

"Trash" it! Waste food becomes juice, snacks and other tasty treats

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Image 1: Boxes of strawberries sit among bags of trash outside of a grocery store in New York City in December 2007. Food waste is a big problem around the world, and much of the food that gets thrown away is still safe to eat. Today, some companies are using these discarded foods as ingredients in an effort to reduce food waste. Photo from: Don Emmert/AFP/Getty Images

Would you use ketchup made from thrown-out tomatoes? Would you snack on a cereal bar made from leftover grain?

If you said yes, join the club. A growing number of companies are making food out of ingredients that used to be considered garbage. A new study suggests that consumers increasingly accept such products. In some cases, they even prefer them.

The study was led by Jonathan Deutsch. He teaches cooking at Drexel University. Deutsch says people are "actually willing to pay more for food made from surplus products." Surplus products are leftovers. They would usually be thrown out.

In the study, Deutsch and other scientists presented people with different food products. Some were labeled "value-added surplus." This was the scientists' term for foods that would normally be

headed for the trash. As it turns out, people were not disgusted by them. They felt good about the chance to help the environment. Eating surplus foods helps cut down on food waste.

Deutsch is happy about the results. He hopes the study will make manufacturers feel better about using food waste in their products.

One-Third Of All Food Is Wasted

The problem of food waste has been getting more attention in recent years. Around the world, up to one-third of all food is spoiled or lost before it can be eaten. America wastes about 62 million tons of food each year. Yet 1 in 7 Americans is food insecure. That means they do not have regular access to healthy food.

Waste can happen anywhere along the food chain. Farms might not harvest crops in time. Food can spoil on its trip from the farm to the store. Supermarkets throw away ugly fruits and vegetables, thinking shoppers will not buy them. Consumers forget food items in the back of the fridge. Then they throw them out when they have gone bad.

But now people are learning more about the problem. In response, some companies are betting on surplus foods. One is Misfit Juicery in Washington, D.C. It collects fruits and veggies that were thrown out for being ugly. Then it turns them into delicious juices. A Dutch company called Barstensvol is another example. It makes soups from surplus veggies.

Some of these companies are experiencing major success.

Dumpster Divers

In 2010, Jenny Costa read an article about dumpster divers. These are people who dig through the trash bins outside supermarkets and restaurants. They look for food that is still good. The article interested Costa. She started reading more about the food system. She learned about how hard it is to match supply and demand.

"I thought, this is just unsustainable," she says.

"We've got a planet that actually has the resources to feed everyone, and yet so many go without."

So Costa started a company called Rubies in the Rubble. It makes jams from surplus fruits and vegetables.

"People are starting to value food so much more," Costa says.

"Pink Slime" Food Scandal

Deutsch says that openness is important when using surplus food. Consumers want to help the environment. But they do not like feeling that a company has something to hide. A few years ago, there was a food scandal. Reporters found that meat manufacturers were using something called "finely textured beef product." This "beef product" is made of meat trimmings. Companies were mixing it into ground beef. It is perfectly safe to eat. However, it looks like pink slime. The idea that meat companies were hiding it made many people upset.



No food manufacturer wants that kind of reaction. That is one reason they keep waste products out of their food, Deutsch says.

But people's attitudes about their food are starting to change.

"Consumers want to support products that help the environment," says Dan Kurzrock. He runs a company called ReGrained. It makes cereal bars from leftover grain. "You can create some amazing, really nutritious, delicious food products out of the stuff companies leave behind," Kurzrock says.

Quiz

- 1 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-5].
Select the detail from the section that explains why people are interested in eating surplus foods.
- (A) A new study suggests that consumers increasingly accept such products.
(B) Deutsch says people are "actually willing to pay more for food made from surplus products."
(C) They felt good about the chance to help the environment.
(D) He hopes the study will make manufacturers feel better about using food waste in their products.
- 2 Read the paragraph below from the section "One-Third Of All Food Is Wasted."
- Waste can happen anywhere along the food chain. Farms might not harvest crops in time. Food can spoil on its trip from the farm to the store. Supermarkets throw away ugly fruits and vegetables, thinking shoppers will not buy them. Consumers forget food items in the back of the fridge. Then they throw them out when they have gone bad.*
- What conclusion can the reader make based on this paragraph?
- (A) Farms create more food waste than supermarkets.
(B) Consumers might buy ugly fruits if they were in the store.
(C) People are learning more about the problem of food waste.
(D) Food waste can happen in many different ways.
- 3 Select the sentence that BEST summarizes the article.
- (A) Companies are helping to lower food waste by creating food products from leftovers.
(B) Some consumers are disgusted by the idea of eating foods that are leftover.
(C) People were upset that meat companies were using meat leftovers in their food.
(D) It is important to consumers that their food is not harming the environment.
- 4 Read the section "Dumpster Divers."
- How does the section support the MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) It explains how people can find surplus foods in nearby stores.
(B) It explains why food gets wasted at different points in the food chain.
(C) It explains how one surplus food company got started.
(D) It explains how many people in the United States go hungry.