

Executive Summary

Using a range of theory from in class discussions, module topics and a range of further research this report issues a proposal to tackle two key issues facing society today; food insecurity and overproduction of waste (including food waste) that cannot be effectively processed, ending up in landfill sites. The concept proposal is for a sustainable solution for both of these issues and this report will break down each component part of the proposed concept. It will outline the aims and objectives, the proposed sources of funding, and provide a justification for why it is necessary in the community.

Introduction

In this day and age consumerism is the social standard particularly pushed in western cultures. We want more, for less, as quickly as possible, and if one place can't meet this requirement, another will. The competition is at an all time high and consumers remain unsatisfied, on the lookout for 'the next best thing'. Culturally this message that we need to have more materialistic things is backed on social media, with influencers pushing products to mass audiences for commissions. At the same time as this pushing to overspend and overconsumption materialistic things, we have many families struggling to pay bills and afford food. Following covid this number has only risen due to unemployment and economic instability in harsh times. In this time energy prices in Britain have been and are "souring" (The economist 2022)

While we are seeing efforts to reduce food waste and provide affordable alternatives, we still have people suffering on the breadline, living paycheck to paycheck. "One in four households with children experienced food insecurity in September 2022 – affecting four million children." (McRae, 2023) Prices are rising as we relieve the earth of natural resources and fossil fuels with our overconsumption and capitalist ways and we are beginning to face the consequence of hundreds of years of using unsustainable resources to build an equally unsustainable economy. The BRC (British Retail Consortium) stated that "high prices for animal feed, fertilizer and energy fed into higher food prices on supermarket shelves, while warning that consumers would probably face further increases in 2023." (Partington, 2023)

According to the latest monthly report from trade body the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and the data Nielsen, annual food inflation jumped to 13.3% in December, up from 12.4% in November. Food prices rising impact the most vulnerable in society and will contribute to rising numbers of people with food insecurity, not knowing when their next meal will be as their remaining bills stack up. The government will find it is supporting even more people, which may lead to each individual family receiving a lesser amount to cover for this. Nobody wins in this scenario and it sets a dangerous precedent. "People really are on the line between just and only just about surviving and being pushed into really quite deplorable situations." (Huaxia 2023)

Background research and identifying key issues

This report will focus on how to make food affordable while minimizing waste associated with mass production. We have so many starving people and so much edible food that is unsold getting thrown out. This is completely unacceptable. In 2019 "More than 100 of the biggest players in food, including all of the UK's major supermarkets" signed a pledge to take major

action to drive down food waste following a call to action from the government.(Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2019). Some supermarkets such as Tesco have opted to donate the stock that is beyond its sell by date but within the use by date. In their food waste statement Tesco stated “If we can't sell food, we distribute it to charities and community groups, and offer it to colleagues through our Colleague Shop. Any remaining surplus is converted into pet or animal feed, or turned into energy.” (Tesco PLC)

The current capitalist economy works in a very linear way;

Extract resources > transfer resources > produce products with a lot of remaining waste including toxic chemical waste > sell and dump what's unsold in landfill, to be joined with the purchased product once no longer new or as functional. We are seeing gradual shifts as company's switch to more circular economies although this is not yet mainstream. Kecipir is an example of circular innovation in Indonesia to bring organic farm fresh produce to local urban customers with zero waste packaging and a plastic-free delivery system. “Kecipir customers can access a food webstore via the app to order and pay for their fresh food products. Farmers then harvest the produce, while Kecipir takes care of the packaging, sorting and distribution.” (Ellen McArthur Foundation)

The fresh farm produce is delivered within a 60km radius with delivery times under 24 hours, thus preventing the need for preservatives or refrigeration in transit.

“Using Kecipir, consumers have convenient and affordable access to organic produce (on average 30-100% more expensive than on Kecipir's platform). At the same time farmers get a 40% increase in profit due to a fair and direct market.” In 2019 Kecipir was awarded Circular Economy 2nd winner at the ocean Plastic Innovation Challenge in 2019. (Enviu,2021)

‘Wonky veg’ is catching on as a more affordable solution. This is the less aesthetically pleasing or uniformed fruit and veg that has nothing wrong with them beyond being ‘misshapen’ or more accurately, more natural looking. Instead of being discarded, these are sold for less in supermarkets such as Lidl and boxes can be found in these shops selling a mix of ‘wonky’ or close to being removed from shelves fruit and veg, making diverse healthy eating more affordable. Lidl has named this scheme “Too Good To Waste” and charges only £1.50 for a 5kg box “filled with fruit and vegetables which are still good to use, but would have otherwise been thrown away.” (Lidl)

Unfortunately, it is often cheaper per unit to buy more of something than what you need. For example, it is often cheaper per 100g to buy a 1kg bag of dried pasta, than it is to buy a smaller 500g bag.

Supermarket Price comparison of dried white Fusilli pasta 500g vs 1kg

	Tesco (Tesco plc)	Aldi (aldi.us)	Sainsburys (sainsburys.co.uk)
500g	£0.95 (1.90/kg)	£1.59 (2.97/kg)	£0.95 (£1.90/kg)

1kg	£1.65	£1.35	£1.65
price difference 500g vs 1kg	£0.25	£1.62**	£0.25

** Aldi had different brand pasta for 500g and 1kg however the I went with the cheapest (non gluten free and non whole grain) options for fusilli they had for each category

Although pasta can be considered non perishable goods, the same applies for perishable goods. 'Buy one get one free' deals push people to 'grab a bargain' without much thought as there seems to be no loss to them, but this excess is often unnecessary and will expire before it is used, further contributing to the problem of food waste. Teco have taken action to combat this and have "banned Buy One Get One Free deals on short-life perishable foods like salads." (Tesco PLC)

Society, especially younger generations, are starting to gravitate to more sustainable buying habits, placing key value on ethical sourcing, sustainable production methods and their own contributions to global warming and waste production. We can see a generational consumer shift as social awareness and social pressure changes habits and buying preferences to be more environmentally conscious and minimize single use plastics and unnecessary packaging.

Solution outline

The proposed solution to the problem of food becoming less and less affordable while remaining cheaper to purchase in bulk is simple. Many people don't have the money or the desire to buy massive amounts of the same item just to spread the cost. Sticking with the previous example, who wants to eat pasta every day?

The solution is simple. A social project where a collective purchases these bulk items, with the capacity to store them, and sells to consumers in the amounts they actually need, at cost price. This would function as a non profit. The average household doesn't have room to store the amount of each product that a catering company would use, but these products are still needed and in demand. By purchasing in bulk the unit price is reduced, so when buyers purchase a small amount of the overall amount, they will pay the proportionate percentage, which totals to be enough to cover the cost of the full amount paid. This will prevent overspending to spread cost and unnecessary waste as people no longer feel the pressure to buy more than they need because it ends up cheaper. Doing it in this way buying more does not make the overall saving any better so there is less incentive to overspend.

Catering company suppliers may be unwilling to sell to this non profit cause due to their business contracts, and if this is the case there are alternatives. Supermarkets sell bulk amounts of certain dried products such as rice, pasta and grains, huge sacks of potatoes can be found at a lot of supermarkets too. Very large jars of sauces, special offers on multi-buys. There are many ways around this potential barrier.

Concept aims and objectives

The aims and objectives are to provide affordable food solutions to individuals and families while allowing for a varied mixed diet and buying only the amount they intend to use to save them money. A single member household doesn't need to purchase enough to feed a family of 4. Even if it is overall cheaper it will lead to eating a lot of the same things over and over and a high initial cost which not everyone has available. This proposed solution eliminates that concern, offering the same saving potential, without the high initial costs, and without being loaded with masses of the same products. Not only food waste but packaging waste is also cut back. Each person will bring or buy their own reusable, refillable containers and the bulk purchase will come in one bag or tub, not multiple small /single serving bags.

Name of concept

This proposed concept will be called Cutback as it promotes cutting back on waste, over consumption and overspending. The 3 key values of this proposal. Cutback will begin being located in the most affected areas of Swansea but could expand to other areas in time. Not only will Cutback consumers make a net saving on groceries but it builds a network of people brought together to tackle a shared issue as a community tying into our community goals.

Sustainability and community goals

In times like these, community is everything. Helping one another out, speaking up for those with less of a voice and helping to meet the needs of the vulnerable members of society who are often most affected yet least acknowledged until the repercussions of change are already in effect. A rise in cost affects everybody, but by no means equally. Cutback will be available as a resource for the whole community, but those who will most benefit will feel less financial pressure. On top of providing affordable food solutions, Cutback could have trained volunteers or permanent staff offering free financial managing advice for those who seek it. This could be providing case by case personalized, affordable and realistic meal plans to fit their dietary needs, numbers of people to cater for, financial situation etc as well as more general advice such as recommending the current best market value heating and electric companies and money saving tips for everyday spending.

Another negative impact of rising food prices is that unhealthy food is in many cases more affordable as it is far cheaper to produce. This can force some people to make difficult choices to feed themselves and their families foods they know can be harmful in order to be able to eat "widening health inequalities between wealthy and disadvantaged people in the UK" (McRae 2023). Children who have a diet high in sugar and processed food tend to have more difficulty focusing and lack of nutrition may lead to slower cognition or "brain fog" This can in turn affect their performance in school and their future prospects. They're also more likely to develop unhealthy eating habits that can contribute to long term health issues such as high blood pressure.

Not everyone has the privilege of being able to provide a healthy and varied balanced diet with fresh fruit and veg and although this proposed concept won't fix this problem entirely, it will aid the progress and provide some relief, with a wider variety of options made more affordable.

Much like Kecipir, Cutback can source fresh ingredients from local producers to support local trade and minimize the travel and outsourcing of fresh produce. Providing fresh seasonal produce is often cheaper as they are more readily available and have a shorter shelf life than shipped in items that have been picked early and preserved in transportation to ripen on the shelves.

Justification

There are growing numbers of 'bring your own refillables' stations selling loose grains, pasta, sweets etc in amounts charged by the weight although these are very expensive options in many cases, costing far more than it would to just buy as prepackaged proportioned amounts. These are also often organic options - more difficult to grow/produce without pesticides or genetic modification (GMO) and so more expensive.

This concept would adopt this model but keeping the prices as low as possible, sourcing the produce affordably and only covering the cost of the purchase. There is piling pressure for prices to be lowered but in order to make profits this is increasingly difficult. Cutback would operate as a non profit and so dividing up bulk purchases into more commercial portions based on consumer needs provides a far more affordable option without making losses. Any close to expiry foods bought in bulk that are not entirely sold can be made into meals in an in house cafe which could be sold for low prices as hot meals. This would generate some income while minimizing waste.

Stakeholders and funding opportunities

The stakeholders of Cutback are the local community who will most benefit from the resource, Suppliers who will be providing affordable stock in bulk, Swansea council who will be providing funding and grants and managing tax allowances . The National lottery can also provide grants. Other stakeholders include staff who will be working for the organization, competitors such as big supermarkets will be stakeholders as we will be providing a cheap alternative to what they are offering, however as a non profit, the aims are different and the capacity is far smaller. Cutback won't replicate a supermarket with as wide of a range, Cutback will have a more basic range to provide some affordable healthy variety of foods with less waste and over stocking.

Cutback will require startup funding to purchase a space to build the shop, to store and distribute stock. Funding will also go towards purchasing bulk amounts home essentials. This can also extend to cleaning supplies such as dish soap, and doesn't have to be completely limited to food items.

The majority of staff would be volunteers, although to keep the system running smoothly, Cutback will need some permanent staff such as general managers to oversee the running and organization. General managers roles will be keeping track of inventory, contacting suppliers, managing finances, instructing volunteers, and marketing the idea to the public.

With regards to sourcing funding, local government grants and the national lottery community funding would two be good contributors. On the national lottery website there is "national lottery awards for all of wales" category. Applications for this funding is ongoing and listed as suitable

for voluntary or community organizations. This makes it relevant to Cutback project which will be a community led non profit to combat food poverty. In this category, national lottery fund can offer funding “from £300 to £10,000 to support what matters to people and communities. We're here to support communities with the things that are important to them, including mitigating the impact of the cost-of-living crisis” (national lottery) making them a very viable option.

Local government grants will also be an option for funding as cutbacks will be set up in the more affected area of Swansea who don't yet have access to any similar resources. Swansea government offers a few different grant schemes, the most applicable being the Swansea welsh church act trust fund and Direct Food Support Fund 2022 / 2023. (Swansea council 2023)

The criteria for the Swansea church act fund is among other points “Charitable or voluntary organizations or those with charitable objectives” and “New organizations which require 'seed funding' to start a service for which there is a demonstrable need” (Swansea.gov) the maximum funding awarded by Swansea gov for community groups under this trust fund is £5,000.

To be eligible to apply for direct food support funds you must be “charitable or voluntary organizations, those with charitable objectives and not-for-private-profit organizations.” (Swansea.gov)

One criteria in particular completely encompasses the goals and objectives of Cutback; “Capital funding should support organizations to access, store and distribute additional supplies of food, including good food surplus, boosting their capacity to provide good quality, nutritious food to their customers.” Cutback is a community project to distribute food at a more affordable price in a non profit method of delivery to the community.

Conclusion

To conclude, Cutback will be such a valuable and necessary resource to communities most impacted by the ‘cost of living crisis’ making food and energy bills less affordable for many families who are forced to make a difficult choice of deciding between heating and eating. High levels of stress and being forced to make extreme cutbacks lowers quality of life and negatively affects entire communities who all feel the burden. Cutback is by no means a quick fix to such a complex social and economic issue. However, it would provide some much needed relief, making a wider variety of food and nutrition more accessible and more affordable regardless of situational needs. The benefits of this project will far outreach this generation, as it will be a stepping stone to relieve financial pressure and improve the quality of life and health of children who will grow to be the next generation of workers.

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