

SCRAP EAT CHALLENGE

Meet the British food producers transforming 'waste' into gold

Words CLARE HARGREAVES

More than a third of Britain's fruit and veg crops are rejected because of their wonky shape or imperfect size. Every year UK households produce seven million tonnes of food waste, worth £15 billion. But all is not lost. Eco-conscious food entrepreneurs are beginning to rescue this produce from the bin by turning it into dips, ales, relishes and other delicious foods and drinks. Meet Britain's waste food heroes – and get stuck in!



RUBIES IN THE RUBBLE

Raised on a Scottish farm, from an early age Jenny Costa learned to prize each painstakingly grown fruit and veg, and to turn any leftovers into chutneys and jams. Later, while working as a hedge-fund trader, she visited New Covent Garden market and noticed huge quantities of perfectly edible fruit and veg being binned, so decided to do something about it.

In 2010 she founded Rubies in the Rubble, making relishes from surplus from London's Borough Market, where she sold (and still sells) them from a stall. Today Rubies in the Rubble works with farmers and producers across the UK and Portugal to produce not only relishes but also ketchups, which use rejected pears or overripe bananas as sweeteners. Its newest products are plant-based mayos, made with aquafaba – the water left after cooking chickpeas – sourced from a hummus maker in Cardiff.

"We're on a mission to encourage people to waste less, treasure their resources and live more sustainably," says Jenny. "We want to save the planet one jar at a time by providing a delicious and practical solution to food waste." rubiesintherubble.com



CHICP

Hannah McCollum used to work as a private chef. But she became so horrified at the amount of food going to waste that she set up a business making healthy, colourful hummus dips from wonky vegetables that would otherwise be binned. "It was cooking for private clients that got me into dips," says Hannah. "At the end of each day I'd blend left-over salads to make dips for the following day. It became my signature."

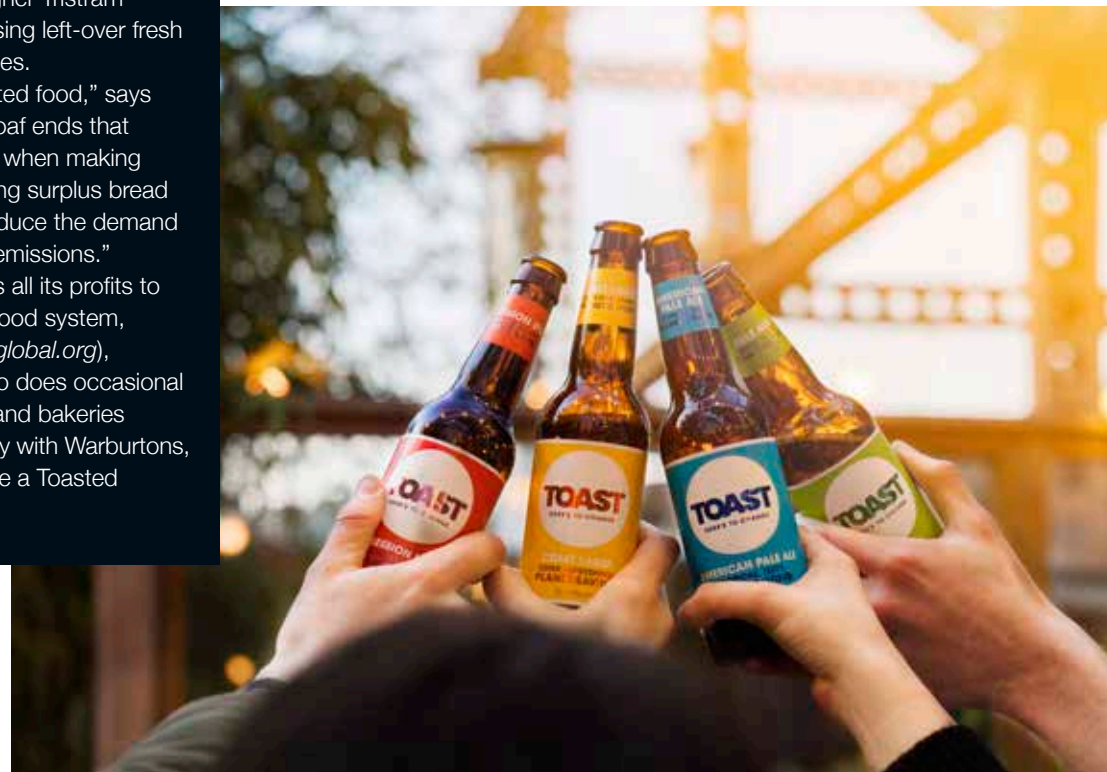
Hannah started by making hummus at her London home, using surplus raw veg from New Covent Garden market. Now she manufactures six different hummus dips from premises in Park Royal, sourcing left-over vegetables from a range of farmers and wholesalers. Hummus flavours range from chilli and pumpkin, and beetroot and horseradish, to a "chocummus" made with banana and chocolate. chicp.co.uk

TOAST ALE

Saving the world starts with beer. At least that's what the guys at Toast Ale believe. The company, set up by food-waste campaigner Tristram Stuart in 2016, brews beers using left-over fresh bread from big bread companies.

"Bread is the UK's most wasted food," says COO, Louisa Ziane. "We use loaf ends that would otherwise be discarded when making packaged sandwiches. By using surplus bread rather than virgin barley, we reduce the demand for land and water, and avoid emissions."

The social enterprise donates all its profits to charities which help to fix the food system, including Feedback (feedbackglobal.org), founded by Tristram. Toast also does occasional collaborations with breweries and bakeries around the world, most recently with Warburtons, using wonky crumpets to make a Toasted Crumpet ale. toastale.com



FLAWSOME!

Karina Sudenyte (from Lithuania) and partner Maciek Kacprzyk (from Poland) were brought up helping their grandmothers run their orchards and vegetable plots. When they moved to London they

were shocked to see supermarkets selling fruits of uniform size, usually wrapped in plastic. They investigated, visited farms, and were horrified by the waste they witnessed. So, inspired by their nans' recipes, they started making perfect juices from 'imperfect' fruits from farms across Europe. They now produce a cold-pressed range in eight flavours, as well as three lightly fizzy fruit waters with pressed wonky fruit.

"We don't ask farmers to grow fruits for our drinks," says Karina. "Instead, we buy their surplus or wonky stock, which means no extra natural resources are used. We pay 70% of the market price for fruits that are otherwise discarded, so creating a future where a farmer can sell their fruits everywhere, to everyone, even if they happen to be wonky. So Flawsome! is not only sustainable but also promotes fair trade." flawsomedrinks.com



WASTED KITCHEN

Rooted in Kent, former marketing executive Katy Newton kept spotting fruit by the roadside that nobody was using, and also discovered that many farms had excess produce they didn't know what to do with. So, she turned the unwanted foods into vinegars, gins and shrubs, including a killer Spiced Damson Shrub cordial, made from unused Kentish damsons, and sold them to her local foodhall Macknade in Faversham. Macknade then started supplying Katy with its own surplus fruit and veg, which she turned into hummus dips and ready meals under the name of Wasted Kitchen. She also sells online and through local cafés, hotels and school nurseries.

"We celebrate the inconsistent and put unwanted food back into the food system," says Katy. Now the word has spread about Wasted Kitchen, Katy has farmers and orchard owners regularly offering her produce. She even had a Master of Wine offering her wine left over from wine

tastings. Katy also re-purposes spices and orange peel used in her shrubs to make cakes, such as a spiced orange and almond cake; and puts together inventive Kentish picnics for up to four people, perfect for the summer months. wastedkitchen.co.uk



TIDDLY POMMES

In the autumn, it's not uncommon to see orchards and gardens with apples that have fallen to the ground and are left to rot. More than a decade ago, Oxford-based musician and environmentalist Rupert Griffin decided to bottle this neglected fruit into juice, branding it Tiddly Pommies.

"I've always hated waste," says Rupert. "I realised someone should be doing what I'm doing. It's about relearning how to use the resources we have on our doorsteps. We use up to 100 apple varieties, so each juice tastes different."

In a year Rupert processes between 10 to 20 tonnes of fruit, rescued from private gardens, farms and orchards across Oxfordshire. The juice is sold through farmers' markets, delis, restaurants and caterers, or can be ordered online for delivery near Oxford. tiddlypommies.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPH: CLARE HARGREAVES

THE WONKY FOOD COMPANY

Whether it's 'ugly' onions, 'oversized' tomatoes or left-over limes, the Oxfordshire-based Wonky Food Company turns unloved fruit and veg into tangy relishes that will make your plate sing. "It started with a holiday job in New Zealand where I was told to walk under the kiwi fruit vines and throw any misshapen fruits to the ground," says founder John Cavers. "My feeling of dismay at this pointless waste wouldn't go away,

so two decades later I decided to tackle the issue by setting up The Wonky Food Company along with my sister Ashley and caterer Laura Snook."

From their HQ in the grounds of Blenheim Place, John and his team source wonky fruit and veg from a range of farms, large and small, before getting them crafted into relishes. Try their bestselling tangy onion relish. wonkyfoodco.com

