

London's food footprint

A commitment to act

Introduction to the research

Cities play an influential role in achieving a sustainable future, with London's consumption-based emissions (those embedded within the products consumed in the city) being 3.5 times bigger than the territorial emissions which occur within the city boundaries.

When exploring these impacts, it is therefore critical that we understand not just the emissions we are directly responsible for producing within the city's boundaries, but also those associated with things we consume – in this case food – that are imported from elsewhere.

'[London's food footprint](#)' is a material flow analysis exploring the mass of materials flowing through London and their associated consumption-based emissions across the entire food and beverage supply chain: from primary production, manufacturing, imports, wholesale and retail, to consumption in food service and the home, to how waste is managed. The research also estimates the amount of food loss and waste at every step of the supply chain.¹

What does the evidence tell us?

- **6,347,000 tonnes** of food are produced to supply London's food system each year.
- **99%** of London's food is imported from outside the city.
- London's food-related consumption-based emissions are equal to **15,483 kt CO₂eq** each year.
- The majority of food-related consumption-based emissions (approximately **78%**) occur outside the city itself and are 'embodied' within the food we import.
- Even before it reaches London, **836,000 tonnes** of imported food are lost, representing the second largest volume of food that is either lost or wasted across the supply chain.
- The first largest volume of food either lost or wasted in London is our household waste (**931,000 tonnes**).
- By reducing and making better use of food loss and waste and shifting towards a more healthy and sustainable diet, London could see a reduction in consumption-based emissions of **31% a year**.

¹ 'Food loss' refers to the discarding of food that results from decisions and actions by stakeholders in the supply chain from post-harvest up to (but not including) food services and retail. 'Food waste' typically refers to food that is discarded resulting from decisions and actions by distributors, retailers, food service providers and households.

Ambitious measures from the Mayor of London, ReLondon and London boroughs to reduce food consumption-based emissions

The Mayor and ReLondon will develop an action plan to reduce food consumption-based emissions. The action plan will work alongside the London Councils 'One World Living' action plan led by the London Borough of Harrow and will include, amongst other actions, the following measures:

- The Mayor of London will convene a food supply chain roundtable with the representatives of the food sector that 'London's food footprint' has identified as having the largest impact in order to reduce consumption-based emissions and food loss and waste from the supply chain.
- As he has done elsewhere, the Mayor will lead by example and use the purchasing power of the GLA and the wider GLA group to measure and reduce the consumption-based emissions of supply chains, working with suppliers, including catering contractors, to achieve this.

London boroughs will also lead by example in reducing the environmental impact of the food served by council services (reducing waste and aligning diets with Planetary Health Diets – ideally sourced locally and from organic agriculture).

Activities and achievements to date

- The Mayor's [London Environment Strategy](#), published in 2018, set targets to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030 and to send zero biodegradable waste to landfill by 2026. The London Environment Strategy also includes the requirement for boroughs to introduce separate food waste collections; 24 London boroughs currently offer kerbside collections to residents. This led the way for government to introduce this requirement for local authorities across the country by 2023.
- The Mayor of London also published the [London Food Strategy](#) in 2018 that aims to ensure all Londoners have access to healthy and sustainable food. The strategy includes chapters on Good Food Growing, Community Gardening and Urban Farming as well as Good Food for the Environment. The Mayor also created the London Food Board to advise on the delivery of this strategy and food issues across the capital.
- The [FoodSave](#) project supported 170 small and medium enterprises in the food sector to better manage their food waste. Collectively these businesses saved an impressive £500,000 over the course of a year, simply by reducing their waste; a further 150 tonnes of edible food waste were sent for redistribution; and 900 tonnes were diverted from landfill through a network of city farms feeding livestock. FoodSave developed a host of food reduction support, materials and case studies which has gone on to support WRAP's programmes and also the [TRiFOCAL](#) awareness-raising campaign.

- Following the TRIFOCAL project that helped Londoners in six boroughs reduce the amount of edible food thrown away by 9% from 2017 to 2019, ReLondon is now implementing an educational campaign called [Food Wave](#). This EU-funded project targets young people – in particular those on low incomes – across London to increase their understanding, engagement and communication skills around sustainable patterns of food consumption and production for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- With support from the Greater London Authority and London boroughs, the [London Food Alliance](#) (Felix Project, Fareshare & City Harvest) created over 50 [food redistribution hubs](#) in 32 boroughs during the pandemic.
- Thanks to funding from the Mayor of London's Green New Deal Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, ReLondon's [business transformation programme](#) is supporting the development of an eco-system of innovative food waste prevention and redistribution businesses. Such companies include Winnow, Olio, and Too Good to Go that have collectively reduced food waste by 30,000t and avoided the emissions of 150,000t of CO₂e.
- The [Food Flagship Initiative](#) is a partnership between the GLA, ReLondon and Ellen MacArthur Foundation. It has convened a consortium of public-private organisations to co-design, test and scale evidence-based food solutions and policies to reduce consumption-based emissions. A key element of the initiative is supporting and amplifying circular food demonstration projects in London; a 'Circular Food Pioneer Project' status has been recently launched to formally recognise good practice circular food projects. Circular Food Pioneer Projects are promoted through Food Flagship Initiative partners' networks, can use a certification stamp, and receive strategic support and targeted introductions to potential partners where needed.