

TEARING-UP £10 NOTES

Can you imagine, at the end of the month, going to the waste bin, tearing-up five £10 notes and dropping them in? Every month? Yet this is the equivalent of what the average family does in the UK.

Before the Second World War we wasted 1 to 3% of our food. Now, according to Radio 4 on 22nd August 2011, we waste 25%. We are really affluent now and can afford to waste a significant proportion of our hard-earned salaries or pensions. **And the figure of 25% does not include vegetable and fruit peelings.** Here is a true story. A pre-war lady of a certain age was invited to a friend's house for a meal, and watched very generous peelings separating themselves from their mother potatoes. "Why", she said to herself, "in those peelings there is enough for a meal for me"!

Since I grow my own, I do not wish to waste anything. So young potatoes, carrots and turnips are scrubbed rather than peeled. When I have to peel I use a device which takes off the merest lamella.

Wasting 25% of our food is obviously a catastrophe. So how can we bring to the public's attention the need to avoid waste? Why, with a competition of course. Village horticultural shows could have a class in the domestic section where, on paying an entrance fee, members of the public could be given about a pound of potatoes and invited to peel them with minimum waste. They could bring along their own peelers and take away their peeled potatoes at the end. Red-skinned potatoes could be the best so that judges could easily assess whether all the red skin had been removed to reveal the yellow flesh beneath. The use of accurate scales would be necessary to weigh the potatoes before and after to calculate the percentage of waste. The winner could receive a cup and the title "Potato Peeler of the Year". Men, women and children could compete on equal terms.

If everyone cut back their waste to 1 to 3% then **the reduction in the cost of our imported food could be of the order of 10%**, since 40% of our food is imported at present. In monetary terms about £12 billion is thrown away, so with 40% being imported we could cut around £4.8 billion off the cost of our imports. The need to avoid food waste is therefore of national importance. So, to maximise publicity there could be a competition on television the night before Parliament reconvenes every autumn where the prime minister challenges the leader of the opposition to a bare-knuckled potato peeling competition to see who would be best at cutting waste. The competition would be just the job to bring to the public's attention the need to avoid food waste and help our balance of payments to the tune of £4,800,000,000. But am I fantasising?

Food prices have risen a lot in recent years and are forecast to rise a lot more. We cannot afford to keep wasting 25%. Especially when one hears that 3,500,000 children die of malnutrition every year.

Please do not waste food.

MIKE MASON