

Episode 7: Don't Waste This | Native Vegetables and Game in Australia

Francesca Goodman-Smith, End Food Waste Australia

Natural disasters unfortunately, are, you know, increasing in their frequency. We're seeing once in every hundred-year events happening once in every 10 years. And these natural disasters not only are a challenge for the food system when they happen in terms of getting food to the right places and having transportation and refrigeration.

But also in terms of food production, so making it harder and harder to grow with droughts and floods. And I think, you know, we need to become resilient and we need to do things in a different way that actually ensures we can continue to produce food. Australia is such a large food producing nation we actually produce enough to feed our population four times over and then just earlier this month there were figures released that one and three Australians face food insecurity, and I just think we have such a long way to go when you hear stats like that, you know, it's this awful paradox that we really don't want to be our reality.

I think everyone was pretty shocked with the amount of food that is being wasted in this country. It came out with the figure of 7.6 million tonnes of food per year. So we have a huge international cricket ground in Melbourne called the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the MCG, and that food that is wasted every year is enough to fill that stadium to the brim 10 times per year, so that absolutely blew my mind when it was quantified

Every person has a role in reducing food waste and it's one of those topics that you know you you talk to people and they have experiences with food they, you know, they'll tell you what they had for dinner last night and what they do with their leftovers or, you know, I think it's one of those ways that we can tackle issues relating to climate and social issues and economic issues through everyday decisions and every single person can be part of that.

Talya Shalev, WRAP

Welcome back to Don't Waste This. I'm Talya Shalev, International Partnerships Manager here at WRAP, and I'm joined by Francesca Goodman-Smith from End Food Waste Australia to talk about the global food system crisis and what's at stake in Australia if we don't fix it. Francesca, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today. How are you doing?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

My absolute pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Talya Shalev

It's really great to have you and also to bring you into the conversation and to represent Australia.

We have had representatives from New Zealand already, so it's good to try and make this work in terms of different time zones that we're working in to demonstrate that we are able to do this. Thank goodness, because of all the high tech that we have post-covid available to us, but first of all, before we get into the conversation and talk about the food system crisis and some of the other challenges that we're dealing with in our organisations, it'd be good to get to know you a bit more. So could you share with us who you are and what your role is at End Food Waste Australia?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Absolutely. And so firstly, I am joining you from Brisbane, Australia and I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I'm calling you from the Jagera and the Turrbal people of Meanjin Brisbane. So yeah, I'm very lucky to be based here in Australia and working at End Food Waste Australia, which is a large public private partnership dedicated to food waste reduction across the country.

Talya Shalev

And you're not actually from Australia as I understand it.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

No, that's correct. So it's quite interesting actually. Kaitlin, who heads up the New Zealand Initiative is from Australia and I am from New Zealand. So we had a bit of a running joke going that we sort of swapped roles and swapped countries.

Talya Shalev

It's good that you managed to find each other's roles in each other's countries and yet can still stay so connected as part of the Food Pact Network.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Definitely. I mean Australia and New Zealand are very, you know have their unique attributes but are also very similar in many ways. The way that businesses operate and even the same businesses operating across the two countries and cultural practises and some of our beloved foods are also shared.

Talya Shalev

Which she also made reference to as well, which we really appreciated. And I suppose we always like to ask our our guests what food or ingredients matters to them or represents their country. Kaitlin did that for us by referring to the Sunday Roast, which is for Kiwis at least a very traditional meal, which we also share in the UK too. So I guess if you wouldn't mind today sharing with us what you

would think, what would you would say represents Australia when we think about tradition, culture, food and or ingredients?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah, sure. So I do feel a little bit unqualified to answer that question being from New Zealand and I don't know if Kaitlin mentioned, but we also have a few great food debates that go on between our two countries around where certain dishes originated, for example, the Pavlova, which I think the jury is still out on whose dish it is. However, both of our countries have a very rich historical food culture that began a very long time ago with the First Nations people. So here in Australia, with the Aboriginal people, food, looking after the land, and and really connecting with nature and how food has grown is something incredibly important and transformative in the culture. And there's native foods such as kangaroo and emu and plants like bush tomato and wattleseed that have been used and consumed for a very long time and are still part of the modern Australian food scene as well, which is fantastic. We also have a very rich multicultural community here in Australia, so we have a lot of food influences from around the world, from Europe to Asia Pacific to the Middle East, so it's fantastic to see a broad range of food celebrated here.

Talya Shalev

I mean, I can remember when I I was very lucky to spend some time living in Australia almost a decade ago, and I can remember my first time trying kangaroo as someone from the UK, we don't necessarily have that type of what I would call exotic meat available to us. And it was quite the experience. Would you say that that's part of your everyday diet or your regular diet, kangaroo and emu?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

I think it depends on the individual of course, but there is, you know, a big kangaroo production, you know, rearing and yeah, wild harvest of Kangaroos in Australia, even though they're a national animal, they also are very bountiful in numbers, so they are available to purchase at supermarkets, and we're actually doing a food waste reduction project on kangaroo at End Food Waste Australia, where we're helping to maximise all of, utilising all the meat from the harvest and transforming some of the lesser used portions into new products.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

I think, you know, with the national dishes, we recently completed a project on converting rescue food into shelf stable meals that can be transported to rural and regional communities during disasters to make sure that communities are not cut off from food supply and have access to healthy and culturally appropriate nutrition. So when we developed that range of meals, we actually did a lot of testing with communities to understand what flavour profiles they wanted and what food would

actually do well in terms of being freeze dried and then reheated again. So in that range, we had spaghetti Bolognese and a chickpea tagine, and a Asian inspired noodle dish. So that kind of reflects our multicultural communities as well.

Talya Shalev

And I'm curious to know in terms of how that project has been received by those living in rural communities, have they been able to feedback in terms of what they've appreciated or or enjoyed most in terms of the cultural representation that this project has allowed for them to access?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah so I think the one of the key things is that for communities such as Wujal Wujal, which is in far North Queensland, they can be really affected by natural disasters such as Cyclone Jasper, which happened a few years ago and, you know, powers cut off and refrigeration isn't available, and so the range of food that is you know shelf stable and able to be consumed during those times is not necessarily very nutritious. It's definitely not, you know, celebrating vegetables and meat and you know other nourishing and delicious ingredients. And so I think it was really transformational in a way that these meals can be stored in preparation for a disaster happening. So not only is it providing access to food, but it's actually looking at the nutritional profile as well. And the testing that was done with the community actually helped to refine the dishes, even changing some of the names of the dishes which didn't feel like they resonated with the community. The team, the research team from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and FareShare, who are the food rescue organisation that now are deploying the initiative, worked really, really hard to to make sure that Community was consulted during the development of those recipes.

Talya Shalev

That's brilliant. And is this something that you expect to roll out into other communities across Australia or are you going to keep it to Queensland for the time being?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Absolutely, it's it's for all of Queensland, for all of Australia and also, you know, could be utilised globally as well and the recipes were developed specifically to be, you know, utilised foods that were commonly donated in Australia and common surplus foods that arise during gluts of production as well, so that we can make sure we're not only addressing food security, but we're also addressing food waste and food surplus challenges. So those recipes might be modified in different countries, but the same processing techniques can be employed in order to extend that food, which often is, you know, highly perishable like fruits and vegetables into long shelf life products.

Talya Shalev

Amazing. So you've already started to give us a glimpse into what it is that End Food Waste Australia are doing. But for those that are unfamiliar in terms of what a food waste voluntary agreement looks at or is looking to achieve. Can you give us a quick overview of what are the kind of activities or the overall aspects that End Food Waste Australia are trying to drive in Australia at the moment?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah, absolutely. So we are a organisation that has four foundational pillars to it. So the first one is research and development. So we've been running a research centre for about 7 years and partnership with industry and universities and research organisations across the country to build the evidence base to food waste reduction. So where we need new innovations or where we don't have, you know, answers to fundamental questions such as how much food is being wasted and various different parts of the supply chain we can commission research to get those insights in order for us to implement. Then the second part around implementation is the Australian Food Pact, which is under our industry action pillar. So this is where we really take those insights from research and development, from industry, from what we're hearing in communities and then help to assist industry in rolling out different initiatives, measuring their food waste, committing to targets. So really being that trusted partner to industry.

Then we also have a lot of policy insights that not only come out of the research, but also come out of discussions with industry around potential barriers to food waste reduction, where we will work collaboratively with both industry and government to advocate for policy change.

And then the final pillar of our organisation is around the consumer. As you know, us in the sector know, that consumers are responsible for a significant portion, around 50% of food waste in Australia and it's similar figures for other countries globally.

And so we are running a consumer awareness campaign called the Great Unwaste, that was actually informed by our research and development pillar as well. We did a big study on household food waste which distilled seven key behaviours to help consumers reduce food waste. And now those behaviours are embedded in this nationwide campaign.

Talya Shalev

And in terms of your role within End Food Waste Australia, is there a particular area that you head up or a role that you have moved into?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah. So at the moment I am director of the Research Development and extension arm. So our Cooperative research centre, we've got around 57 projects that are currently running through that and we've already completed 80. So it's a huge portfolio of projects and really diverse exciting part of the organisation. And at the moment I'm also overseeing the industry action area of our

organisation, so that's home to the food pact and I've been able to learn a lot from colleagues internationally as well as my team here in Australia around how the food pact operates, how to work with businesses on some of these really gnarly nitty gritty issues that not one business can solve on their own.

Talya Shalev

Absolutely. And speaking of gnarly and statistics, is there a key fact or a statistic that comes to mind when you think about how we illustrate what the challenge of food waste is in Australia for those that maybe are unfamiliar with it, both within Australia and outside?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yes, there is. So in 2021, we published our national food waste baseline and I think everyone was pretty shocked with the amount of food that is being wasted in this country.

It came out with the figure of 7.6 million tonnes of food per year and they converted that and it's quite an Australian sort of centric visualisation, but I'll try and describe it to you. So we have a huge international cricket ground in Melbourne called the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the MCG, and that food that is wasted every year is enough to fill that stadium to the brim 10 times per year, so that absolutely blew my mind when it was quantified and then put into a visual like that, you just you think about that whole stadium packed with food waste and you do that 10 times over.

Talya Shalev

And this statistic, when were you able to capture that baseline and have you seen a reduction since you managed to measure that baseline?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

So the baseline was published in 2021, utilising 2019 data, so it has been a significant portion of time since that was done. We're actually in discussions at the moment around what it would take to redo that baseline.

As far as End Food Waste Australia goes, we measure our initiatives. So we have an annual reporting process with the pact where businesses report back voluntarily on their food waste produced. And that's a really great process where we are seeing year on year reductions that businesses are able to achieve. But we don't yet have that national picture again of, you know, how is that being reflected in Australia's country footprint?

Talya Shalev

And working with those businesses and with the rest of industry to capture that data is so incredibly important as so many of the other Pacts have told us across the podcast. And as we know in in the

Network. I'm curious to know when when we think about those native ingredients and and those foods that you mentioned earlier.

Are you able to easily see how much waste of those items was seen when you measured that baseline? Specifically, I'm thinking about kangaroo you mentioned we're now looking at carcass utilisation as part of that was the baseline was determining the baseline an activity that helps you to really identify the key commodities that are being highly wasted in Australia.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

So I think the baseline is only as good as the data that's available and the sectors and businesses that engage and we haven't really delved deeply into all food groups, so I think we we utilise sort of more traditional food categories that are comparable on an international level. So foods like kangaroo or wild harvest foods weren't actually counted in the baseline, but that is definitely an area that obviously we don't want those foods being wasted and we want those foods to be celebrated and part of diets and cultural practises as well. So it's perhaps something that we can consider going forward.

Talya Shalev

I'm really curious to know a bit more about the whole carcass utilisation project that you mentioned. Was it End Food Waste Australia or a particular business or industry representative that came to you that wanted to look at this as a potential intervention opportunity?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah, it was a particular business. So Macro Meats in South Australia, they harvest kangaroo and they, yeah, came to us saying, you know, we want to increase our harvest and one way to do that is ensuring that we can utilise everything that we are processing. So yeah, they came up with the idea and really spearheaded the initiative and we've provided the research support in order to really understand the full suite of options they have available to, not only, it sounds a little bit gory, but during the deboning process and make sure that they're extracting as much meat as possible, but then also be able to create some really innovative and interesting product from that additional meat that's harvested.

Talya Shalev

As part of this project, do you expect to be able to publish some of your findings to share some of the data in terms of food, food waste reduction as we would traditionally refer to it.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah, absolutely. So most of our projects will produce a final report that's available publicly. Obviously any commercially sensitive data isn't published, but anything that can help the industry or

shed new light on opportunities or data or technology or collaboration is published wherever it can be.

Talya Shalev

Amazing. And Speaking of collaborations, Australia, the End Food Waste Australia team have been part of the Food Pact Network since it launched in 2024. I'm curious to know from your perspective what being part of the network has helped you to achieve or the kind of support that you've been able to get access to in the last year or so

Francesca Goodman-Smith

It's fantastic to see this global network not only established, but then the individual food pacts and countries developing and launching. Really excited to have Brazil now part of this ecosystem. And you know every country brings such unique insights and you know, everyone's been on a journey in most countries for quite some time trying to tackle this issue and we are seeing more and more this the challenge of food waste being raised in importance and in profile and I think having a global network actually helps us all to amplify that message, that shared message. You know, I'm really looking forward to learning and hearing more of the case studies and stories and also challenges that other countries are facing when it comes to food waste reduction. And then sharing our own learnings and challenges as well, I think you know there's although there's lots of unique elements to how each country manages and deals with food waste, there's also a lot of similarities and synergies that you know, we don't need to reinvent the wheel and we can adopt solutions that have been tried and tested elsewhere.

Talya Shalev

Absolutely. And and some of those learnings, we've already started to see even coming from Australia. We know that the US supported in terms of hosting webinars and we like really seeing more of that cross-border collaboration starting to happen more and more, which is amazing to see. Thinking now about the food system crisis, we've talked a little bit about food waste reduction activities that you're doing with industry, the amazing amount of research that you're supporting and delivering on in Australia. There is, and you've also talked a bit about the social aspects of what we're calling this food systems crisis, and you're addressing that by working with organisations like Fareshare to look at redistribution as well. Are there other aspects of how what you would define the crisis that you are addressing or that you're interested in looking at? And that you feel that a part of the work that you're doing on top of those social and environmental, unfortunately the challenges that we're dealing with.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

I think establishing that evidence base of those challenges that we're dealing with has been really important. And then once you you know it's that whole classic once you see and understand the

problem, then what do you do about it?

And I think that's where our organisation is really here to hold the hand of industry and NGOs and government and other organisations wanting to take action, but not necessarily knowing the next step or needing to work with others on what those next steps look like.

So we've actually we're about to launch a large horticulture project, which is a collaboration with 30 different horticulture growers and Horticulture Innovation Australia, which is our large research and Development Corporation and three research providers to deliver a multi-year project on food waste reduction for the sector. So that's where we see our real ability to help shift the dial is to bring all of those players together and support these large initiatives that can really benefit an entire sector, multiple businesses through to the consumer.

Talya Shalev

And that's really the key as you've described it in terms of really driving progress is bringing those stakeholders together to collaborate and to see that there is an advantage, hopefully a competitive advantage. But we like to work in this pre competitive space to collaborate and work together across the value chain.

I'm curious to know from your perspective what is the the issue that you see that our future generations might face in Australia if we don't all come together and start working on some of these key opportunities as we like to see them.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah. So as I mentioned with the example earlier on the the Food Rescue Initiative, where we're looking at extending the shelf life of rescued meals to get into the remote communities. And after disasters, I think you know, natural disasters unfortunately, are, you know, increasing in their frequency. We're seeing once in every hundred year events happening once in every 10 years. And these natural disasters not only are a challenge for the food system when they happen in terms of getting food to the right places and having transportation and refrigeration.

But also in terms of food production, so making it harder and harder to grow with droughts and floods. And I think, you know, we need to become resilient and we need to do things in a different way that actually ensures we can continue to produce food. Australia is such a large food producing nation we actually produce enough to feed our population four times over and then just earlier this month there were figures released that one and three Australians face food insecurity, and I just think we have such a long way to go when you hear stats like that, you know, it's this awful paradox that we really don't want to be our reality. So the more that we become aware and work together to, to take action, I think, the better.

Talya Shalev

If we think about, if we were able to fix this crisis in Australia tomorrow.

Ideally that would be great, but not only for the people that you've described, but also for the

environment and for the country that you're representing at the moment. What would you feel needs to happen to ensure that or to achieve that?

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Oh, that's the \$1,000,000 question, isn't it? What will we do tomorrow?

Look, I think I honestly think it is working together. I just think you know, if a business or an individual tries to solve this challenge in isolation, you'll only get so far. But we can really amplify and fast track that impact if we're bringing organisations from completely different spaces together to innovate and to come up with solutions. I mean, I think that's how the whole food rescue sector evolved. It was, you know, there's this food insecurity challenge and then there's farmers growing food that they're not able to sell. And you bring those two things together and you help to not only feed people but also create avenues for farmers to utilise and make sure that their food is not going to waste. So the more that we can look across the food system and see one part of the system's challenge is someone else's opportunity the better we can do.

Talya Shalev

I love that and absolutely that that sense of working together is something that we continue to champion as part of the Food Pact Network and we're hopefully evidencing it by bringing the organisations that are delivering this at a national level together.

It's been really interesting to hear what your perspective is on the crisis in Australia, as someone who's not necessarily from the country but very much embedded in its food system. Now I'm curious, we ask all of our guests this but what is it that motivates you to get up every day to work in this space to deliver the work that you're doing, especially on the days when it's proving a little bit more challenging, the issues are still very much a reality and you're having to deal with them make quite big decisions on a day-to-day basis.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

The part that has always motivated me about food waste when I was working in the sector in New Zealand and now here in here in Australia and it's universal, it doesn't matter what country you're in, is that every person has a role in reducing food waste and it's one of those topics that you know you talk to people and they have experiences with food they, you know, they'll tell you what they had for dinner last night and what they do with their leftovers or, you know, I think it's one of those ways that we can tackle issues relating to climate and social issues and economic issues through everyday decisions and every single person can be part of that. So I find that finally motivating, and I think you know some, I think we need to do a better job of helping, helping to empower everybody to know their role and their responsibility and that the actions they take do matter.

Talya Shalev

And was there a particular moment when you were first introduced to the sustainability space or the

food loss and waste, I would say, sector, in terms of a career path that you can remember that was that light bulb moment for you where you were like, yeah, this is something that I want to do. I want to work in this space. I want to make a difference in this particular area.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Oh, 100%. And so in my third year of university, I actually went to UNI to study nutrition and I wanted to become a dietitian. And that was the way I thought I could make a difference in the food system. And I took an elective subject in my last year, which was about food and society and the wonderful Miranda Marosa was my lecturer, and she's still a very important mentor and collaborator to me and to many people in the food waste space. And she took our class for a field trip to the local landfill.

And I just remember, you know, it was my first time being in a landfill and just opening up some of the bags that were sitting there and seeing, you know, whole lettuces and absolutely perfect food. That was all just sitting in this pile of waste and rotting. And I thought, you know, this is really, if I want to make a difference in the food system this is this is where I can do it.

Talya Shalev

That moment is very real for a lot of people that work in this space and that that visual is not uncommon unfortunately for not only people that work in the sustainability sector, but also every day in our everyday lives in our homes. Unfortunately we do. We are faced with that reality, so hopefully that passion that you're feeling will also be ignited and other people that might also want to work in this space as well. And I'm sure you're meeting those excited young people all the time and it's great to know there is organisations like yours where they have a place that they can come and support those activities.

Well, thank you for sharing that with us, Francesca. I think that's the last thing that we would like our guests to try and do. It's a difficult task, but what we ask is whether you're able to share with us in 10 seconds. Hopefully if we can keep it 10 seconds. What do you think the most urgent message is to that people should hear to make sure that we understand why we need to fix the global food system crisis as you understand it.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Yeah. So I've said it lots of times during this conversation, but I will say it again because I really think it is what's needed for us to fix this crisis is that tackling food waste requires collaboration between different actors across the food system to do things differently and achieve what no one business or individual can alone.

Talya Shalev

That's brilliant. Thank you so much, Francesca. We started by talking about Kangaroos and emus and wattleseeds, which I've never heard of before, and I'm going to go away and look into it a bit more



now after this conversation. So thank you for enlightening me as well. And it's been great to hear what what it means to you to work within End Food Waste Australia as a Kiwi who's come over to Australia and is both still very much representing your culture and your heritage, but also trying to support the food system in Australia. So thank you for that and for all of your work in it.

Francesca Goodman-Smith

Thanks so much.