

# Craig and Marc Kielburger: Leftover food truly a wasted opportunity

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER, POSTMEDIA NEWS MAY 12, 2014

true



Grant Baldwin finds a swimming pool sized Dumpster filled with discarded hummus in the documentary *Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story*. Every year in Canada, \$27 billion worth of food is wasted, according to the Value Chain Management Center.

**Photograph by:** HO, THE CANADIAN PRESS

We're seriously considering opening a biological research station in Craig's kitchen, where new forms of life may be evolving in his fridge. When you travel as much as we do — often taking off on just a few hours' notice — meal planning is difficult. Too often, our produce sits untouched until it resembles primordial ooze. It's a guilt-trip every time we dump a Tupperware-container-turned-bacterial-habitat into the trash.

Our grandparents lived through the Second World War, with its food shortages and rationing, and were raised to savour every last morsel on their plates. They handed that food thriftiness down to their kids, our parents' generation, who took up the refrain: "Eat, there are starving people in ---," which was usually Africa in the era of Pierre Trudeau and Ronald Reagan. But as the decades have passed with no serious threat to our food supply, our attitudes to food waste have relaxed. Your milk expires tomorrow? Better not risk it. That green pepper looks a little wrinkly? Chuck it.

Every year in Canada, \$27 billion worth of food is wasted — 40 per cent of the food we produce. That's according to a 2010 study by the Value Chain Management Center (VCMC). We burn more money on wasted food than the gross domestic product of the world's 32 poorest countries combined.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that nearly half of all the food produced in the world ends up uneaten. So where does it go?

Ever wondered why bunches of carrots are almost all exactly the same length? Us neither, but we recently found out. For starters, as much as 30 per cent of the fruits and vegetables grown in Canada will never make it to store shelves because they are deemed too ugly to eat.

But the biggest losses by far happen in our own homes. All of the mould colonies in Canadian fridges add up to \$13.4 billion in wasted food every year. That's \$384 per person — straight from your wallet to the trash. And our wasteful ways are on the rise. **The VCMC says the annual amount of wasted vegetables in Canada was almost 80 kg per person in 2009, up from 50 kg per person in 1961.** Which is roughly 730 green peppers, give or take.

But here's the real kicker: uneaten food also squanders all the elements that went into producing that food — water, electricity, transportation fuel. We pat ourselves on the back for installing low-flow toilets. Meanwhile, the International Water Management Institute in Stockholm estimates that almost half the water used to grow food every year is flushed down the toilet (metaphorically speaking), by hydrating produce that will never be eaten.

Eating leftovers could strike a major blow against climate change. According to the David Suzuki Foundation, 20 per cent of Canada's methane emissions — a greenhouse gas that traps more heat than carbon dioxide — come from the organic waste rotting in our landfills. Cutting that would be equivalent to pulling one third of Canada's cars off the road.

But even before the leftovers pile up, consider that most people generally buy more food than they can use. Two-for-the-price-of-one strawberries might sound like a great deal, but not if you can't eat them all before they go mouldy. Experts like those at the VCMC say consumers need to re-evaluate their shopping habits. Stores need to change the way they market, and stop using sales and incentives to coax consumers into buying more than they need. They also argue that food producers and retailers could use labelling to teach consumers better food storage practices so foods last longer.

After all, we work hard to earn the money to buy our food. And while the local raccoons might appreciate your leftover lasagna in the trash bin, your family will appreciate it even more on their plates. Now if you'll excuse us, we have to go catch a month-old pizza that's making a break for the door.

Brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger founded the educational partner and international charity Free The Children and the youth empowerment movement We Day.

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

