

Resource efficiency special issue



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"By cutting waste, we help preserve earth's natural productive capacity"

Low-cost, practical steps to reduce resource use by businesses are 'win-win' opportunities for the environment and the economy. By cutting costs, businesses get a significant pay-back in the short term, with innovation able to reduce their costs further over time. And by cutting waste, we help preserve earth's natural productive capacity which supports the UK's and Europe's long-term

aim of fostering sustainable growth.

Research by Defra found that British businesses could save up to £23bn annually by adopting energy, waste and water efficiency measures which pay back within a year. Small changes in factory working practices can, for example, produce the same good with far less waste in inputs and packaging.

Some big companies are already making significant savings. Marks & Spencer, for instance, made additional profits of £50m in the past year from using less energy and packaging in its retail business. The dairy product manufacturer Yeo Valley saved more than £700,000 in road miles per year, and Coca Cola saved 15,000 tonnes of aluminium a year and 90,000 tonnes of CO₂ by reducing the amount

of aluminium in their cans across Europe.

Such efficiency gains not only improve the competitiveness of individual businesses, they also make them more resilient to economic volatility and environmental change. It is up to European governments to reach out to areas of industry, including small and medium-sized businesses, which are not yet seizing these opportunities.

The UK government is already taking such action. The Defra-sponsored WRAP programme,

for example, focuses on waste prevention and encompasses the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme which helps companies to understand where waste from one company can be a useful input to another. Forthcoming Defra research into energy-using products will explore how manufacturers learn to reduce costs. The UK government has also adopted the EU's voluntary green public procurement principles, as well as a mandatory set of government buying standards, to encourage the take-up of

resource efficiency measures in the public sector and stimulate further action in the wider economy.

Resource efficiency will continue to be a priority in the UK, given the underlying pressures on the global stock of natural resources. Because these resources are part of the productive capacity of our economies, we know their inefficient use can jeopardise future growth. We also know we can do better in Europe because many businesses are already showing us the way. □