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Creating Food Waste: Journeys of food becoming waste in a catering kitchen.

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Abstract

The creation of food waste is an issue of increasing importance given growing concerns about environmental sustainability. Until recently the food waste literature has focused on the amount of food wasted with little consideration of the practices that create food waste beyond households and hospitals. This thesis seeks to consider food and waste practices as they occur within a catering kitchen with an aim of exploring how food waste is created.

Exploring the creation of food waste in catering occurred through participant observation in a catering firm in Palmerston North, New Zealand during the summer of 2013-14. Information gathered through this technique centred on following food journeys through the catering kitchen and the moments of transition which occur as food becomes waste. Concepts of 'becoming' and 'assemblages' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) were drawn on to understand food waste creation, with Hetherington's (2004) concept of conduits to inform how becomings take place.

Analysis of field notes demonstrated that creating food waste in catering is not a simple process, nor a certain outcome. Instead food waste occurs as part of a vast interconnected web of interactions between food, places, people, and ideas. Conduits exist to change meaning and value inherent in food. Those conduits to avoid food waste can be found as buckets for pig feed, storage in a chiller to be made into a new dish, or staff consumption. The use of these conduits can reduce food waste, but the capacity of food to enter them is constrained by the economic and material realities of producing food for sale. Staff at the catering firm desire to reduce food waste, but time and space pressures, kitchen practices regarding food and waste, external regulations, and the material properties of food means that, while reducing food waste is desirable, it is not always possible.

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