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Diners urged to think inside the box to cut restaurant food waste

Too Good To Waste campaign puts doggy boxes on the menu

Top chefs including Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Thomasina Miers are urging London diners to overcome their embarrassment and ask for a doggy box when eating out, as part of the **Too Good To Waste** campaign to reduce the amount of food wasted in restaurants.

At today's launch, The Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA) announced 80 restaurants have already signed up to the campaign to reduce food waste and will happily box up diners' leftovers. These include Michelin-starred The Quilon, groups like Wahaca, Leon, Feng Sushi and Drake and Morgan as well as independents including The Cinnamon Club and Oxo Tower.

Research conducted by the SRA revealed that the average London restaurant wastes 21 tonnes of food every year. That's equivalent to the weight of three London double-decker buses and works out as almost half a kilo per diner. A third of all restaurant food waste comes straight off diners' plates.

Nine out of ten consumers told the SRA they wanted restaurants to do more to address the problem. But one quarter of those surveyed said they were too embarrassed to ask for a doggy box and a third had never thought to ask.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall said: "Food waste in restaurants is a massive problem and doggy bags are one excellent way of cutting waste. There's no need to be shy - any of the chefs in our places would be more than happy to give a doggy bag. I've eaten in some pretty fancy places - I've even asked for doggy bags in Michelin-starred restaurants."

Too Good To Waste will encourage diners to be lovers not leavers and overcome their embarrassment of asking to take leftovers home. It will also urge restaurants to box up, not bin plate waste. The SRA wants asking for a doggy box to become as much a part of the UK dining experience as doggy bags are in the US.

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Thomasina Miers, co-owner of Wahaca and former Masterchef winner said: "I always ask for a doggy bag. I was brought up to enjoy leftovers and for me cooking leftovers is proper cooking. It saves money and it's such fun turning one thing into another. Wasting food is criminal."

The SRA will also be helping restaurants implement measures to help cut the amount they waste when preparing food – prep waste accounts for two thirds of all food waste.

Mark Linehan, managing director of the SRA, speaking at the campaign launch, where lunch was cooked by Bruno Loubet, of Bistrot Bruno Loubet, and Anna Hansen, from The Modern Pantry, and served in the campaign's specially designed doggy boxes sponsored by 3663 and One Water, said: "Restaurant food waste is a huge problem and diners have a role to play in solving it.

"So, if you've enjoyed your meal but just can't finish it, remember you've paid for it and ask for a doggy box. Then you can enjoy tonight's dinner tomorrow lunchtime."

Diners who want to eat out at a participating restaurant should visit the campaign website www.toogood-towaste.co.uk.