

Americans Waste a Huge Amount of Food Every Year. Should Big Brands Be Worried?

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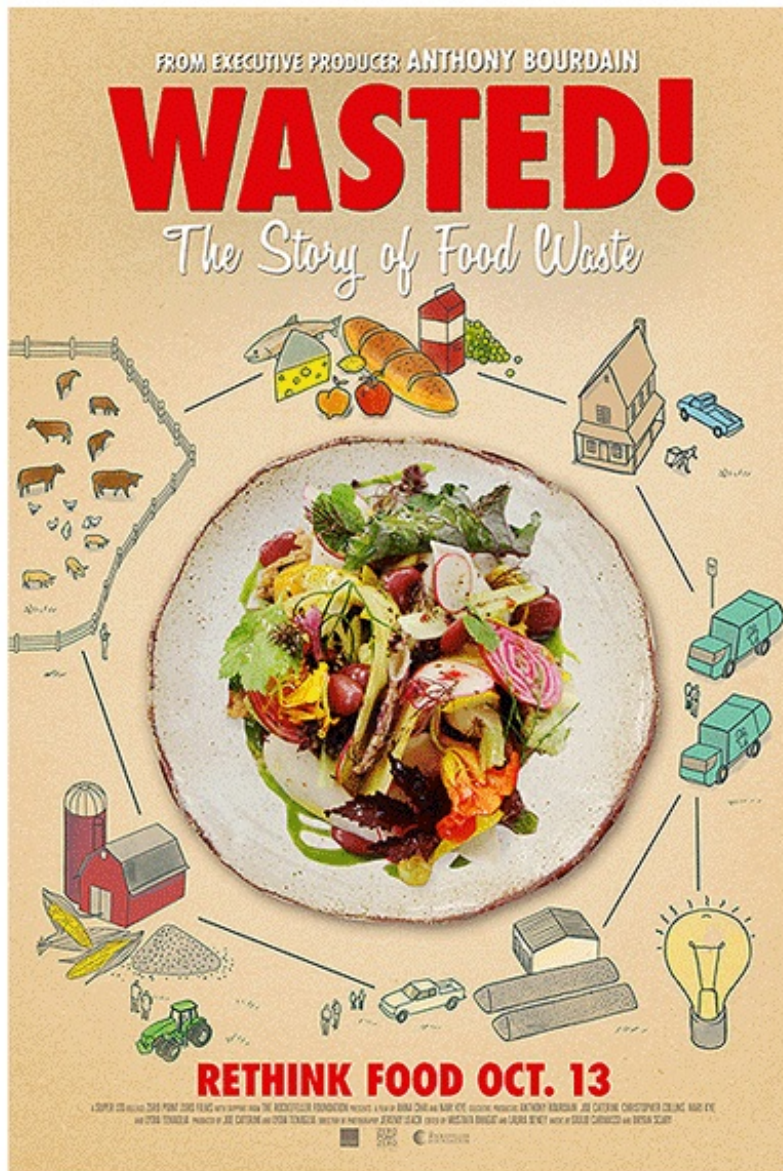
By Joan Voight

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Walk into your favorite grocery outlet. Look around at all the food for sale. Then, imagine dumping a third of it in the garbage.

That's how much food experts say we discard every day. While some will be composted, most of it is headed for landfills. Sustainability activists have fretted about this for years, but concerns about wasted food are now going mainstream. Case in point: on Oct. 13, Anthony Bourdain, host and writer of CNN's travel/foodie show *Parts Unknown*, debuted *Wasted*, the [feature-length documentary](#) about food waste, in theaters and online.



“Over the last 24 months, more shoppers are concerned about unused food,” said Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group, a market research consultancy. “In conversations, they’ll bring up the issue of food waste unaided.”

A few major marketers, such as Anheuser-Busch InBev and Quaker Oats, are scrambling to get ahead of the trend. Simultaneously, a handful of startups are peddling products that not only reduce waste, but use surplus food in their offering, with names like “Misfit” and “Ugly.”

This is just the beginning.

Big Food will inevitably feel pressure to address food waste, but they’ll find themselves in a tricky situation, according to Allen Adamson, founder and CEO of BrandSimple Consulting. “For major food and beverage marketers, anti-waste marketing initiatives will not drive brand preference, but companies have to protect themselves from ending up as the poster child for the problem. So they will [be forced] to invest in an area they’ve never invested in before,” he said.

Quaker Oats approached the issue with an online recipe contest in September. Called “More Taste, Less Waste,” the brand partnered with the James Beard Foundation and chef Marco Canora to challenge professional chefs to provide recipes that used oats and “rescued food,” such as onion and garlic skins. Consumers then voted online for their favorite recipe. “We saw the conversation growing about the food waste epidemic,” said Jessica Spaulding,

senior marketing director of Quaker Foods North America. “This is more than a passing trend. As a nutrition brand, our contest was an opportunity to raise awareness and inspire solutions.”



Nipping at their heels are food and beverage startups that use waste as a way to stand out from the crowd. Take Toast Ale, which brews beer with stale bread, and Misfit Juicery, which makes juices with discarded and misshapen produce. In each case, the brand's name and imagery brag about its less-than-perfect ingredients, and the marketing message revolves around quality and sustainability. Sampling events and social media sites are their bullhorns.

While Toast Ale started in the U.K., it expanded to the U.S. this year; the company uses local bakeries' discarded bread to brew about 400 cases of [beer](#) each month in the Bronx, N.Y. The beer is sold in bars, restaurants and Whole Foods stores in New York and Long Island, as well as on the [FoodKick](#) delivery service. “Our unique way of fighting food waste directly fires the imaginations of a wide range of people,” said Madi Holtzman, director of Toast Ale USA. “People are curious; they want to know if the ale tastes like bread.” (It doesn't.)

The connection between beer and wasted nutrition also caught the eye of AB InBev, which is funding a startup that uses the spent grain left over from beer making to produce smoothie-like, barley milk beverages. Under the brand name Canvas, the flavored dairy-free, high-fiber drinks are slated to hit retail shelves by December. The company's brand position: "Find the good in everything. Often, things that are cast aside have the biggest impact."

That sounds a lot like the concept of Misfit Juicery, founded three years ago in Washington, D.C., by a pair of Georgetown University grads. It expanded distribution to New York in April 2017, thanks to word of mouth and support from mentors and other food companies. The brand's newly updated imagery and tone are upbeat and modern, not preachy, said Katie Levy, co-founder of Gander, Misfit's design agency. "The idea is that oddball, misshapen things can come together to make a beautiful composition."

Perfection, in other words, might be overrated.

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