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PLASTICS
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UNPACKING THE OPPORTUNITY

PATHWAY TO SELLING MORE UNCUT FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES LOOSE

Reducing household food
waste and single use
plastic packaging

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About WRAP

WRAP is a climate action NGO working around the globe to tackle the causes of the climate crisis and give the planet a sustainable future.

Our core purpose is to help you tackle climate change and protect our planet by changing the way things are produced, consumed, and disposed of.

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Glossary

CO2e – Carbon Dioxide Equivalent

GHG – Greenhouse Gas

PP – Polypropylene

PE – Polyethylene

SKU – Stock Keeping Unit

WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature

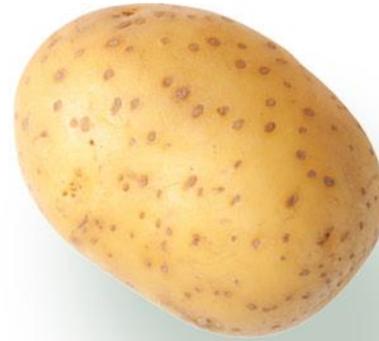
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UNPACKING THE OPPORTUNITY

Introduction

Challenges, opportunities,
and shared ambitions



1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Challenge

Food waste feeds climate change: globally up to 40% of food produced ends up as waste, representing 8–10% of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions¹. In the UK, 70% of post-farmgate food waste in the UK comes from the home, with fresh fruit and vegetables accounting for the largest proportion². The £2.1bn worth of fresh fruit and vegetables thrown away in our homes are frequently discarded before they are even prepared or cooked³.

Meanwhile most fruit and vegetables are packed using single-use plastic. While plastic packaging is a resource-efficient material, its propensity to escape into the environment is evident on a global level, with plastic pollution impacting the health of waterways and marine environments across the planet. Furthermore, the production of virgin plastics is highly energy-intensive and heavily reliant on the extraction of finite fossil fuel feedstocks, exacerbating climate change and further pushing us towards breaching the safe planetary boundaries. Therefore, we need to remove plastic where it is unnecessary and is making unwanted contributions to climate change. And it is not enough to simply switch from one material to another since all materials have an environmental impact.



1.2 The Opportunity

In February 2022, WRAP published important research⁴ which investigated the relationship between plastic packaging and uncut, fresh produce. The research highlighted significant potential to reduce food waste by enabling people to buy only what they need and reduce plastic packaging by increasing the amount of fresh produce items sold loose. If all apples, bananas and potatoes were sold loose, 60,000 tonnes of food waste could be saved by enabling people to buy what they need, and plastic packaging use reduced by 8,800 tonnes per year. Combined, this is a saving of more than 80,000 tonnes of CO₂e.

Whilst the study focused on a handful of commonly wasted items, there are many more products where the research could also be applied. Fresh fruit and vegetables make up more household food waste, by weight, than any other food type. **1.6 million tonnes of edible fruit and vegetables are thrown away each year, costing citizens £3.8 billion³.**

¹ [UNEP Food Waste Index Report, 2021](#).

² [food-surplus-and-waste-in-the-uk-key-facts-oct-21.pdf \(wrap.org.uk\)](#)

³ [Household food waste: restated data for 2007-2015](#)

⁴ [WRAP Reducing household food waste and plastic packaging](#)

However, making this change is not without its challenges. Supply chains have been optimised to sell fresh produce packaged and people have become accustomed to buying it that way. We will need to find solutions to reconfigure supply chains and store operations, and to make it easy and convenient for people to buy loose produce.

Removal of packaging from fresh produce supports the targets of The UK Plastics Pact which is driving circularity for plastic packaging. Key to this is the target to [eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastic by 2025](#). Most of the packaging for fresh fruit and veg is PP and PE film. This material, whilst technically recyclable, is not collected and effectively recycled at scale, nor can it easily incorporate recycled content due to current limitations in existing regulatory frameworks and a lack of large-scale capacity within the domestic recycling infrastructure.

Selling more fresh produce loose also supports [The Courtauld Commitment 2030](#) which aims to halve food waste and associated GHG impacts by 2030, and the [WWF Basket](#) which aims to halve the environmental impact of UK shopping baskets by 2030, including reducing primary plastic packaging by 40% and food loss and waste by 50%.

Countries in Europe are already starting to introduce bans on plastic packaging for fresh produce by adopting the [European Directive 2019/904](#) which aims to reduce the impact of certain plastic products on the environment. The French Government banned fruit and vegetables from being sold in plastic packaging from January 1st, 2022. Other countries are following suit in banning plastics on uncut fresh fruit and veg (e.g. Spain in 2023). In the UK, WRAP has convened members of The UK Plastics Pact and Courtauld Commitment 2030 to develop a Pathway for the removal of packaging from fresh produce. This provides a voluntary framework for action and shared ambition to increase the proportion of fresh fruit and veg sold

loose, thereby reducing both plastic packaging and household food waste, whilst delivering GHG reductions.

1.3 The Shared Ambition



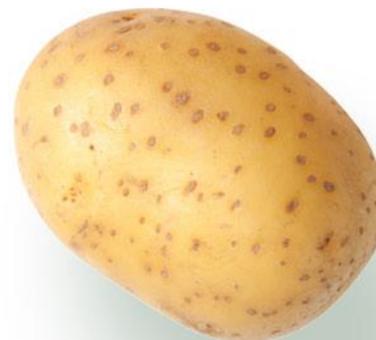
As previously published in the [Eliminating Problem Plastics](#) report, the ambition is for retailers to work towards selling a significant proportion of fresh produce loose. This document sets out a Pathway for achieving this ambition. We have developed a target percentage of fresh produce sales for in-store and online, with targets for 2025 and beyond, representing a significant increase in the sale of loose produce. The Pathway also identifies a list of items to be sold loose across all retailers, in order to 'normalise' the purchase of loose produce by consumers and deliver consistency across the retail environment.

The Pathway has been developed in consultation with industry, to provide a highly challenging but feasible set of targets. The rate of progress will vary across supermarkets depending on their current offering and infrastructure. It is, however, essential that all retailers move towards the end goal, if we are to realise this impact potential and help reduce both food waste in the home and plastic usage.

UNPACKING THE OPPORTUNITY

The Pathway

Aims, Principles,
Targets and Timelines



2.0 The Pathway

2.1 The Aim and Key Principles

Signatories to [Courtauld 2030](#) and members of [The UK Plastics Pact](#) are committed to reducing household food waste and removing unnecessary plastic packaging. The removal of packaging from uncut fresh produce is identified as a pivotal way to deliver this.

The primary principle underlying best practice is that fresh produce should be sold loose, unless it can be demonstrated that selling packaged will result in a net GHG benefit. This takes into account the impact on food waste and packaging, both in the home and supply chain.

Retailers should look to adopt the following key principles as they move towards selling more loose fresh produce.

- The longer-term aim is to sell loose and only loose; investigations and process changes should continue with this in mind.
- The targets and timelines outlined in section 2.3 represent a minimum threshold to aim for, but learnings and progress should be reviewed and accelerated wherever possible.
- Fresh produce should be sold packaged if there are legislative or regulatory requirements to do so e.g. for phytosanitary control on imports or to prevent cross contamination of allergens.
- Mainline/top-selling SKUs should be a focus and prioritised for the transition to loose wherever possible, in order to normalise loose for the consumer, whilst simultaneously maximising reductions in food waste and plastic packaging for high-turnover lines.
- Businesses should refer to the [Best Practice Guidance for Uncut Fresh Produce](#) to aid in the decision on which variety/varieties to sell loose.

- The selected SKU(s) from the list detailed in section 2.3 should be sold loose in every store location which sells that product type.
- Consumers should not be financially worse off and should not perceive they are worse off by buying loose. For example, loose versions should be available at a reasonable and comparable price to any packed alternatives. Price comparisons must also be highlighted, prominent and simple to understand.
- Loose produce should be made attractive and prominent in store to encourage sales.
- For online sales, messaging on loose as well as an attractive web shop for loose lines should be in place.
- Retailers should use the best practice messaging being developed by the WRAP Consumer Engagement Collaborative Action Group incorporated in their own brand voice.
- Independent retailers/stores wishing to move to loose should follow the [Best Practice Guidance for Uncut Fresh Produce](#).



2.3 Targets and Timelines

As a minimum, retailers are encouraged to work towards the following targets.

- **By end 2023:** To sell at least one SKU of each of the produce lines (right) listed loose (i.e. provide a loose option), if 2 or more SKUs of that product are stocked. Retailers are encouraged to look at additional items to sell loose wherever possible.
- **By end 2024:** To sell at least one SKU of each of the produce lines (right) listed loose (i.e. provide a loose option), if that product is stocked. Retailers are encouraged to look at additional items to sell loose wherever possible.
- **By end 2025:** 30%⁵ of all uncut fresh produce sales volume⁶ (units/kgs) in store (5% on-line / 10% in stores without weighing capabilities) to be loose. A full assessment of the baseline will be made in 2023 but is estimated to be c15% across all stores in 2021.
- **By end 2030:** The aim is for 50% of uncut fresh produce sales volume⁶ (units/kgs) in store (10% on-line / 40% in stores currently without weighing capabilities) to be loose⁷.
- **Year-on-year (YoY) progress:** In addition to aiming for the targets listed above, a year-on-year increase in the percentage of fresh produce sold loose is expected and will be monitored through annual reporting.

Produce list for specific focus.

Apples		Garlic		Parsnips
Aubergines		Ginger		Pears
Avocados		Lemons		Peppers
Bananas		Limes		Potatoes
Broccoli		Mangos		Squash
Cabbages		Onions		Swede
Carrots		Oranges		Salad tomatoes

Exclusions

- Online sales are not included in this products list but will still be expected to report progress year on year and aim for the milestone targets. Retailers selling loose online should focus on this list and aim to sell these items loose wherever possible and continue investigations into making more loose items available online.
- Retailers/stores without appropriate weighing capabilities should select and sell products from the list that can be sold by item ("each"). The longer-term aim for these retailers/stores will be to install appropriate weighing capabilities (in-aisle or at checkout) to enable a wider range of loose fresh produce to be offered

It is recognised that there may be exceptional, temporary circumstances when items may need to revert to being sold packaged, for example when the product is too delicate to sell loose during seasonal shoulders, or at times of extreme throughput of high-volume lines such as potatoes and carrots at Christmas. The duration of time should be kept to a minimum and customer communication should be used to explain the reason behind the temporary change.

⁵ Based on the data that was reported to WRAP as part of the UK Plastics Pact annual reporting this is currently (at the time of publishing) around 15% as an average across the retailers who reported at the time although this is based on 2021 data and includes the list of excluded items in some cases and also stores without scales and online sales. The baseline figures for this work, therefore, (with bricks and mortar stores, stores without scales and online sales split out) will be 2022 data which will be reported to WRAP in H1 of 2023.

⁶ Excluding berries, prepped salad/fruit/vegetables, dried fruit, nuts and seeds.

⁷ It is recognised that it might be challenging for any one retailer to reach this target alone, without the support and consistent messaging from the retail environment as a whole in order to change consumer behaviour to buying loose. This target is designed to encourage large scale change.

2.4 Implementation

The Pathway targets are ambitious and will require industry to take action on existing processes, procedures, and behaviours. Throughout the development of the Pathway a range of challenges has been identified by industry. Overcoming these will require cross-sector collaboration on the development of solutions, action planning, trials and knowledge sharing. These include, but are not limited to:

- The introduction of weighing capabilities;
- The impact of seasonal shoulders when some products may be more prone to damage;
- Delivering cost efficiency when packed can be more cost effective;
- Selling loose online – how to handle, deliver and provide product information;
- Maintaining whole crop utilisation as much as possible;
- Supply chain optimisation;
- Imported produce and products packed at source;
- Protection during supply chain and transport, and
- Consumer behaviour change to buy loose over packed and associated barriers around convenience and cost.

Through the Voluntary Agreements, WRAP will be seeking commitment from industry to continue collaborative action on overcoming these challenges and investing in solutions.



2.5 Progress Reporting

All retailers will report data to WRAP annually, and aggregated progress will be published. Progress on in-store loose fresh produce sales will also be reported through WRAP's periodic [Retail Survey](#). The baseline year for tracking progress will be 2022.

In addition to progress reporting, retailers and their suppliers are expected to develop action plans and share best practice as they work towards implementing the targets.

2.6 Next steps

WRAP will continue to work with retailers and their suppliers to support the roll-out of this ambition and Pathway.

Citizen engagement is of critical importance and needs to happen in parallel to the increased offering of loose fresh produce by retailers. WRAP is supporting the development of consistent messaging that can be used by all retailers and stakeholders. WRAP will be working with stakeholders on trialling the specifics of this messaging to better engage the consumer, and results will be shared across the industry.

With plastic packaging around fresh fruit and vegetables is being banned in other nations, there will be learnings that can be applied to the UK.

Further operational trials will be necessary by the retailers to overcome many of the practical implementation challenges previously outlined.

WRAP will continue to convene and develop the evidence and insights to support and report on progress. Through collaboration, and with determination, we will be able to realise the significant opportunity to remove unnecessary packaging and reduce household food waste.

**WRAP's vision is a thriving world
in which climate change is no
longer a problem.**

Our mission is to make the world a
more sustainable place. We bring
people together, we act on the
facts, and we drive change.

Find out more at
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