme is for fruit and vegetables withdrawn by producer organisations. The take-up of the food varies between the programmes, and between member states (UK withdrawals are described in section 3.4.1). Each country is free to make its own arrangements for withdrawal, but all redistribute via food banks or direct to charitable agencies. On average, one-third of food bank supplies in Europe come from agricultural surplus, rising to three-quarters in Italy. The EFFB can negotiate the withdrawal of the intervention stocks on behalf of the member food banks. In Italy, food banks consult member agencies on what they need and then negotiate with the Department of Agriculture. The take-up of fruit and vegetables remains marginal

A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

throughout Europe - only 2.3% of produce withdrawn is redistributed in this way. One reason for this is that agencies find it difficult to receive and distribute large quantities of perishables at irregular intervals.⁶⁶

Donations from food retailers also vary between countries. This may depend on government incentives. For example, Spain recently brought in a tax incentive to encourage greater donations, and the number of food banks subsequently increased from 14 to 31. The one food bank in Ireland, the Dublin City Food Bank (DCFB), takes food from a range of corporations including Irish Sugar PLC and Lever Brothers. Established in 1989 by the diocesan agency CROSSCARE, the DCFB provides essential groceries to recognised caring organisations. It now supports 43 charities. The amount of food it distributes rose from 16 tonnes in 1989 to 248 tonnes in 1996, most of which goes to the elderly.⁶⁷

Germany differs from the rest of mainland Europe in that it has a more extensive system of redistribution of perishable food. Taking the City Harvest project in New York (the founding member of Foodchain) as its model, the first so-called 'Tafels' ('tables' in English) were set up in Berlin. A church-based network, they are now all co-ordinated by the Münchner Tafel e.V. network, set up in October 1994. There are now around 85 Tafels, providing food for around 6000 people per week. Managed by three salaried staff

members and funded by Munich City Council, they also use 60 volunteers. Funds for the Tafels come from donations, and there are 32 sponsors ranging from major food companies to banks. Surplus food comes from the grocery industry and perishable surpluses.⁶⁸

4.4 Australia

Foodbanks dominate surplus food redistribution in Australia.⁶⁹ There are four: Foodbank NSW (New South Wales) Limited, Foodbank Victoria, Foodbank Queensland Limited and the Foodbank of Western Australia. All are members of Foodbank Australia, formed in 1996 to "provide the individual state foodbanks with one strong national voice." The food banks were set up when Federal and State governments were reducing funding for family and community services, while at the same time looking more to voluntary organisations for help.

The food banks take donations of surplus food from manufacturers and fresh food markets, which currently dump between 1.5-4% of their annual production. Since 1997, Foodbank Australia has been allied formally with the Australian Food and Grocery Council (formerly the Australian Food Council and the Grocery Manufacturers of Australia. The British equivalent is the Food and Drink Federation.) Several major food companies have also entered into

Food bank	Tonnage	Recipient agencies	Main supporters
NSW	750	>260	ANZ Bank, Westfield shopping Centres
Victoria	1500	>220	ANZ Bank, The Potter Foundation
Western Australia	750	240	Rio Tinto, Lotteries Commission
Queensland	480	>200	Brisbane City Council, Suncorp-Metway
Totals	3480	>920	

A comparison with surplus food distribution in other countries

individual contractual agreements to supply surplus produce - Kellogg's, Nestlé, Unilever Foods and Kraft for example. In addition, various services are provided to the food banks by companies such as DHL, Qantas, PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Funding comes from private companies as well as the Lotteries Commission and City Councils.

Recipients must cohere to industry codes of practice for food handling in Australia and members must hold liability insurance to protect both the food banks and donors.

Some Australian food bank statistics are listed in Table 3. Between them they have less than 20 paid staff, and rely heavily on volunteers for administrative and logistical support. Voluntary organisations pay a small fee to the food banks, covering around 25% of the operating costs. Every year a further \$1.5-\$2 million must be raised to ensure continuing operation. Foodbank Australia is currently planning a new food bank in South Australia.

There are no other formal surplus food redistribution networks in Australia, though there are informal links between smaller charities and food manufacturers, retailers and produce markets.

5 Surplus food redistribution: the current debate

5.1 Introduction

At the moment the relative number of surplus food redistribution schemes in the UK is low but expanding. This expansion indicates that Britain has an increasing

According to its proponents, surplus food redistribution is a "win-win" solution to the problem of food insecurity and hunger: saving waste while feeding those in need.

inability to provide all its citizens with adequate mechanisms, financial or social, to obtain food in culturally acceptable ways. Thus research is needed to enable the development of such schemes to be either halted or supported by appropriate policies. Integral to such research is an active

debate to assess whether the expansion of surplus food redistribution will perpetuate food poverty, rather than promote long-term solutions.

According to its proponents, surplus food redistribution is a "win-win" solution to the problem of food insecurity: saving waste while feeding those in need.⁷⁰ "Food recovery programs are easy, safe and cost-effective," says the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁷¹ As Crisis FareShare points out: "food retailers and wholesalers are throwing away huge amounts [of food]. Often this food is within its use-by date or nearing or outside its best-before date. Many food suppliers are frustrated by this waste but do not have the means to arrange and co-ordinate its distribution." A response by groups such as Crisis FareShare, or Second Harvest, is to help companies eliminate waste by serving as a distribution channel for surplus foods. The aim of the South and West Lancashire Food Bank is to "try and help prevent waste in the food industry and help voluntary organisations at the same time." And it is Foodchain's philosophy "that no food should go to waste when people go hungry."⁷³ Grocery Aid, meanwhile, is able to use surplus food to "provide for the needy, products from the Food and Grocery Trade which improve the quality of their everyday life."⁷⁴

But is it really a "win-win" scenario? Not according to critics of surplus food redistribution. In North America, the vast scale of both food insecurity and redistribution has prompted a critical analysis,⁷⁵ most recently by Professor Janet Poppendieck in her book *Sweet Charity*.⁷⁶ In Canada, Professor Graham Riches and Dr Valerie Tarasuk have been vocal in the debate. Not only does distributing surplus food hide the real causes of hunger, they say, but it doesn't actually solve the problem. Indeed, if it unwittingly displaces public welfare, it may even perpetuate poverty.

In the rest of Europe, too, surplus food redistribution schemes are being debated via a series of reports.⁷⁷

These debates and others are detailed below under the following headings: feeding the hungry, saving waste, sharing and voluntarism, and education. They are debates made complex by the fact that the people involved with surplus food redistribution are often driven by concerns for social justice; likewise the critics.

5.2 Feeding the hungry?

5.2.1 The immediate benefit: food for those in need

Surplus food provides for people in emergency and crisis situations and those who face chronic problems that exclude them from mainstream society. The immediate benefit of surplus food distribution to these groups is palpable. There can be no doubt that surplus food has helped keep at bay - if only sporadically - hunger and malnutrition for millions of people throughout the industrialised world. In the UK around 500 charities benefit. And the food is very welcome. Phrases like "excellent," "fantastic," "very good service," "great," "do a very good job," "it's such good, nutritious food" were used by charities to describe the different UK schemes.⁷⁸ "We believe Provision [now Grocery Aid] can really make a difference by providing

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us with the products we want," said one recipient.⁷⁹ According to the Salvation Army, which receives food from Crisis FareShare and Grocery Aid, redistributed surplus food is a "valuable source and extremely useful, and does enable us to provide extras that we could not otherwise provide."⁸⁰

It is a similar story in other countries. Responses to questionnaires carried out for the DCFB were always full of high praise. "We find that the children gain a lot from it and look a lot healthier," and "it is a boost to us in that it adds variety to our food supply. It improves quality in terms of daily diet," were two typical examples.⁸¹

There are other advantages too, over and above basic food provision. Crisis FareShare, for example, aims to improve the choice, quality and food safety standards of the meals in existing projects.

The number of people who benefit from food that would otherwise be wasted is clearly significant. But does the surplus food really feed the hungry? Not according to its critics, who point out that hunger persists, despite increasing amounts of surplus food redistribution.

5.2.2 Surplus food redistribution: does it alleviate hunger?

Surplus redistribution schemes work hard to ensure that they always have food to provide for those in need. But the nature of the system means that food provision is inherently unreliable - there is no security of supply because so much depends on how much faulty stock there is, whether there is much surplus that day, and so on. So although schemes may maintain a sufficient number and range of donors to go some way to provide reliability, according to critics, a 'get what you're given' relationship between retailers and recipients is inevitable.⁸² Implications of this are that the food maybe unsuitable, and that recipients

Surplus food is a "valuable source and extremely useful, and does enable us to provide extras that we could not otherwise provide." The Salvation

Army

remain in a state of food insecurity, so may go hungry when there is no surplus.

Is the food unsuitable?

The people who receive surplus food have little, or more likely no choice in what they eat, a criticism made by those

using the DCFB.⁸³ And some recipients of Crisis FareShare's food have had problems with the 'suitability' of the food - "what do you do with endive," for example?⁸⁴ Grocery Aid also points out that some foods are very unpopular and difficult to cook. But Karen Bradford, Programme Manager of Crisis FareShare, believes that this can actually be an advantage by providing variety, and encouraging people to try different foods. In fact, FareShare produced a recipe file to help projects deal with the more unusual foods. This point was also made by David Wilesmith of FoodDelivery, who deliberately sets aside unusual fruit for schemes in schools, because children enjoy it. A respondent quoted in the DCFB document noted that the fact that the scheme allows him to try out new foods is one of its best aspects.

However it is not only the type of food which is important, but also its nutritional value.⁸⁵ American research has shown that the low-income families reliant on a food bank have nutrient intakes below the recommended daily allowance owing to the absence of fresh food.⁸⁶ Solutions are being sought to alleviate this problem. For example, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts brought in a nutrition educator, and set up its own Community Farm. Research also continues to develop nutrition education schemes intended to help food banks use a nutritional profile when securing donated foods. The idea is to allow an informed choice rather than just 'get what you're given'.⁸⁷

But the nature of the system means that food provision is inherently unreliable - there is no security of supply.

Moreover, as described in sections 3.1, surplus redistribution of fresh food was actually initiated to alleviate nutritional inadequacies. This was an original aim of Crisis FareShare, for example, which also runs nutrition

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workshops for projects receiving food in London.⁸⁸ Fresh produce does have the potential to improve the nutritional intake of those suffering from food insecurity. A study by Naomi Evans and Elizabeth Dowler found that the diets of the majority of people using day centres in London do not meet current dietary recommendations for health, and suggested that surplus fresh food could go some way to improve the situation.⁸⁹ They noted: "The primary reason for this survey [of homeless peoples' diets] was to mobilize potential new food sources from food retailers, particularly perishable foods, to improve the food provision to those who rely on day centres and soup runs for their food requirements."⁹⁰ In another survey, Evans showed that the potential of Crisis FareShare to boost the nutritional needs of the homeless in London was significant,⁹¹ concluding: "schemes such as FareShare can help promote health and empower the homeless population by ensuring they obtain the correct amount of vitamins and minerals."

There is also potential for fruit and vegetables from EU surplus to improve health. A report assessing the European Community Food Programmes states: "The social usefulness of the measure [to distribute fruit and vegetables] is clear, since it improves the diet of the needy."⁹² The 1998 Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health (the Acheson Report) noted that: "At a time when data have pointed to the protective effects of fruit and green vegetables in the prevention of cancer and coronary heart disease, large sums of money are being spent in the destruction of these products. This amounted to 2.5 billion kilos of fruit and vegetables at a cost of 390 million ecus in 1993-94." The report therefore recommended "strengthening the CAP Surplus Food Scheme to improve the nutritional position of the less well off."⁹³ This point was significant in encouraging UK distribution (EU surplus was not distributed until December 1998, as detailed in section 3.4.1). With the

"Schemes such as FareShare can help promote health and empower the homeless population by ensuring they obtain the correct amount of vitamins and minerals."

Naomi Evans

scheme now in operation, the redistributed fresh fruit and vegetables are appreciated for health reasons. Rhea Brooks, a community worker in Plymouth, now takes food from the Intervention Board to "help change food culture and encourage the intake of fresh fruit and vegetables, especially considering current government healthy eating recommendations."⁹⁴

However, evidence that schemes distributing surplus fresh produce are effective in actually (rather than potentially) boosting nutrition is limited. Despite earlier assumptions, the authors of the European Community Food report admit that "the effectiveness of the measure [to distribute fruit and vegetables] is difficult to assess in view of the lack of indicators."⁹⁵ In the UK only one such evaluation has been carried out. The study, of Crisis FareShare Southampton, was limited because evaluation was based on data collected only one month after the scheme was set up. It showed that FareShare Southampton improved access and appreciation of fruit, but, in the early stages of the scheme at least, did not actually increase fruit consumption.⁹⁶ The study recommended further evaluation.

Unreliability of surplus food supplies and the perpetuation of food insecurity

Analysis of the DCFB shows the scheme offers a limited choice, restricted product range and no guarantee of basic supplies.⁹⁷ According to Graham Riches, a critic of food banking in Canada, and author of a book on the subject, this situation is typical. He writes: "Food banks allow us to believe that hunger is being solved. Yet this is not so. Despite the massive amounts of food they give away, they run out of food, cannot guarantee nutritious food and have had to develop systems of rationing and eligibility to protect their food supplies."⁹⁸ The latter of Riches' criticisms is accepted by the UK organisations themselves. "There is no guarantee of food supply to the

Evidence that schemes distributing surplus fresh produce are effective in actually (rather than potentially) boosting nutrition is limited.

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homeless organisations, though delivery of sandwiches in London is 100% reliable to date," says Crisis FareShare, while FoodDelivery "make no promises," and the South and West Lancashire Food Bank "cannot always supply what our members would like....members have to take pot-luck!" Rhea Brooks, who has received fruit and vegetables from the Intervention Board, says food arrives at irregular intervals - sometimes 12 months, sometimes a few weeks - owing to the impossibility of predicting when produce will be withdrawn.⁹⁹ (Further discussion of donor supplies is in section 5.3.2.) Recipients make up for this unreliability by buying other supplies, and all those interviewed said that though they would welcome more food, they knew the source was not reliable and so always had back-up. In terms of eligibility criteria, individuals are not assessed because food provision is always via charities. However the charities must be deemed eligible by the distribution schemes. For example, recipients of food from Crisis FareShare must be related to homelessness, and adhere strictly to food handling regulations. Grocery Aid also have strict eligibility criteria related to food safety. Potentially this does restrict membership of such schemes by less well-funded charities.

The other point made by Riches is that food redistribution allows us to think that the problem of hunger is being solved, whereas in fact there are few long-term benefits. This argument would not be accepted by food redistribution schemes in the UK, where hunger (as opposed to food poverty) is rarely discussed. Since the UK schemes have never claimed to be solving 'hunger', they would not expect to be judged on that criterion. Nevertheless, Riches' indication that food redistribution is only a short-term solution could equally apply, especially given its potential expansion in the UK to cover a wider range of food-insecure people. Just because the terminology used is different, does not mean the issues are not the same.

In the U.S., surplus food redistribution is considered by some to be a major solution for hunger.¹⁰⁰ 'America's Second Harvest is Ending Hunger', runs one slogan.¹⁰¹ Yet, as Graham Riches writes: "there is no particular reason to assume that their [recipients of food bank foods] hunger has been satisfied simply because they have patronised a food bank."¹⁰² Empirical evidence of this comes from another critic, Valerie Tarasuk. Through a study in Toronto she found that "while charitable food assistance may have alleviated some of the absolute food deprivation in the households studied, it clearly did not prevent members

"It is possible to feed populations with handouts. But the real question is whether it is desirable. That is, in wealthy Western democracies, do we really want segments of our populations to have to 'forage' for handouts from private agencies, or do we want to secure adequate diets for all our people through the more normal means?"

Professor Larry Brown

from going hungry. Given the supply-driven (i.e. donor-driven) nature of this system and the fact that demand for food assistance has long surpassed supply, food banks cannot be expected to resolve the kinds of food problems described here."¹⁰³ Similar problems have been found in food banks throughout the U.S.¹⁰⁴ And throughout Canada, food banks have been suffering from 'donor fatigue', when donors feel either they are already giving enough, or are becoming more efficient so generating less waste. So while demand is rising, supplies are levelling off.¹⁰⁵ In the UK, however, there is still plenty of untapped surplus in the system. According to Karen Bradford of Crisis FareShare "there are more sandwiches wasted every day in London than there are homeless people to eat them."¹⁰⁶ Yet donor fatigue could potentially happen in the UK given that waste management is becoming more efficient (see section 5.3.1). Moreover donor fatigue is not necessarily related to the amount of waste.

Analysts of the situation have responded to this type of critique in two ways. First, an approach advocated by the USDA is that more surplus food should be distributed to meet demand. In the document *A Citizen's Guide to Food Recovery*, the USDA encourages corporations and individuals alike to donate and volunteer. Dan Glickman, Agriculture

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Secretary, states in the introduction: "We need your help. We need to help communities implement food security plans that incorporate food recovery and gleaning as vital components."¹⁰⁷ In 1997 he urged a 33% increase in food recovery by 2000.¹⁰⁸ The desire to encourage more donations of surplus was also expressed by some members of the food redistribution schemes in the UK. Nevertheless, Dr Larry Brown, a prominent expert on hunger in the U.S., says we should be asking not whether it is possible to feed people with redistributed food, but whether it is what

Private food redistribution in Canada ... perpetuates, not solves, the problem of food poverty.

we want: "It is possible to feed populations with handouts. But the real question is whether it is desirable. That is, in wealthy Western democracies, do we really want segments of our populations to have to

'forage' for handouts from private agencies, or do we want to secure adequate diets for all our people through the more normal means?"¹⁰⁹ It is this point which is the core of the second response to surplus food provision: an unreliable food supply for those in need is no substitute for a public welfare system. In fact, writes Graham Riches, private food redistribution in Canada "plays into the hands of governments wishing to cut payrolls and services and to privatize social welfare."¹¹⁰ In so doing, it perpetuates, not solves, the problem of food poverty.

5.2.3 Private charity versus public welfare

According to Graham Riches, the large scale of private food redistribution in America indicates that it has become an institutionalised and permanent extension of the welfare system - and that Canada is moving in the same direction.¹¹¹ Others suggest that privatised food recovery is part of the American 'shadow state', or the 'mixed welfare economy.'¹¹² USDA figures show the Food Stamps Program in the U.S., described in section 4.1, serves about 23 million people annually (around 8% of the U.S. population), while the private food relief system serves around 26 million.¹¹³ Therefore, in the U.S. private food relief programmes

using surplus food are, in terms of numbers (not cash), similar in importance to the Food Stamps Program.

Charity food, says Janet Poppendieck in her book *Sweet Charity*, is not a problem if it is a "kindly add-on to an adequate and secure safety net of public provision."¹¹⁴ It could be argued that the privatisation of welfare in the UK is not, and will never be, so widespread as the U.S. and, since the scale of surplus food redistribution in the UK is so small, that this is an accurate description of food provision in the UK. Moreover, according to Poppendieck, the fact that the vast majority of surplus food in the UK is redistributed via agencies who already provide food on-site (the 'soup kitchen' model) as opposed to food pantries set up especially to hand out food parcels for families with children, is a crucial difference. "In this case," she says, "the danger is much less. Surplus food just makes life easier for those agencies who are serving food anyway."¹¹⁵

However, as described in section 3, Crisis FareShare and Grocery Aid are expanding, and Sainsbury's is both increasing informal networks with local charities, and, via the BRC, encouraging other grocery stores to do the same. In addition, there are also now agencies which distribute food parcels to families in crisis. And significantly, there are voices in the surplus food redistribution network calling for an extension of their service to poor, housed families suffering from food poverty. At the same time, demand for food currently exceeds what the schemes are providing (see sections 3.3.1 and 5.2.4), and the pressure on food retailers to save waste is increasing (see section 5.3). Meanwhile, the welfare state is undergoing a period of change, with government promoting private-public and voluntary sector-private partnerships. The government is also engaging with the American welfare system with a view to implementing similar policies in the UK.¹¹⁸

Surplus food just makes life easier for those agencies who are serving food anyway.

Although surplus food redistribution in the UK is not widely presented as a replacement for welfare or

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other responses to food poverty, it remains important to assess what might happen in the future by taking stock of events in the U.S., Canada and Europe. In particular, there are two features that make for interesting comparisons. The first is that the origins and development of the surplus food redistribution schemes in the UK have some similarities with North America; and second, neither the UK nor North American schemes see themselves as the welfare safety net.

5.2.4 Origins and development of surplus food redistribution

Graham Riches lists the following amongst the main influences on the food banking movement in Canada: the need for food; government policy; support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and churches; U.S. influences; the media; the corporate sector.¹¹⁹ Corporate sector issues are discussed in section 5.3.2.

The need for food in Canada increased during a period of high and, in some regions, rapidly increasing unemployment. The welfare safety net could not cope.¹²⁰ It was at this time that the first food bank opened, in Edmonton in 1981. According to Riches, the fact that increased demand for food came after welfare cuts demonstrates "official awareness and even endorsement of the inadequacy of benefits."¹²¹ The U.S. had a similar scenario, with a proliferation of food recovery schemes during the period of high unemployment in the early 1980s, while President Reagan clamped down on public assistance (see section 4.1).¹²²

Proliferation of surplus food redistribution did not occur in the UK during the 1980s recession. Though the Intervention Board's Surplus Food Scheme became operational in 1987, all the private schemes were set up in 1993-96. And it was at this time, according to some researchers, that poverty had reached a high point, and food poverty had taken an upward turn.¹²³ Furthermore, the continuing problem of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, required urgent attention.¹²⁴ And now, according to the charities that use the surplus food redistribution schemes, more food

would always find a recipient.¹²⁵ As Grocery Aid (then Provision) said in its 1998 brochure: "It is a sad fact, but the need for Provision is likely to become even more important over the next few years."¹²⁶

The second factor that Riches lists as influencing the growth of food redistribution in North America is government policy. This has not only affected the need for food through welfare cuts, but also encouraged the growth of redistribution networks through funding incentives, food provision and policy supports (see section 4.1). Such assistance is particularly strong in the U.S., where Poppendieck has termed national government the 'silent partner' of privatised food provision.¹²⁷ According to Second Harvest founder John van Hengel, federal laws have been highly significant in the growth of surplus food redistribution in the U.S., in particular the tax incentives to donors introduced in 1976, and the removal of donor liability through the 1996 Good Samaritan Law (see section 4.1).

In the UK, whether government is currently cutting welfare or not is a debatable point. But there are two factors that could affect the growth of surplus food redistribution. The first is that local authorities have very tight budgets, and second, central government is keen to encourage voluntary sector-corporate, and private-public links. John Prescott MP said of Crisis FareShare: "Retailers' involvement in Crisis FareShare is an inspiring example of how effective partnerships between the voluntary and business community can make a real impact on contributing to improvements in the lives of homeless people."¹²⁸

Since National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB) funds are available to charities, but not to local authorities, charities are able to take on a food provision role with the blessing of the cash-strapped local authorities. It could be argued that both the Portsmouth City Council funded FoodDelivery and the Kirklees Council funded Kirklees Crisis FareShare are an outcome of these budget constraints, together with the current trend for private-public links. Both schemes, adopted as part of anti-poverty strategies, run more cheaply than council-run food provision, and they are placed in a strong

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position for private funding - from the NLCB for example, which currently provides some of the core funds for Crisis FareShare.¹²⁹ The Southampton FareShare scheme was also initiated partly by the local authority. And local authority agencies are now accepting surplus food, to make up for what they are unable to afford. For example, the Summerfield Centre, run by the local authority in Birmingham, uses food from Crisis FareShare to provide food through the day, as an incentive for homeless people to come into the centre for other services. Without Crisis FareShare it would not be able to provide this food (although its breakfast scheme is funded).

The government also supports its own scheme to redistribute surplus via the Intervention Board, with the view that the programme is a practical way to make use of withdrawn commodities (see section 3.4.1).¹³⁰ However the government has been criticised for running the scheme inadequately and with little publicity, and has only recently been looking at ways of increasing efficiency (see sections 3.4.1 and 5.2.2).¹³¹

In North America innovation by NGOs was crucial to the origin of many surplus food redistribution schemes. In the UK innovation has also been critical to the development of schemes, particularly in terms of their trustworthiness in food safety and security issues. Innovation has come from the charitable sector (Crisis, the Portsmouth Council of Community Service), government (such as Kirklees Local Authority) and industry (the IGD). Often the enthusiasm of particular individuals has been the crucial catalyst. For example it was the involvement of the then director of the IGD, John Beaumont, that led to the initiation of Provision (now Grocery Aid).

The origins and development of surplus food distribution in the UK are complex, but this overview has shown that there are similarities with North America which need to be placed under greater scrutiny so that lessons can be learnt.

5.2.5 How the schemes see themselves

Riches asserts that privatised welfare is a problem and that everyone should have the right to food. Food, he says, is a universal right that can only be provided by a government commitment to a guaranteed social minimum standard.¹³² In response, schemes redistributing surplus food point out that they have no intention of replacing welfare. They maintain that they are there to supplement not replace public feeding programs. Janet Poppendieck writes about the U.S that: "Many private food charities make a point of asserting that they are not a substitute for public food assistance programs and entitlements. Nearly every food banker and food pantry director I interviewed made some such claim, and the national organizations that co-ordinate such projects, Second Harvest, Foodchain, Catholic Charities, even the Salvation Army, are on the record opposing cuts in food assistance and specifying their own role as supplementary."¹³⁴

The same assertions are made by the UK schemes - none consider themselves to be welfare substitutes.¹³⁵ The food from the UK schemes is almost always supplementary, not the main source (which some consider a problem as discussed in section 5.2.2). Those working for the schemes consider their role more of "benefiting people who need charity anyway" and "doing what you can," while "it is important not to subsidise things which should not be subsidised."¹³⁶ Although many charities hold similar views - "it is not about becoming reliant on it," said one, "it's just short-term intervention," said another - some do see the food as basic welfare provision. For example, Wigan Council Family Support Services use the South and West Lancashire Food Bank to provide "basic welfare" and the Birmingham Council Homeless Initiative provides food donated by Crisis FareShare as part of its "basic welfare."¹³⁸

Critics, such as Riches and Poppendieck, claim that, unwittingly, surplus food redistribution does undermine public welfare, and inevitably becomes a replacement. The integrity of people's intentions is not being criticised. It is clear that charitable workers do not intend to weaken public welfare, still less perpetuate poverty. But whatever their intentions, the effects of their actions must be examined. On this

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basis, critics argue vociferously against such schemes, whatever the good faith of the people running the schemes themselves. Riches writes: "One of the most serious arguments made against food banks is that they deflect public and political attention from the need for long-standing and urgent reforms in the social security system."¹³⁹ His main criticisms are that food banks (or other schemes of surplus food redistribution):

Help us to believe that the public safety net is working and that any flaws in it can be efficiently dealt with by charity. They reassure us that no one will go hungry even if there are welfare or wage cuts.

The integrity of people's intentions is not being criticised. It is clear that charitable workers do not intend to weaken public welfare, still less perpetuate poverty. But whatever their intentions, the effects of their actions must be examined.

feeding into the right-wing critique of public programs in general and entitlements in particular. The same fund-raising appeals that reassure the public that no one will starve, even if public assistance is destroyed, convince many that substitution of charitable food programs for public entitlements might be a good idea.¹⁴⁰ Poppendieck also suggests that whenever public programmes are attacked for fraud or other inefficiencies, public opinion shifts again in favour of privatised assistance.¹⁴¹

Some food recovery schemes accept these arguments. For example, in 1984, the Metro Food

Bank in Halifax, Canada admitted it had lost sight of its original aim "to be an emergency response to the local hunger situation. In essence we were becoming a regular supplement to the inadequate incomes of people on social assistance and the working poor."¹⁴² So they put out a challenge to national government that hunger was their responsibility; but ten years on, the project remains open owing to the moral imperative of feeding those in need. This indicates the problems of reversing the schemes once they have started. In the UK, though probably a minority, some charities already find surplus food "indispensable." Not having the food would be extremely detrimental to their work.¹⁴³

So, these critics would argue that surplus food redistribution is problematic because the schemes inevitably become an extension of the welfare programme and eventually contribute towards the destruction of public entitlements. But there are many, as shown in section 5.2.5, who believe that encouraging private-public or corporate-charity links is a suitable way forward. As part of an overall strategy, it can ease welfare-funding problems, and work efficiently, getting away from the bureaucracy and rigidity of state welfare. David Wilesmith pointed out that running FoodDelivery from within Portsmouth City Council itself would be a bureaucratic nightmare, and Mary McGrath, director of Grocery Aid "would welcome tax incentives for donors. It would benefit the government enormously in terms of cost-benefit, because they could spend less on their own food provision schemes."¹⁴⁴ And the USDA points out why the 1996 memorandum signed by President Clinton to boost food recovery schemes was so important. It says: "The Department [the USDA] is not seeking to create a new federal bureaucracy, but rather to encourage, energize, and provide technical assistance to existing and new private, nonprofit, and corporate food recovery and gleaning efforts."¹⁴⁵ It avoids the bureaucracy by providing grants, advice and incentives.

Some believe in no government involvement at all, favouring an entirely private approach. For example a Canadian advocate said: "Canadians are not

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enthused by the prospect of the further extension of public welfare services, and are more inclined towards what are the increasingly successful operations of private charity.¹⁴⁶ And the chairman of the Perth Food Bank in Australia said: "We have not sought support from government for operational funding because we know how changeable this can be - particularly in the welfare arena. We cannot afford to base our 'business' on the unpredictability of bureaucrats and government whims of policy.....So far the corporate world has been fantastic. All our approaches are made on the basis of a business proposal that benefits both parties. We will not be seen, ever I hope, as an organization seeking handouts on the basis of cries for help."¹⁴⁷

Other critics attack this approach from another angle: that privatised assistance eventually becomes just as bureaucratic as a public system. So says Dr Karen Curtis, who studies privatised food assistance in the U.S. state of Delaware. She writes: "this newly

institutionalised voluntary bureaucracy closely parallels the bureaucracy, the rigidity and the depersonalization of government agencies."¹⁴⁸

The major concern, however, by those who work in the 'front lines' of surplus food redistribution is that, regardless of academic debates about welfare provision and welfare states, there is a tremendous amount of wasted food, and there is a moral and practical imperative to save it.

The major concern, by those who work in the 'front lines' of surplus food redistribution is that, regardless of academic debates about welfare provision and welfare states, there is a tremendous amount of wasted food, and there is a moral and practical imperative to save it.

5.3 Saving waste

Waste reduction is a fundamental element of surplus food redistribution. Without it the schemes would not exist, and food provision would be held entirely in the domain of programmes such as donated non-surplus food or financial help. Whether the presence of surplus food should be an incentive to channel it to those in need is discussed here.

5.3.1 Less food for landfill

In the United States, it is estimated that 27% of all food produced is wasted.¹⁴⁹ In the UK there are no absolute figures on how much is wasted, although a study of supermarkets and other sources of surplus estimated £386 million worth of food is wasted each year.¹⁵⁰ The sight of waste commonly leads to outrage. Phrases such as "it's carnage", "waste is ridiculous", "I hate waste" and "it's terrible when people need the food" are typical.¹⁵¹ Dan Glickman, U.S. Agriculture Secretary, said at the 1997 National Summit on Food Recovery in response to the high U.S. waste figure: "There is simply no excuse for hunger in the most agriculturally abundant country in the world."¹⁵²

But the imperatives are not only moral, but economic and environmental too. In the U.S. the municipalities spend \$1 billion on food disposal.¹⁵³ In the UK, a landfill tax of £7 per tonne of waste was introduced in October 1996. In April 1999 it went up to £10 per tonne, with a further increase of £1 per tonne per year. The aim is to 'encourage greater diversion of wastes from landfill.' In addition, an EU law is being phased in over the next two years which may ban surplus food being sent to landfill, and the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (DETR) has set up a Composting Initiative for organic waste.¹⁵⁴ Sainsbury's is looking at ways to lower costs on waste - currently it costs them £35 per tonne for landfill. Wastage of food is also an added cost. Sainsbury's first ever waste survey in 1995 showed that 23% of edible

Redistribution falls into a wider retail strategy to minimise waste - which saves costs and reduces environmental impact.

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food was being wasted; since then it has worked to reduce it, and in 1997 the figure stood at 9%. In the future it hopes this percentage will fall to 2-3%.¹⁵⁵

But does the existence of surplus food and costs of disposal justify its redistribution? Or does redistribution perpetuate the underlying causes of food waste? Is it more effective as a means of waste disposal and improving public relations than as a way of solving the problem of food poverty? These debates are discussed in the next two sections.

5.3.2 Just another retailing opportunity?

Food retailers do benefit from redistributing their surplus. The 1998 Provision (now Grocery Aid) publicity brochure encourages contributions by pointing out that donating:¹⁵⁶

Improves the environment by minimising landfill.

Reduces industry's disposal costs.

Will provide an alternative solution to the problem of surplus food when disposing of it in landfill sites is banned.

Saves money on long-term food storage.

Demonstrates the community focus of the food and grocery industry

Provides valuable support for a wide-range of worthwhile UK causes.

Provides management of what might be large numbers of requests from charities for food.

Foodbank Australia presents a similar list, and emphasises that donations earn organisations "recognition by governments and the public as good corporate citizens."¹⁵⁷ Moreover, there are also other financial considerations:

Tax relief on donations (notin the UK, but in the U.S., as described in section 4.1, and some European countries).

Food wastage is an operating cost, already reflected in food prices.

Financial gain - the real advantage?

Food redistribution schemes advertise these advantages to encourage donations. For example, the South and West Lancashire Food Bank points out that donating "is an environmentally friendly (and free) way for food manufacturers to dispose of surplus products."¹⁵⁸ A food corporation in Canada reckons that donating unsaleables is "a good deed, but it's also a very fiscally responsible thing to do. If you're trying to lower the costs of doing business, this is the way to do it."¹⁵⁹ Interviews with donors carried out by Second Harvest revealed that "the tax benefits for donating, reduction of disposal costs, and ease of the system were cited by nine out of the ten donors as primary factors influencing their decision to donate."¹⁶⁰ And according to the chairperson of the Victoria Foodbank Management Committee, Australia: "Corporations take very readily to the food bank concept. They can understand it, because it is pragmatic, extremely cost-effective from a business point of view, and because they understand the problems associated with waste and production error and disposal of excess product."¹⁶¹ So such incentives, outside of the UK at least, have encouraged donations. Now, particularly in the U.S., donation is embedded into corporate food culture.

Analysts of food banking, however, do not see these corporate advantages as beneficial to the problem of feeding those in need. Writes Professor Tim Lang of the Centre of Food Policy at Thames Valley University, "The giver of surplus food benefits far more in the long-term, than does the recipient in the short-term. The givers almost always claim tax deduction, or charity status. So the poor have the added indignity of receiving hand outs via a mechanism which even helps retain the superior purchasing power of the affluent."¹⁶² Others argue that the patronage of food retailers results in a dependency on retailers, and

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confusion about which is more important: supply or demand. The experience of the DCFB shows how this is linked to the unreliability of supply, as noted by Faughnan and Byrne: ¹⁶³ "The Dublin City Food Bank was primarily driven by supply rather than by demand... was largely dependent on what the suppliers, whether manufacturers or distributors, chose to donate... accepted what suppliers offered.. regardless of its usefulness to member organisations. There was no arrangement with providers of products in high demand to guarantee continuity in supply. There was little scope for exercising control over such features as the nutritional value of the supplies. Essentially the Food Bank's relationship tended to be one of dependence."

However, Faughnan and Byrne point out that the DCFB situation "contrasted sharply with that of other food banking movements in the U.S and Europe, albeit on a much larger scale."¹⁶⁴ In other words, the dependency described by the DCFB has been largely overcome in places where the movement is more extensive, and where the kudos is significant enough for certain guarantees to be met by donors - remembering also that donations are made easier by the Good Samaritan Law and encouraged through tax breaks. This suggests that a shift from dependency on corporations to greater agency power can be overcome by changes to regulations, infrastructure and supplier-recipient relationships. An example of the latter comes from EU intervention. When stockpiles of the staples, such as rice and beef, fell to zero following the 1996 CAP reform, previous recipients campaigned to reallocate the intervention funding to national governments, so they could buy stocks instead - and thus maintain supplies to charitable agencies.

But practical issues of supply and demand are not the point, say the critics. Much more important is that waste (i.e. supply) should not be

"Waste is a big driving force."

David Wilesmith

dictating the real long-term demand: a policy of tackling the causes of food insecurity. "Waste is a big driving force," said David Wilesmith of FoodDelivery. Faughnan and Byrne, authors of the report on the DCFB, agree: "The huge availability of surplus food within the market system is a powerful incentive to utilise such a mechanism to tackle food insecurity and food poverty."¹⁶⁵ Graham Riches puts it this way:

"To the extent that food banks require the support of the food industry to supply them with their surplus food, few questions are asked about the financial benefits which accrue to the food industry when food which would otherwise be dumped is instead given to the poor. The cost of such wasted food has undoubtedly been included in the mark-up of food prices in general so the community has already absorbed the cost of the wasted food, yet it can be regarded as a well-meaning corporate donation. Who, then, is really benefiting from the corporate donation?" ¹⁶⁶

Advantages to whom: donor or recipient?

According to the Toronto Food Policy Council, redistributing surplus food has: "provided an opportunity for many large food corporations to cast themselves as good corporate citizens, and to hide their contribution to the current situation."¹⁶⁷ In the U.S., outrage has been expressed that corporations can use the tax incentive to make money out of food that would otherwise be dumped. For example, Michigan-based academic Laura DeLind argues that while tax credits aid corporations which donate to hunger-based charities, those tax revenues are needed to help deprived local communities.¹⁶⁸ Thus the schemes harm rather than help those living in poverty.

"The cost of such wasted food has undoubtedly been included in the mark-up of food prices... so the community has already absorbed the cost of the wasted food, yet it can be regarded as a well-meaning corporate donation. Who, then, is really benefiting..?"

Professor Graham Riches

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So, in North America, some hold the view that corporations benefit unduly from surplus food redistribution, and are therefore enthusiastic to become involved. But is this really the situation in the UK? The problems of obtaining donations in the UK have already been discussed. Schemes such as Crisis FareShare have had more problems in getting donors, than pressure to handle their waste. In fact, it was the reluctance of supermarkets to donate surplus that generated more (negative) publicity (after the publication of *Waste not, Want not* in 1997). However, Sainsbury's has now helped pioneer a new attitude (see section 3). Since 1998, the number one priority for edible surplus has been redistribution; second, composting. But, whilst the supermarkets are not dictating the policy, there are still benefits for them. First, redistribution falls into a wider retail strategy to minimise waste - which saves costs and reduces environmental impact. Anecdotal estimates show that Crisis FareShare has helped reduce edible waste in the donating stores by 3-5%.¹⁶⁹ Second, 'Talk-Back' in-store attitude surveys show that consumers want surplus to be given away. Sainsbury's thus inevitably gains kudos, by raising public awareness of its "responsible policies and practical actions." Moreover, as a good-will gesture it has proved "positive for staff morale."¹⁷⁰ All to the good. The retailers gain, and more food is donated.

But some would disagree: donating what would otherwise be waste, they say, contributes to a 'two-tier' system.¹⁷¹ The 'second-tier' receives redistributed surplus as part of a waste disposal strategy, already 'discarded' by the 'first-tier' shopper. However, it must be noted that the strict food safety rules in the UK do mean that food tends to be of a good standard. This compares to Canada, where, according to critics, poor-quality food more easily enters the systems because of the more lenient regulations.¹⁷²

"If good food is going to waste, why feed it to pigs?"

Employee of a surplus food redistribution scheme

Waste recycling or prevention?

A second argument is that redistribution deflects from the issue of waste generation in the food production system. Wastage produced

by agricultural intervention has already been discussed (sections 3.4.1 and 5.2.2). Supermarkets also generate waste in various ways. For example, they set 'consumer-driven' standards on produce size and appearance, meaning that suppliers cannot sell all their edible produce. For example, an important donor to Birmingham Crisis FareShare was an organic importer which couldn't sell less-than-perfect looking fruit to the supermarkets - and therefore gave it away as surplus. Another example is 'consumer demand' for constant in-store availability which can result in unsold produce. Although supermarkets are working to reduce unsold inventory, it can be argued that our current food system is inherently wasteful.

The 'dictating-policy', 'two-tier' and 'there shouldn't be waste' criticisms often elicit the same response from those who work in redistribution schemes. "If the waste is there, we might as well do something with it," "if good food is going to waste, why feed it to pigs?" and "in the current retail climate, that waste is always going to be there." But what if providing surplus, that would otherwise be wasted, to those in need is not the best way to increase access to food? Karen Bradford of Crisis FareShare recognises these wider issues: "If helping those in need is the aim

of surplus food redistribution," she says, "then we need to think about whether it is the best way to do it. There may be better ways of tackling the problem."¹⁷³ Adds Valerie Tarasuk, in response to a question about what should be done with the wasted food: "As for your question about how to make use of food rejected from our current market system - I think that probably is an important question. However, I think it should be considered separately from the question of how poor people should

"To entrench a two-tiered food system with the 'good' food going to those with money and the other stuff ('leftovers') going to the poor is... undesirable for a number of reasons... not the least, of what it does to further social inequality."

Dr Valerie Tarasuk

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meet their food needs when they cannot afford to participate in the market place. To entrench a two-tiered food system with the 'good' food going to those with money and the other stuff ('leftovers') going to the poor is, I think, undesirable for a number of reasons... not the least, of what it does to further social inequality. It would be preferable to bring the edible food that is currently discarded back into the mainstream food system in some way - through improved efficiency in our food processing and retailing system (for example, does so much food need to be wasted in the first place?) and through incentive systems for retailers to sell less-than-perfect products, perhaps at reduced cost.¹⁷⁴

5.4 Sharing and voluntarism: a practical way for the community-minded to help

According to analysts, one of the great benefits of food recovery programmes is that they are morale boosting for those who work in them. They channel the enormous energies of those who wish to volunteer or work in the voluntary sector, and reveal the deep commitment of many thousands of people to helping those less fortunate than themselves. In this way the individualistic nature of society is tempered by solidarity and concern for others. For example, the Salvation Army says: "By feeding people well we show we care."¹⁷⁵ Food is a practical way of showing you care." The Salvation Army is a religious organisation that believes in charity as a creed - often those providing food have concerns based on religious beliefs. But there is a secular motivation too. As Riches puts it, with reference to food banks, "They touch deep wells of community altruism and permit individuals and communities to express their feelings of common concern for their fellow human beings in very practical ways." Volunteers and,

"By feeding people well we show we care. Food is a practical way of showing you care."

The Salvation Army

in the UK, New Deal participants, can also gain from skills training.

The local and community-oriented aspects of the schemes are also seen as a benefit. Those involved throughout the surplus food redistribution chain in

the UK typically say: "it's great to see something positive happening," or "I like the fact that it's local" and "it's local charities benefiting from local businesses."

But again, there are those who criticise these comments as naive. For example, while accepting that food recovery programs "provide a sort of moral relief from the discomfort that ensues when we are confronted with images of hunger in our midst," Janet Poppendieck reckons that "with the moral pressure relieved, with consciences eased, the opportunity for more fundamental action evaporated."¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, it can be argued that the time and effort that goes into redistributing food detracts from other, potentially more useful activities.

Again the argument goes back to the discussion in section 5.2 - whether it is the responsibility of charity to distribute food, or the governments, to develop and implement appropriate policies to tackle the problem.

5.5 Education

5.5.1 An educational force?

Second Harvest believes its food banks can educate the public about the problem of domestic hunger. Indeed, many food banks throughout North America have committed themselves to public education about both hunger, and its causal factors, such as low wages and public policies.¹⁷⁷ In Canada: "The very existence and practice of food banking serves to remind the public, almost daily, largely through the public debate in the

"With the moral pressure relieved, with consciences eased, the opportunity for more fundamental action evaporates."

Professor Janet Poppendieck

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media, that a number of critical social problems continue to plague the lives of millions of Canadians.¹¹⁷⁸ Bread for the World, a U.S. anti-hunger activist organisation maintains that: "Charities [in the feeding movement] can help educate people from their entry point to a sophisticated understanding of the causes of hunger and its national and international dimensions."¹⁷⁹

But, according to critics, while the high profile status of surplus food redistribution may educate people about the existence of hunger, homelessness and poverty, it still helps perpetuate the belief that food charity can help alleviate their causes, and so little public attention is given to the deeper structural issues. This not only allows governments to abdicate responsibility and depoliticise the issue, but also eclipses the much more complex community development initiatives designed to reduce reliance on food handouts and contribute to individual and community empowerment.¹⁸⁰

5.5.2 Eclipsing community food initiatives?

Community food initiatives aim to improve access to food for people on low incomes with the involvement of the local community. Many groups, including the Food Poverty Project at Sustain, view these initiatives positively because, rather than just handing out food, they encourage participation and self-reliance. Communities assume greater responsibility for the well-being of their members and existing strengths are promoted. Examples in the UK include food co-operatives and community cafes. There are also community schemes in the U.S. and Canada, some funded by the USDA, as described in section 4.1.

Despite their positive aspects, some point out that the greater demands placed on the recipients in community schemes inevitably make them less

"Charities can help educate people from their entry point to a sophisticated understanding of the causes of hunger and its national and international dimensions."

Bread for the World

popular as a way of easing food insecurity.¹⁸¹ Others argue that the huge scale of private food relief, coupled with public assistance programmes have eclipsed the movement fighting for community food initiatives.¹⁸² Indeed, the scale of community-based initiatives does remain small in North America when compared to food recovery efforts. There is a debate, behind the scenes at least, between the two types of scheme, concentrated around the

issues raised in this report.

Andy Fisher of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) in the U.S. writes: "Much of the debate between community food security advocates and the emergency food system centers around the dignity and stability of food give-away programmes (left-over food for left-over people?), whether charity just displaces welfare, or is just a morally acceptable way of waste management? The emergency food system receives substantial support from giant food processors, like Philip Morris (Kraft, General Foods) and ConAgra. The appropriateness of these connections can be questioned in the light of these companies' primary activities that harm the health of low income consumers in particular (cigarettes), or destroy the integrity of rural communities and lead to higher incidences of rural hunger. The food bankers, on the other hand, defend their work by the sheer volume and quantity of people they serve and the great immediate need that they meet."¹⁸³

Surplus food redistribution ... still helps perpetuate the belief that food charity can help alleviate their causes, and so little public attention is given to the deeper structural issues.

Moreover, food recovery operations do not have to be indivisible from community-based schemes. Many schemes, including most in the UK, are entrenched in the community, organised by local people who are concerned with the well-being of their neighbours. There is also the potential for the agencies through which food recovery schemes distribute food to

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provide additional services as a way of promoting longer-term solutions. In the U.S., examples of these are numerous.¹⁸⁴ In *Sweet Charity*, Janet Poppendieck portrays such schemes as 'beyond band-aids' - for example, if a project employs a community worker to educate people coming in for food about their welfare-entitlements. Another example is training provision - the D.C. Central Kitchen in Washington D.C., uses surplus food to train homeless people for cooking jobs in the food service industry. Food banks can also become directly involved. For example, the Community Food Bank of Tuscon, Arizona, actually provides medical services and welfare information at the food bank site. It is also one of the many schemes which runs community gardens.

In the UK, Crisis FareShare believes that food provision encourages homeless people into daycare centres and the like, which then encourages access to other services and support, assisting longer-term solutions.¹⁸⁵ This was also a point made by James McKechnie of Sainsbury's, who stressed that Sainsbury's is keen to provide more than just a 'sticking-plaster' approach.¹⁸⁶

Analysts do note that there are limitations both to community food initiatives, and food provision projects that provide access to other services. Neither type of initiative can solve the underlying causes of food insecurity, such as poverty, on a national level. Nor can they provide national minimum standards for access to food.¹⁸⁷ But, according to Janet Poppendieck, food recovery schemes could effect change in this way by highlighting the issue of food poverty as a political problem, and working to set the agenda for public policy by engaging in campaigning activities.¹⁸⁸ So, should food provision be seen as a political issue?

5.5.3 Food insecurity and hunger: a political or practical problem?

Should debates about surplus food redistribution be placed in a political context, or is it best to depoliticise it in order to counter the problem as speedily as possible?

Graham Riches writes: "Food banks have served to depoliticise the issue of hunger in Canada by undermining governments' legislated obligations to guarantee adequate welfare benefits and by obviating the need for responsible public action."¹⁸⁹ Janet Poppendieck describes the growth of food redistribution thus: "It [hunger] became detached from issues of rights and entitlements and taxes and fairness, and became attached instead to canned food drives and walk-a-thons."¹⁹⁰

Riches and Poppendieck essentially place on one side the political nature of distributive fairness, and on the other, apparently practical immediate solutions not concerned with the underlying dynamics. The same duality could be applied to other problems of deprivation, such as homelessness or famines in developing countries. For example, is homelessness an individual problem or a political one?

Should debates about surplus food redistribution be placed in a political context, or is it best to depoliticise it in order to counter the problem as speedily as possible?

The benefits of the practical approach, countering the political one, are summed up by the late Bill Emerson, the U.S. Representative who sponsored the Good Samaritan Bill: "Hunger is an issue that, in its solution, should know no partisan or ideological bounds."¹⁹¹ According to John van Hengel, politics just gets in the way. "The major problem of feeding the poor," he says, "has always been the political thinkers and their individual misappropriations of government help."¹⁹² But the fiercest opponents of food recovery would accept neither this depoliticisation, nor the naming of hunger as the issue. Writes Janet Poppendieck: "defining the problem as hunger contributes to the obfuscation of the underlying problems of poverty and inequality. Many poor people are indeed hungry, but hunger, like homelessness and a host of other problems, is a symptom, not a cause of poverty.... By defining the problem as "hunger," we set too low a standard for ourselves.... Unfortunately, however, a concept like hunger is far easier to understand, despite its

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ambiguities of definition, than an abstraction like inequality.... Once they [Americans] begin, and get caught up in the engrossing practical challenges of transferring food to the hungry and the substantial emotional gratifications of doing so, they lose sight of the larger issue of inequality...It is time to find ways to shift the discourse from undernutrition to unfairness, from hunger to inequality."¹⁹³ And Riches suggests that defining the food access debate around food insecurity is better than hunger because "it raises the debate about the right to food, and because food is an excellent metaphor and tool for engaging the debate about the many manifestations of poverty, inequality and powerlessness in society, and thereby it brings together different institutions and sectors who together are capable of addressing the underlying structural causes (from health, agriculture, food policy, education, social policy, employment, anti-poverty groups, and so on)."¹⁹⁴

Some surplus food redistribution schemes would broadly accept this position, and thus declare themselves for political advocacy. The CAFB "makes representations to the federal government...voicing concerns about policies affecting low income, and supporting national standards for health and welfare in Canada."¹⁹⁵ Graham Riches is supportive of such action. "I would not argue against [food recovery programmes]," he says, "if these institutions played a key role in terms of public education and policy advocacy concerning people's basic human rights."¹⁹⁶ In the UK, the programme manager of Crisis FareShare, Karen Bradford, and her colleagues, are aware of these wider issues, but recognise that the practicalities of the system may push these real issues off the agenda.¹⁹⁷ But as Janet Poppendieck points out, advocacy becomes more difficult in practice when schemes are unwilling to take political positions which might offend donors. It also becomes difficult when funding is stretched, and

"During our growth I have noted that advocacy groups are merely fellow travellers and while they waste much time and money, we end up feeding the poor." John van Hengel

provided for day-to-day management, not political campaigns.¹⁹⁸

The argument against this dialogue, from those whose daily work is to try and ease some of the problems of deprivation, is that in the meantime, we have to feed people, and surplus food redistribution is one way to do it.

John van Hengel, who has worked for over thirty years in the food banking movement, puts it like this: "During our growth I have noted that advocacy groups are merely fellow travellers and while they waste much time and money, we end up feeding the poor...We are very practical in our usage of food and money while they continue to have meetings without solutions."¹⁹⁹ But what this argument ignores, according to Valerie Tarasuk, is the "simple fact that what we do in the present shapes future responses. Moving all this surplus food around takes a lot of work, effectively detracting from advocacy activities. As for people being fed in the meantime, well, I am not that convinced that there is really all that much feeding going on. So I would say that the bigger impact of surplus food redistribution schemes is not what they do in terms of feeding people, but what they do in terms of redefining food problems as matters of charity rather than social justice."²⁰⁰

"It is time to find ways to shift the discourse from undernutrition to unfairness, from hunger to inequality."

Professor Janet Poppendieck

6 Conclusions

So, should we in the UK welcome and therefore extend the use of surplus food redistribution as a weapon against food poverty? Much of the debate presented here has been taken from the situation in North America. The UK has a very different system of surplus food redistribution, and a different politics and culture. How these arguments can illuminate the UK situation must also be the subject of debate. At the most basic level, the North American movement can tell us that apparently harmless 'band-aids' can have outcomes in the longer-term that are difficult to predict. The retrospective theoretical analysis carried out by critics could then be used as a general framework into which the British system can be pieced together and analysed.

The crucial question is: will the expansion of surplus food redistribution in the UK perpetuate food poverty, rather than promote empowerment and long-term solutions? Or is it a matter of how, not if, surplus food redistribution is carried out? Should political advocacy play a role?

It can be argued that food provision is a political issue, and therefore should be fought for with political weapons. Campaign activities by donors, redistributors, charitable agencies, NGOs involved with food, and, wherever possible, by those who benefit from the food, should be welcomed. Using the issue of food security in a strategic context, they are in a powerful position to raise awareness that the problem is one rooted deep in society.

It is a fact that surplus food redistribution is expanding in Britain. Such expansion is unwelcome in that it indicates that Britain has an increasing inability to provide all its citizens with adequate mechanisms, financial or social, to obtain food in culturally acceptable ways. In August 1999, the Labour government announced that by 2002, one million fewer British citizens will be living in poverty.²⁰¹ Perhaps, then, 2002 is the year we should start to see charities turning away surplus food due to the absence of need. And if they are not doing so, we must ask the government - not the redistribution schemes, not the beneficiaries, not the corporations and not the front-line agencies - but the government: why not?

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- 26 Feb '98 - Feb '99: 20 tonnes; Feb '97 - Feb '98: 27 tonnes
- 27 An approximate figure based on the number of crates delivered (3730-3918) multiplied by the average weight of each crate (15-19kg). Figures given for years April '97-March '98 and April '98-March '99.
- 28 Actual figures provided were total distributed since December 1998 are 126 tonnes of apples, 81 tonnes of pears, and 279 tonnes of cauliflowers, giving a total of 514 tonnes. The annual figures have been calculated on a mean per month basis (assuming figures run inclusively from December to August [9 months]) and then multiplied to an annual sum. Given that the production is seasonal and availability irregular, the figure is only a rough estimate. Tomatoes not included because non have been withdrawn.
- 29 Figures from Mary McGrath, Director of Grocery Aid, oral communication, August 1999
- 30 All figures provided by Karen Bradford Crisis FareShare Programme Manager. Meals per week is calculated on a number of meals provided daily by the number of days FareShare deliver
- 31 Figures from David Wilesmith, coordinator of FoodDelivery
- 32 The number of charities who take surplus foods from the Intervention Board varies widely from year to year.
- 33 Figure is the 'real cost' of Provision (now Grocery Aid) for 1998, from Provision, *Provision: providing products for those in need, 1998*
- 34 An extremely approximate 'real revenue cost' (i.e. included unpaid costs of seconded managers, gifts in kind etc) of £70,000 per franchise, multiplied by six (including franchises soon to start). Note initial capital costs are £100,000 per franchise.
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Farm and Food Society
Farmers' Link
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
FLAG (Food Labelling Agenda)
Food Additive Campaign Team
Food Commission
Food for Health Network
Friends of the Earth
Gaia Foundation
Genetics Forum
GMB (Britain's General Union)

Green Network
Guild of Food Writers
Health Education Trust
Henry Doubleday Research Association
Hyperactive Children's Support Group
Institute of European and Environmental Policy, London
International Society of Ecology and Culture
Land Heritage
Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS)
Maternity Alliance
McCarrison Society
National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology
National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations
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National Dental Health Education Group
National Farmers' Union
National Federation of Consumer Groups
National Federation of Women's Institutes
Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association
Oral Health Promotion Research Group
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Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Rural Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (TGWU)
Scottish Crofters' Union
Scottish Federation of Community Food Initiatives
Society of Health Education and Health Promotion Specialists
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UK Public Health Association

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