



Waste opportunities

For more than 20 years Mark Barthel has worked on food and agricultural sustainable innovation, largely on quantifying and preventing food loss and waste around the world. Now he has Australia in his sights. **Kim Berry** writes.

AUSTRALIA is the 16th country Mark Barthel has worked with in tackling food waste.

He moved here less than a year ago and is the specialist food waste advisor at the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre. He was shocked at what he found.

More than seven million tonnes of food are wasted in Australia every year, at an estimated cost of \$20 billion. And yet in 2019, more than one in five Australians experienced some form of food insecurity.

Barthel told *Food & Drink Business*: “At some point in the last twelve months, twenty-one per cent of Australians did not have the money or access to food they needed for their households.

“The food chain in Australia is uniformly bad, no matter where you look. Normally in an OECD country you see food waste in the home, wholesale

and retail. But in Australia, almost a third of food waste occurs in primary production, thirty-four per cent in homes and twenty-four per cent in manufacturing. Australians waste two hundred and ninety-eight kilograms of food per person per year.

“I have never seen food waste on a scale like this in an OECD country before.”

A number of factors are at play, he says. “There is systemic over production. Australia grows enough to feed sixty million people. Roughly a third is exported, so where is the over supply? That gap is food waste.

“It is going to take a whole chain effort. So much has to change at every stage of the supply chain,” Barthel says.

BUILDING A ROADMAP

In 2017, the federal government released the *National Food*

Waste Strategy which set the national target to halve food waste by 2030. Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL) was engaged to support the strategy’s implementation.

During the past two years, FIAL has worked with multiple stakeholders to identify the steps required to make the food waste reduction target a reality.

Barthel has been the driving force behind the result of that consultation, the *Roadmap for Reducing Australia’s Food Waste by Half by 2030*.

He says the critical building blocks that need to be in place start with a voluntary commitment program with the agrifood industry. He has implemented similar programs in 24 countries and would use the findings and experiences from those to frame one here.

“Secondly, we need a nationwide behaviour change

Food waste by value chain sector¹



effort that will support households to better manage their food and alter behaviour. And we need a change of culture with business. Looking at commercial contracting practices and the infrastructure between producers and retailers, that will make a difference.”

In one project, Barthel moved retailers to a whole crop purchase arrangement. “That was phenomenal. Crop utilisation went up twenty-five per cent. The farmers got a better income, most of the crop came out of the paddock, most was used to feed humans and if not, animals.

“It’s a much more holistic view of how to contract and maximise value through the whole value chain,” he says.

Barthel says reframing food waste creates a host of opportunities, while securing

commitment from the food industry equals impact.

There are major environmental benefits, with food waste being the third largest source of greenhouse gases in the world after China and the US.

Barthel says the rollout of the UK’s Courtauld Commitment Stages 1-3 spanned 10 years and achieved a 28 per cent reduction in avoidable food waste, \$12 billion in business and consumer savings and 11 million tonnes CO₂ equivalent emissions.”

The ability of major retailers and hospitality chains to have an impact is significant. “They are really important to better manage the food they buy and how they manage it. Reframing establishes trust and improves the resilience and sustainability

of food supply chains by working with those that influence how the land is used (e.g. food retailers) and those who manage the land (farmers and growers),” Barthel says.

It also means more hungry Australians can be fed by

guidance and support is provided for those who want to act and take control.

“The situation we find ourselves in with the pandemic is such an opportunity. With such unprecedented food demand and supply volatility, to

QUANTIFYING FOOD WASTE IN AUSTRALIA

\$2200-3800

PER HOUSEHOLD, OR 298KG PER CAPITA

increasing the amount of surplus food that reaches them through food rescue and relief organisations; households learn better ways to manage the food they buy or grow; and greater

still be wasting the amounts we are in conceivable.

“If there was ever a time to reframe food waste this is it. We can significantly change food chain resilience.” *

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