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Food surplus as charitable provision: Obstacles to re-introducing food as a commons

Tara Kenny, Colin Sage

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist" - Hélder Câmara

'We may find in the long run that tinned food is a deadlier weapon than the machine gun' – George Orwell.

Introduction

One of the consequences of the 2008-09 economic crisis has been a growing casualization across the labour market through short-time, zero-hours contracts and other flexible working practices. This has resulted in increased pressure on household budgets, such that opportunities to 'save' on food spending - particularly at 'no-frills' discount supermarkets, through 'own-brand' labels and by eating outside the home (with a steep rise in 'takeaway' fast-food outlets) - have been welcomed. It is no ,coincidence that this period has witnessed, particularly in the UK, an explosion in the number of food banks and other charitable food provisioning arrangements. Yet alongside changes in the labour market and rising levels of poverty we also witness an enthusiastic celebration in certain quarters for the emergence of a new 'sharing economy' with social entrepreneurs spearheading logistical solutions for a more sustainable future. The prevailing narratives are that of celebration and transformation: fixing an inefficient system that wastes one third of all food produced into a 'win-win' solution where food surpluses are channelled to the less fortunate, and thereby solving the twin burden of food poverty and food waste in the process. Of course, the fundamentally structural unsustainability of the food system remains unchallenged.

In this chapter we attempt to stitch together disparate developments which we believe have implications for understanding the challenges confronting the 'food as a commons' agenda. In particular, we suggest that the widespread acceptance of surplus food redistribution as a solution to either food waste or food poverty represent an obstacle to working towards the implementation of the right to good food – the cornerstone of building a commons-based food system. We argue that this new era of food poverty, characterised as much by *malconsumption* as by under-nutrition, where the abundance of cheap highly processed food rather than a lack of food prevails, presents significant challenges to those working for a healthy, sustainable and inclusive food system. This requires that we begin by recognising the industrial *massification* of food, the scale whereby ever greater volumes of highly-processed products are driven through a linear supply chain destined for supermarket shelves, accompanied by strong media promotion such that customers are encouraged to buy more than they require. In the make-believe world of consumer sovereignty and free choice, food is always and everywhere a commodity purchased by 'rational economic actors'. This narrative serves however, to reinforce the individual focus that bedevils food, social and public health policy, crowding out the notion that food is also a public good. If food <u>is</u> just about consumer choice then the responsibility for eating healthily falls upon individuals, not the state nor those who supply the food. In the context of charitable food assistance programmes, however, consumer choice does not apply for here there is no consumer: only a 'needy' beneficiary relying upon the food industry, social entrepreneurs and an army of volunteers.

Consequently, the chapter proceeds as follows. First, we note how the contemporary food system marked by corporate concentration, the excessive supply of energy-dense packaged products and resulting in rising volumes of waste requires, in the 'age of sustainability', new means of disposal. This is key to comprehending the rise of charitable food redistribution, discussed in section two, for which the new 'sharing economy' provides a logistical platform. Thus we briefly explore the rise of 'smart app tech entrepreneurs' that serve as intermediaries between suppliers of 'surplus' food and charitable partners willing to distribute this amongst their client base, the 'deserving poor'. We then drill into the Irish case, first providing some institutional context, then through analysis of primary data drawn from extensive fieldwork in Cork, offering detailed insights into the implications of charitable food distribution. Finally,

we close with a discussion on how these insights will help in developing a more durable case for transitioning towards a commons-based food system.

II. Big Food > Cheap Food > Food waste

The global food industry is estimated to be worth US$8 trillion per year with the packaged food market worth US$2.4 trillion in 2014 and where the top 100 food and beverage firms account for 77% of all packaged foods sold globally (Clapp and Scrinis 2016). Companies have grown market share around the world not only by taking advantage of liberalised trade agreements but by encouraging governments to relax regulations while intervening to re-shape consumer trends particularly in middle-income countries. Besides growing corporate power and increasing consolidation and concentration (IPES, 2017) this food system is also characterized by ever increasing availability of edible oils, sweeteners, and meat (Basu, 2015: 248), an excessive supply of nutrient deficient, energy dense 'pseudo foods' (Winson, 2004) and a significant increase in calorie supply into the human diet (Carolan, 2011)

However, analysis of the changes in the global food supply suggest more complex processes at play than simply an outcome of increased volumes, rising incomes, or simply attribution to 'economic development'. Basu (2015) highlights the role of a handful of companies that are responsible for the increased sales of sugar sweetened beverages and packaged foods distributed through domestic systems (often by franchising local production). With healthier food options 'inherently less profitable' (Stuckler and Nestle, 2012: 2) companies have strong economic incentives to promote highly-refined products. Ultra-processed foods now dominate food systems (Baker and Friel, 2016; Monteiro et al., 2013), and overwhelming evidence demonstrates that this process of dietary change is compounding ill-health with growing levels of obesity and non-communicable diseases such as Type II diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, hypertension and various cancers across the globe (Mann et al, 2015; Roberto et al., 2015; Pearson-Stutard et al, 2017;).

Recent years have seen rising political recognition and a more popular consciousness around the issue of food waste (Campbell et al 2017). Initially addressed within an environmental management framework, food waste prevention was seen in terms of resource efficiency and the need to reduce landfill costs. The publication and screening of a number of exposés,

together with campaigns and gleaning activities accompanied by redistribution, began to raise the moral argument about the scale of food waste. This coincided with the period of austerity that followed the financial crisis of 2008 and accompanied by food price volatility. Inevitably, then, the conditions were created not only for more frugal domestic budgeting in which wasting food was to be avoided, but as a solution to food insecurity and poverty. As Campbell et al (2017) observe, food waste becomes a compelling new arena of political action in which it becomes morally positioned as 'bad'. Given this normative shift, those actors such as the major retailers widely regarded as a major part of the problem then moved swiftly to position themselves as the solution, leading them to partner with food banks and intermediaries that possessed the capability of disposing of food surpluses.

The rise of food banks as key social actors has been noted for both high and middle-income economies (Riches and Silvasti, 2014; Caraher and Coveney 2016). Indeed, it would appear that food banks will continue to grow in number and importance across Europe taking into account the recent introduction of sanctions for failing to redistribute food in France and voluntary agreements in the UK (Mansuy and Ferrando 2017). Donating surplus food to charities is an attractive option for food retailers as it is cheaper to dispose of in this way than to pay for collection and landfill taxes and charges. Besides the 'halo effect' that such philanthropic gestures allow, and which add to the triple bottom line under corporate social responsibility, such donations also squash critical questions about the failings of a food system that drives such levels of structural oversupply with all its attendant resource costs. The key to ease of operation, however, is the emergence of intermediaries willing to perform the work of matching surplus donations with the capacity of charitable bodies to absorb them. Ironically, these developments are embedded within the rhetoric of sharing, caring, supporting and community - vocabulary traditionally associated with the language of the commons in what could arguably be described as an appropriation of solidarity. Some accounts go as far as to describe these activities as part of a 'food revolution' (McGrane, 2015).

III. The Sharing Economy and Charitable Food

The rise of technological based business models, typified by Uber, Airbnb and TaskRabbit have proliferated in recent years. This 'sharing economy' has been defined as the "peer to peer based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing access to goods and services" (Hamari et al, 2015:2047). Alternative names include platform economy, access economy, collaborative economy and crowd-based capitalism (Yaraghi and Ravi, 2017). Frenken and Schor (2017, 4-5) define the sharing economy as "consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilised physical assets" which they refer to as 'idle capacity'. This is exemplified as 'spare rooms or beds' in the case of Airbnb, and 'spare cars' for Uber. However, as Frenken and Schor argue, this process is also surrounded by a discourse of progress, technological sophistication and innovation that seeks to differentiate itself from the 'corporate-centred model' (Sundararjan, 2016), and as a potential platform to elevate sustainable consumption practices (Heinrichs, 2013; Botsman and Rodgers, 2010). Others describe this new economy as 'neoliberalism on steroids', commercialising aspects of life previously outside the reach of the market (Morozov, 2014). The role of new information technology applications, involving sensors and other devices that can be utilised remotely using smart phones and tablets has been critical to this process.

The sharing economy has also found its way into parts of the food system offering 'community' based innovation in dealing with food waste. Perhaps one of the most successful ventures in this regard has been that of *FoodCloud*, an Irish based social enterprise which has been accumulating numerous accolades. Founded in 2013 by two female entrepreneurs with the aim of matching surplus food with charities, it utilises a dedicated smart phone app that, in February 2017, was voted one of the top apps (No. 3) by the Guardian for tackling food waste globally (Wong, 2017).

While a lot of the work is done though an online platform, it is important to note that the model depends upon over 200 volunteers who perform the 'food rescues' (Foodcloud 2016). While it has been argued that 'perma-temps'[1] (Hill, 2015) are critical to the sharing economy, in the case of food redistribution 'perma-temps' become volunteers. Despite the many noteworthy benefits of this well intentioned and highly successful social enterprise in

[1] Long-term temporary workers that lack employee benefits and rights.

highlighting the issue of food waste, using resources more efficiently does not, by itself, equate to ecological or 'sustainable' practices (Martin, 2016). This is especially pertinent when the defining feature is a product of a structurally unsustainable food system driven to over-supply and to the generation of surplus. Indeed, one concern is for the potential rebound effect whereby the key protagonists have no incentive to reduce volumes of food waste and where charitable partners enrol new clients to consume this surplus and, in so doing, conceal the extent of poverty, social exclusion and the lack of a right to food security with dignity.

Food banks serve as a collection and sorting point for food surplus donated by supermarkets and food manufacturers, and have been described as a channel between welfare services and the food industry (Butcher *et al,* 2014) by capturing surplus food that would otherwise be discarded or diverted to landfill. Their precise function may vary; between distributing food directly to the end user, distributing food to intermediary charities and organisations who then distribute to the end users (Ronson and Caraher 2016), or a mixture of both. Across Europe, the amount of food channelled through these secondary food systems has increased annually. In 2014, the European federation of foodbanks (FEBA) redistributed an estimated 441,000 tonnes of food, a figure that increased to 531,537 tonnes in 2015 (FEBA, 2017). Not all food banks are a member of FEBA and not all redistribution is done via food banks (Fusion 2016). Consequently, these figures do not reflect the actual scale of charitable food provisioning, an issue highlighted in an ongoing food aid mapping project led by the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN 2017).

Despite the noteworthy benefits of re-distributing edible food, food banks occupy a highly contested space and have long been a symbol of government failure: "The reliance on food banks is symptomatic of a broken social protection system and the failure of the state to meet its obligations to its people" (De Schutter 2012, 5). Over recent decades, concerns have been raised regarding the appropriateness of such 'corporatized' and 'institutionalised' responses (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2014; Booth and Whelan 2014) as well as the health, welfare, human rights and social justice dimensions (Riches, 2011;Riches and Silvasti, 2014).

The *corporatization* of food banks - and arguably of poverty itself – has been explored in Canada (Riches and Tarasuk, 2014) and the USA (Fisher, 2017). Indeed, Fisher (2017) argues that anti-hunger advocates have now become part of the '*hunger industrial complex*' also attracting corporations from outside the food industry. For example, in 2017 Enterprise Rent-

A-Car Foundation announced its 'Fill Your Tank' initiative designed to celebrate the company's 60th global anniversary that will provide US$60 million over the next six years 'to address food insecurity' in the countries where it has wholly-owned business operations in Europe and North America. In Europe, this initiative is being undertaken in collaboration with the Global FoodBanking Network (GFN) "that accelerates the development and growth of food banks" (crosscare.ie 2107). GFN founders include a selection of the largest food and beverage companies in the world - Cargill, General Mills Foundation, Kellogg's and DLA Piper, a global law firm (GFN 2017).

Scholars have long argued that charitable food distribution models are part of the problem as opposed to part of the solution (Berry, 1984; Poppendieck, 1998; Riches 1996, 2002, 2011; Riches and Tarasuk, 2014). Such models have increasingly served to de-politicize hunger and solidified the perception of food waste and food poverty as a single issue with a 'win-win' solution (Caraher and Furey, 2017). This narrative has worked effectively to divert attention from the causes of hunger (Caraher and Furey, 2017), and food charity recipients' lack of rights in an ad hoc secondary food system (Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003) while maintaining public support for measures to address food waste (Mansuy and Ferrando, 2017).

Food banks are limited in their ability to provide a healthy diet (Poppendieck, 2014), and do not address the social, cultural, and political aspects of food (Caraher and Dowler, 2014). Moreover, the consequences of a minimal and insecure diet in terms of wellbeing, mental and nutritional health are 'potentially severe' (Gairthwaith et al 2015) and often hidden (Dowler and Lambie Mumford, 2015). Receiving food from charitable organisations is not a dignified solution to food insecurity. Much research (van der Horst et al 2014; Purdam et al. 2016; Fisher 2017) has highlighted the shame, degradation, humiliation and embarrassment associated with having to resort to charity to meet the most basic of all needs. Moreover, the much celebrated environmental benefits of redistributing food surplus ignores the numerous externalised costs elsewhere in the agri-food chain where resources (land, water, energy) have been invested and waste streams (greenhouse gases, contaminated water) have resulted. This arrangement does little to support the local economy and does not encourage systematic change. On the contrary, redistribution merely props up an inadequate food system incompatible with the concept of the commons.

IV. Food Poverty in Ireland

Ireland has a long history of food insecurity which extends beyond the experience of the Great Famine of 1845-52 and reflects a history of colonial control over agricultural land use. For centuries food security at times of want relied upon charitable interventions, a state of affairs that has persisted into the contemporary era. Moreover, Ireland is no stranger to 'silo' solutions to food security – it strongly defends its own ruminant-based agri-food strategy as a way 'to feed the world' (see Kenny et al 2018) – and extends this approach to matters of health, environment and poverty. Here, the third sector is playing a key role in the large-scale redistribution of 'surplus food' from corporate retailers to those in need, thereby seemingly solving the twin problems of food poverty and food waste. This narrative has gained considerable traction recently across a wide spectrum of society and policy circles such that it is permeating – and obstructing - efforts to develop a wider civic conversation around the meaning of rights to food and how we should be working toward a healthier and more sustainable food system for all.

Poor diet is a significant risk factor for Ireland's total burden of disease. Currently, Ireland has one of the highest obesity rates in Europe and almost one third of children in Ireland are overweight (IRSPEN 2017a). An estimated 70 million is spent on *treating* diabetes annually (Shannon, 2017) and the Irish Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (IRSPEN), the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland (RCPI), and the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) are now calling for a national obesity *treatment* programme (IRSPEN 2017b). It seems that pulling drowning people out of the river is still preferred to asking why they are falling in upstream.

In a country of less than five million people with reputedly the fastest growing economy in Europe, Ireland manifests striking social inequality.[2] Despite recovery from the economic crisis of 2008-12 the under-25 cohort is disproportionately affected by both un- and under-employment, while the incidence of precarious work 'has skyrocketed' (Nugent 2017: 28). Out of the total working population, 18.8% are below the poverty line (SJI, 2016), 30% earn

[2] Ireland has the highest income inequality in Europe prior to social transfers and 29% of the population are classified as suffering from deprivation and poverty. Over the last 30 years, the top 10% of earners have increased their net wealth from 42% to 54% while the bottom 50% have decreased from 12% to 5% (Hearne and McMahon, 2016).

below the Eurostat low pay threshold (Collins 2016) and 10% earn less than, or equal to, the minimum wage, 58% of whom are women (Brennan, 2017). Other social justice challenges, such as housing, are equally acute and marred with similar band aid responses[3] and short-term thinking. The latest figures indicate that 1.2 million people living in Ireland are experiencing deprivation, 789,855 are living in poverty with 58.3% of these in consistent poverty (SJI, 2017).

Taken together these factors are contributing to the growth and entrenchment of charitable food provisioning given inadequate social safety nets and an expanding pool of potential recipients. Undoubtedly, this prevents progress in acknowledging food as a right, which we consider to be the corner stone of re-introducing the notion of food as a commons. Yet in Ireland's constitution, enacted on the 29th of December, 1937, the right to food encompassing the three key elements of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling is implied in Art. 45.2 and 45.3 (Box 1).

Box 1: The Irish Constitution (1937)

Art. 45.2 'The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing:

i. that citizens (all of whom, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood) may through their occupations find the means of making reasonable provision for their domestic needs.

ii. that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community may be so distributed amongst private individuals and the various classes as best to subserve the common good'.

iii. that, especially, the operation of free competition shall not be allowed so to develop as to result in the concentration of the ownership or control of essential commodities in a few individuals to the common detriment'

Art. 45.3 2° 'the state shall endeavour to secure that private enterprise shall be so conducted as to ensure reasonable efficiency in the production and distribution of goods and as to protect the public against unjust exploitation'.

Art. 45.3 2° 'the state pledges itself to safeguard with especial care the economic interests of the weaker sections of the community, and, where necessary, to contribute to the support of the infirm, the widow, the orphan, and the aged'.

[3] Ireland's response to homelessness was to accommodate families and individuals in hotels and B&B costing the state €39 million in 2016 alone, more than double that of the previous year (Irish Times, 2017).

Food poverty manifests as poor health outcomes and widening health inequalities which are critical justifications for tackling the problem. Tarasuk and Davies (1996;73) note that "the way a problem gets defined or typified shapes responses to it" but this is not the case in Ireland. Here, the Department of Social Protection (DSP) defines food poverty as "the inability to have an adequate or *nutritious* diet due to issues of *affordability* or *accessibility"* (DSP 2015:48). Yet, despite reference to 'healthy' and 'nutritionally adequate' diets in the definition of food poverty (Friel and Conlon, 2004) practical responses involving the redistribution of food pay little attention to its nutritional value: what people eat is not considered.

Distributing surplus food to the 'poor' is not a new concept in Ireland (as elsewhere) and has been done at a national level since 1987 through the 'food aid for deprived persons', a programme that relied upon intervention stocks such as cheese and butter (Reilly 2010). The successor programme, the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) which is designed to 'help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion' (Welfare.ie 2017) now canvasses charitable partners for a list of food items that it then purchases from contracted suppliers. This programme is now administered by FoodCloud Hubs[4] – FoodCloud's partner which, during the pilot phase of 2016, distributed over 162 tonnes of food to almost 55,000 people (personal communication).

FoodCloud and their partner social enterprise - FoodCloud Hubs, has emerged as the single most important charitable entity responsible for food redistribution in Ireland and describe themselves as having a '*transformative impact on addressing the problems of food waste and food poverty in Ireland and internationally*' (Irishtechnews.ie, 2016). According to the FoodCloud website, in 2015 around 567 tonnes of food was donated to 325 charities across Ireland equating to over 1 million meals (a measurement gauged by weight whereby *any* o.5kg of food is considered one meal) (Wood, 2016). By October 2016, more than 3,320 tonnes of food had been distributed in Ireland and the UK (Murphy, 2016) and by February 2017, FoodCloud had distributed '8.5 million meals' (Reeve 2017 57). As of March 2017, FoodCloud was working with 300 Aldi and Tesco stores in Ireland, 1200 Tesco stores in the UK

[4] FoodCloud Hubs, formerly the Bia Food Initiative (BFI), is a social enterprise founded in 2012 to collect and store large volumes of surplus food for redistribution at minimal cost to the charity. In 2016 the BFI partnered with FoodCloud and became FoodCloud Hubs (FoodCloud, 2017)

and had a pilot scheme in operation with Waitrose (Ryan, 2017). However, FoodCloud is not just a matter of redistributing rising volumes of surplus food:

> *'Their innovative and technology-led approach to surplus food redistribution contributes to a different future, where food waste prevention is recognised as an opportunity that can save resources, create jobs, alleviate hunger, conserve water, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions'* (Reeve 2017 57).

In May, 2017 Tesco UK released their annual food waste figures showing a 150% increase in charitable redistribution (Fareshare.org.uk 2017). In Ireland, the CEO of Tesco, Ireland has said:

> *'One of my proudest acts as CEO has been to tackle food waste by working in partnership with FoodCloud […] My One Big Idea would be that the Government should focus the Budget to support resources that will create the infrastructure to facilitate good food management. Some charities would greatly benefit from having the ability to both store and freeze the food we have pledged to provide – Andrew Yaxley, CEO, Tesco Ireland*[5] (*Sept 26, 2016, independent.ie).*

Tesco Ireland is a founding member of FoodCloud (Tescoireland.ie) and have enabled the social enterprise to 'grow and grow' (Murphy 2017). Yet in the early part of 2017, workers in 23 Tesco stores in Ireland were on strike protesting against revised contact terms, proposed wage reductions and 'increased flexibility' in their working conditions (O Halloran, 2017). Further, in March 2017, Tesco were heavily criticised for selling low cost lamb by farmers' unions (Halpin, 2017), lamb which ends up as food surplus as we will discuss later. It is strikingly clear that the many injustices visible throughout the food system are not bound by geography but have the potential to become less visible when the problem becomes part of the solution. This is explored in the next section.

[5] In October 2017, Tesco Ireland launched the 'Community Big Chill' campaign to provide free freezers and fridges to charities (Tescoireland.ie, 2017).

V. The Implications of Charitable Food Redistribution in Cork

This part of the chapter rests upon research conducted within the Cork region, comprising of surveys and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 11 organisations involved in charitable and subsidized food assistance. The decision to only interview charities and not their clients (the ultimate 'beneficiaries' of redistributed food) was based on the fact that charities decide what food they accept – albeit restricted based on availability. All organisations interviewed are recipients of surplus food from a variety of sources. Based on this research we draw a number of observations regarding the often-overlooked implications of charitable food distribution for efforts to achieve a healthy, equitable and sustainable food system for all.

V.a Consistent supplies

Prior to the advent of FoodCloud and FoodCloud Hubs, charitable food provisioning was indeed a rather ad hoc system. This is no longer the case. Marked by streamlined logistics characteristic of the corporate food system, charitable partners are embedded in a supply chain such that none of the surveyed entities reported ever running out of food or not being able to meet demand, at least in terms of food quantity. On the contrary, one issue that has emerged is that some charities struggle to dispose of the food which they have received. In some cases, food that is channelled through these charities acts more as a supplementary feeding programme insofar that products are handed out irrespective of need because as with the general population, nobody likes to throw out food. Moreover, charities are also able to distribute seasonally appropriate foodstuffs, assured of a consistent supply of Brussel sprouts and even smoked salmon at Christmas, lamb at Easter, and processed BBQ meats during the summer months, all of which are surplus to retail demand. Given the nature of reliance on surplus food, charities are also enrolled to utilize new products that fail to perform as well in the market as might have been hoped. An already saturated market expected to absorb two thousand new food products each year (Milone, 2009) may explain the crates of gluten-free cakes and other fashionable food items that arrive from time to time. In the first quarter of 2017, '64 of the top 100 donated items by Tesco were Bakery comprising 59,003 individual bakery items' (Ward, 2017). Table 2 provides an example of the top ten bakery items being channelled through FoodCloud to charitable partners from Tesco donations. While 'the consumers' desires for 'treats' is driving bakery innovation' (BordBia, 2014), these

'treats' are not always purchased and consequently end up on the tables of those without a choice in the matter.

Box 2: Top ten bakery items donated through FoodCloud by Tesco for the first quarter of 2017.

1. Petit Pain Small
2. White Roll
3. Jam Doughnuts 5 pack
4. Custard Doughnuts 5 pack
5. Large Ring Doughnuts 5 pack
6. Tesco Butter Croissant
7. Tesco Black Olive Roll
8. Petit Pain 4 pack
9. Hi Fibre Petit Pain
10. Cinnamon Roll

Source: Ward, 2017

V.b Long term use

In Ireland, food provisioning through charities is far from short-term emergency support. In the majority of cases, products supplied by charities reflect their (restricted) choices about what individuals and families will eat for weeks, months, years, and arguably in some instances, generations to come. Recipient individuals and families includes those in low-paid and precarious full-time employment, struggling families, people with mental health problems, people and families in emergency accommodation, elderly people, and people with serious health issues, such as cancer, who are made aware of existing charitable food services by doctors and other front-line services. Unlike referral systems elsewhere, such as the UK, in Ireland the process in informal and in most cases clients are self-referred. While there is acknowledgement that some of the food being provided may not be health-promoting, the prevailing perception is that it is better than nothing.

In other cases, recipient charities are what many of the end users call 'home', a situation that can mean a lifetime diet based on surplus food. In the context of a healthy, sustainable and nutritious system, the appetite for highly processed food should be a cause for concern. However, the desire to feed the poor/elderly/disadvantaged/ill on restricted or in some cases,

no budget specific to food seems to have created an incognizant situation, one incompatible to the concept of food as a commons. In relation to the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) any registered not-for-profit, community or voluntary based organisation is eligible to apply for assistance and their number grew to 120 in the first quarter of 2017. However, in contrast to the products currently distributed through FEAD-comprising of canned, packaged and instant food- a consequence of lowest price tendering, imagine how FEAD could work by sourcing local, seasonal and healthier foods. FEAD recipient organisations operate in areas such as family resource centres, addiction support programmes, community creches, women's refuges, food banks, homeless support services, youth programmes and senior citizens' associations. Whether or not related to the mass availability of free food, the numbers of organisations in receipt of FEAD food items has increased from 94 organisations in 2016 to 120 in the first quarter of 2017.

V.c Pressure to take what is being offered

The acquisition of foods outside that of the large food retailer surplus redistribution efforts is also prevalent in the Irish context. Established arrangements now exist with food service companies such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), as well as with independent stores, including those from the latest food craze sector in Cork, doughnut shops. For the most part, charities receiving such donations are content with these arrangements given that recipients – and donors - are contributing to avoiding waste and saving money. Yet, considering Ireland's immense health burden, one cannot help reflecting on the role of charities, state agencies and indeed CSR agendas in facilitating this burden.

There is a complex triangular relationship with acute disparities of power in play between food donors, their charitable partners and recipient households and individuals. First, charities appear to be under pressure to take whatever products that are being offered for fear of negative public perceptions if they refuse. Secondly, even if some degree of choice is afforded to the charities, in that they can say what they don't want – or have the capacity to handle - it remains the case that they are choosing the food to be consumed by others and thereby shaping the diets of individuals and families. Finally, the 'beneficiaries' are receiving

products that may not be wanted or even consumed: they become the final arbiter over choice of disposal: consumption or discard.

V.d Implications for local business and the construction of a de-commodified food system.

The provision of large amounts of surplus food to charities also has serious implications for local businesses in a similar way to the experience of farmers in developing countries faced with the dumping of highly subsidized agricultural products from the EU or USA in their markets. How can a local business compete with free food and what does this mean for the challenge of promoting healthy and sustainable diets? Here in Cork, charitable organisations have made direct swaps between purchasing from local butchers and bread companies to using only meats and breads obtained through FoodCloud and FoodCloud Hub. In one case revealed through interview, this was a switch from buying 10 kilos of mince per week from a local butcher to feed clients to using surplus 'cooked' mince instead. Other organisations reported that in the absence of 'free food' they would not be distributing items such as potato crisps, biscuits and yogurts.

At the time of writing, Cork's first self-proclaimed food bank is preparing to open its doors on the 31st of May, 2017 to begin a mission of 'fighting food poverty in Cork', thanks to their partners which include Bord Bia (the Irish government's food promotion board), FoodCloud, Tesco, and FEAD (http://feedcork.com/). With new food banks joining the 'battle' against food waste, it is clear that charitable food is no longer an ad hoc arrangement for emergency provision; rather it has become an institutionalised mechanism for disposing of surpluses from a hyper-trophic food system that has the potential to threaten the viability of local food businesses. Ultimately this further jeopardizes the transition to a de-commodified, healthy, sustainable, and just food system.

VI. Conclusions

The global agri-food system has been lauded for its scale, efficiency and capacity to deliver more calories for a lower proportion of consumer spending than ever before and that has shaped the diets of a majority of the world's population. Yet its capacity to produce more

food than retail demand has led to a rising preoccupation with food waste and reinforced criticisms regarding the inherent unsustainability of this system (Sage, 2012). Cheap food has led to cheap lives – a cycle of impoverishment necessary to keep the current capitalist system afloat (Patel and Moore, 2017) – a forgotten aspect of the charitable food system where celebration keeps the status quo in place. The creation and growth of a 'secondary' food system designed to alleviate food poverty and eliminate waste has proven to be something of a breakthrough for not only has it enabled a 'win-win' solution, it has also sanitised the role of Big Food companies and their grand philanthropic mission. The narrative power of charitable redistribution of commodified food is therefore the first significant obstacle to re-introducing food as a commons.

Our view is that food waste and diet-related ill-health are two sides of the same coin: both originating from, and facilitated by, the massification of food. Unfortunately, the logic of the global food system is to continue to expand production, justified by the need 'to feed a world of more than nine billion by 2050'. As such, the likelihood that volumes of food surplus will also grow long with the associated poverty, intensification of production and the further disappearance of small scale local producers and grocery stores. It is also likely that the numbers of food banks will increase – as will their cast of client beneficiaries - as there appears no other way that such volumes of food can be disappeared while enabling the food industry to reach targets such as having 'zero food waste' without actually addressing the root cause of that waste and the inherent injustices along the food chain. This also means a growing role for entrepreneurial intermediaries able to connect donors and recipients. High-tech, one-dimensional solutions to environmental or other problems generally receive an enthusiastic welcome in policy circles as they do not disturb the broader landscape of 'business-as-usual'. Not only does this allow governments to shirk their responsibilities, it makes the case for a multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder, local-specific and resilience-enhancing, 'food as a commons' approach more challenging.

Food redistribution charities are co-developing with, and are co-beneficiaries of, a broken food system, and as such will act to deepen and hide the problem of inequality. The root problem is mass production and speculation, transforming food as a biological necessity, cultural artefact and public good replete with meanings (Vivero Pol, 2017) into a commodity increasingly stripped of its nutritional, social and ecological value. Yet responsibility for

disposing of this material gets transferred from supermarkets and other businesses, where waste is a cost on the balance sheet; to charities, staffed by volunteers; and finally to beneficiaries who are now, seemingly, 'food poverty free' but ultimately second class citizens fed with whatever is available and responsible for dealing with food waste. There are numerous unexplored implications arising from this arrangement that will repay further interrogation. Here, however, we simply seek to challenge the widespread and simplistic narrative that presents the diversion of food surplus as a solution to food poverty.

We maintain that food poverty is neither a logistical nor a food problem but rather a symptom of a very unequal society. With an endless supply of surplus food, giving food as opposed to vouchers or money risks becoming the new norm further etching away at the right to good food. By continuing this trajectory, inequalities are kept hidden, government responsibility is evaded, and the social, ecological and health value of food are further discounted. In this way accepting charitable food re-distribution as a solution raises profound moral questions regarding the privatization, corporatization and commodification of poverty and leads us further away from acknowledging food as a basic human right. It is clear that negotiating a progressive course in the contemporary era of austerity is an enormous political challenge. However, replacing the current two-tiered food system means working toward a multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder, locally-specific, resilience-enhancing, sustainable system where food is regarded as a commons for all.

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