

Lesson 3: Imperfect Produce - Instructor's Notes

Why is this an important issue?

- ❖ Each year 20% of produce grown in the US is rejected from grocery stores due to its' shape or size
- ❖ There are many interchangeable terms for imperfect produce:
 - Ugly produce
 - Cosmetically-challenged produce
 - Rejected products
- ❖ These produce are generally discarded because they do not fit the desired aesthetic criteria

Where in our food system does this problem occur?

- ❖ **Harvest phase** - many fruits and vegetables are not picked from fields because their shapes and sizes highly deviate from the standards. This happens regardless of the taste and freshness of the fruit or vegetable and is judged mainly on aesthetics. Furthermore, often during the harvest phase, farms are unable to collect everything that is grown. This happens sometimes because of issues with being understaffed and such. Researchers have proposed the idea that food losses in the farm or field are the least environmentally impactful because the products return into the ground as nutrients.
- ❖ **Packaging** - pre-packaged fruits and vegetables are sorted at the packaging and branding phase. Fruits and vegetables must fit a certain aesthetic and safety criteria in order to be packaged.
- ❖ **Grocery stores** - similarly to the packaging phase, grocery stores and other distributors are very selective about the products that are displayed and sold in their stores. Consumers look for unblemished and uniformed products, causing grocery stores to answer to this demand. Stores reject a large proportion of fruits and vegetables because they have minor blemishes or because its' size is different.
- ❖ **Restaurants and homes** - restaurants and home-cooks tend to perceive imperfect produce as produce that has poor quality. This causes many people to throw out produce that can still be eaten.

Where do ugly fruits and vegetables go?

- ❖ Landfills
- ❖ Some cases, imperfect produce gets delivered to food banks[