Household Attitudes Towards Food Waste

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Food waste

- The world wastes 1.3 billion tonnes of food annually, at a cost of $750 billion (FAO 2013).
- Canadians waste $27 billion of food annually (40% of all food produced, and 2% of our GDP. Half of this waste happens in households (Gooch et al 2010).
- UK estimates suggest that 60% of food waste is avoidable (Quested 2013).
- Food wasting has economic, social, and environmental implications.
Studies of household food waste

- We know that there are connections between food waste behaviours and:
  - Social / demographic profile (Quested et al 2013; Ventour 2008; Cox and Downing 2007)
  - Individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Ganglebauer et al 2013; Ghani et al 2013; Stefan et al 2013)
  - Cultural norms (Evans et al 2013; Watson and Meah 2013; Bulkeley and Gregson 2009; Cappellini 2009)
  - Institutional context (Bernstad et al 2013; Metcalfe et al 2012; Nomura et al 2011; Refsgaard and Magnussen 2009)
Studies of household food waste

• WRAP’s “Love Food Hate Waste” in the UK

• Overall, there is a surprising lack of food waste data (especially combining of audits with social / demographic data)
Guelph food waste study

68 households
Results: waste production

• Average total weekly waste: 31.2 kg
  – Clear bag: 7.1 kg
  – Blue bag: 11.6 kg
  – Green bag: 12.5 kg

• Average per capita weekly waste: 10.2 kg
  – Clear bag: 2.2 kg
  – Blue bag: 3.8 kg
  – Green bag: 4.2 kg
Shopping and cooking

• Most (>80%) used lists and checked inventory before shopping.
• Most (82%) agreed that they were able to buy the correct amount of food for their households on a regular basis.
• Most (93%) often or always cooked “from scratch.”
• We observed high levels of food awareness in the survey.
Criteria used to determine when food became waste

- The number of different strategies used to identify food waste was positively correlated with the amount of organic waste produced by a household on average (p = 0.025).
Attitudes and beliefs about food waste

• Guilt around waste:
  – 56% felt guilty about producing “a lot of garbage (non-recyclable waste)”
  – 63% felt guilt about buying food or other products that came with a lot of packaging
  – 85% felt guilt about wasting food

• What kind of problem is food waste?
  – Social: 83%
  – Economic: 72%
  – Environmental: 68%
Whose responsibility is food waste?

- 74% said that the individual is the most responsible for reducing food waste.
- Manufacturers, stores, and government were popular secondary responses.

Individuation of responsibility…
Food waste behaviours and beliefs

Clusters:

1) Family lifestyle and large households
2) Convenience lifestyles
3) Waste awareness
4) Food awareness

• Implications for intervening with individuals, with municipal systems, and on a cultural scale
New research questions

• How is food awareness (shopping, cooking, storing, wasting…) connected to household food wasting behaviours?
• How do changes to municipal organic waste collection systems influence household food waste production?
• Do demographically different neighbourhoods exhibit different food wasting behaviours / beliefs?
• Does the municipal organic waste stream enable guilt-free food wasting at the household level?