

Why wonky vegetables?

When it comes to people, variety is a given. Being unique is natural. Did you know the same is true for vegetables? The carbon copy produce we see in supermarkets only accounts for 60% of food production. The other 40% is wasted on the grounds it is aesthetically imperfect, despite being equal in nutrition. If we applied that rule to the human race, the world would be a pretty scary place.

Here at The Wonky Vegetable Conversation weirdness equals worthiness. We're celebrating diversity in minds and meals! This is a campaign to raise awareness about mental health challenges by reducing food waste.

Why?

Life can be hard if you've been feeling like a twisted carrot, a tattered turnip or a spare pear. But we'll never throw you out. Emotional experiences are what make us human. Without them, our personalities wouldn't develop.

However, when feelings become so severe, they're interfering with our daily lives, we may be facing a mental health challenge. Despite mental health problems affecting 1 in 4 of the population, when you're in the midst of it, it can feel like you're the only person in the world. Life can become characterised by fear – fear of judgement, fear of bringing others down, fear that we'll never get back to our normal selves again.

The reality is, there is no normal. We are only ever measuring up to ourselves. We can't go backwards, so let's go forwards. The only way to stop the stigmatisation around mental health is by reaching a place where we're able to admit what we're going through without shame. When it comes to mental health, I think honesty is the best policy. Without being honest with ourselves, it is impossible to reach out and support others. It's no different when it comes to tackling food waste. Before we start being honest about the issue and how we're contributing to it, we aren't going to change anything.

My name is Lilly and I'm the founder of this site. I could say that over the past six years my relationship with myself, my anxiety and my depression has bent me a bit out of shape. But I don't see it that way. It was these twists and turns that made me who I am today. Right now, I am the perfect shape for the experience I am having. I love being a wonky vegetable so much that I'm inspired to share my story with others. Recently, I had a conversation with myself about my mental health. It wasn't an easy thing to do. At times I've felt so ugly I wanted to dispose of myself. Even in my darkest hours, I knew deep inside that I was worth keeping. Now I want to have that conversation with you.

But first, let's talk about what's happening to our vegetables.

For years supermarkets have held up tight regulations on the appearance of vegetables, convinced that customers would not buy anything that didn't look perfect. In 2016 Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall created a War On Waste campaign, revealing the damage aesthetic standards are doing to farmers and the environment. In response, large supermarkets started selling wonky vegetables at a cut price. Asda created a 'wonky vegetable box,' Tesco rolled out a 'perfectly imperfect' range and you can buy Waitrose 'little less than perfect' range online.

However, these schemes are only tackling a tiny portion of fruit and vegetable waste. Unable to sell almost half of their produce, farmers are still struggling. Food production already creates an enormous carbon footprint without this unnecessary factor.

The increased awareness of climate change has started to alter consumer habits. Businesses have been set up with the specific purpose of creating a demand for fruit and vegetables with a difference. As consumers, we have the strength to alter industries. That means changing our buying habits. It is easy to point the finger at supermarkets as an omnipotent 'food industry monster' but that attitude is disempowering.

40% of vegetables are wasted and 1 in 4 people will develop a mental health problem in the UK each year.

No one deserves to feel disposable. No edible food should be wasted.

I'm ready to talk about it, are you?

On this site you will find everything you need to keep your meals interesting and your minds inspired.

In the minds section there is mental health forum where you can share your experiences in an inclusive safe space, articles giving advice to help you to feel good, animations that can help you to tackle negative thought patterns and destructive behaviors and a mental health directory which can help you find health services, sports clubs, creative workshops and other wonderful things to help you to heal.

In the meals section there is a cooking forum, recipes, the latest news about food in the UK, interviews with organizations that are tackling food waste, interviews with supermarkets who could be doing more, a directory for wonky vegetable outlets and gleaning projects and a comparison tool to help you to start buying wonky vegetable produce that's right for you.

There is even a gift shop where you can buy wellbeing sets and wonky vegetable merchandise for yourself and your loved ones.

My aim is to create a more supportive culture, which improves sustainability and efficiency by embracing what makes us uniquely human. It's time to feel empowered. Diversity is the key to strength. Once we have a good look at ourselves, and reconcile those parts we have been afraid of, we can take the necessary steps towards lasting positive change.

Ready?

Follow the blog

Let's start The Wonky Vegetable Conversation.