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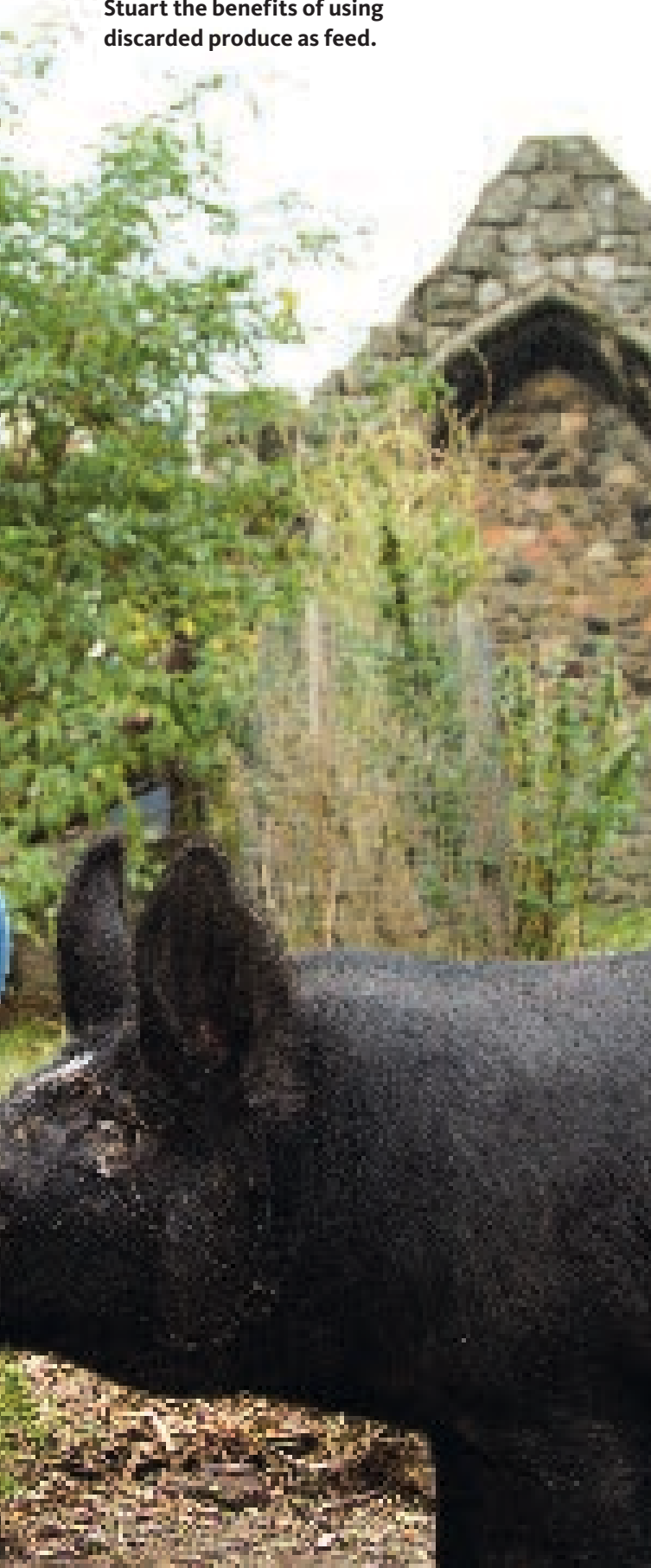
# EXPLORER'S JOURNAL

with **Tristram Stuart**

BY RICHARD PALLARDY



**PIG FARMER, FOOD WARRIOR**  
As a youth, caring for his family's pigs taught Tristram Stuart the benefits of using discarded produce as feed.



### **RECOVERING WASTE**

As one part of his campaign against food waste, Stuart supports “freeganism,” or reclaiming and using food that has been tossed out.

*Though people in many parts of the world struggle to find enough to eat, we waste huge amounts of food. National Geographic Explorer Tristram Stuart hopes to change that by showing how wasted food can be used.*

### **PIGGING OUT**

Tristram Stuart knows the benefits of paying attention to what other people throw away. As a teen, he fed his herd of pigs on food waste. “Buying pig feed was hugely expensive, so I decided to get free waste food from my school cafeteria,” he says. By feeding the pigs on food that was headed for the trash, he saved money and earned even more. “I had loads of delicious pork that I sold to my friends’ parents,” Stuart recalls.

Stuart was surprised by how much usable food was thrown away. Western countries may waste more than half of the food they grow. He began investigating food waste. He soon discovered that wasted food was often hidden from the public. “It’s hidden by companies that don’t want people to know how much they waste, because they know people will be shocked. It’s hidden from ourselves, because we put food in the **bin** and we don’t even realize how much it is,” he claims. “At least a third of the world’s food supply is wasted, and in rich countries, the percentage is much higher.”

As Stuart dug deeper, he found that massive amounts of food were being wasted—on a daily basis—for no good reason. Farmers often get rid of fruits and vegetables that are oddly shaped or otherwise irregular. The stores that they sell their products to only want perfect, unblemished produce. Farmers have to please their customers, so they don't offer imperfect produce to stores.

What is the big deal with an oddly shaped apple or carrot? Store managers explain that their customers are only willing to buy "perfect" produce. The "ugly" fruits and vegetables are thrown away. "That means all the ugly things, stuff that doesn't **comply** with this kind of perfection standard, gets wasted," Stuart notes.

But the reality is that most fruits and vegetables that are not perfectly symmetrical are still fine to eat. Stuart realized he wasn't the only one who could benefit from saving wasted produce. When consumers become aware of the waste that is caused by only buying perfect fruits and vegetables, they change what they buy. Stuart has campaigned in his native England to relax rules about the way produce looks. The program has seen major results. He explains, "We've reduced the level of waste dramatically on farms because we've made the public aware of the problem and marketed the solutions of selling ugly fruit and vegetables rather than letting them go to waste. And ugly fruit and vegetables are now the fastest growing sector of the produce market in the United Kingdom."

Other European countries have followed suit, saving tons of food that would have been wasted. According to Stuart, "It's a win-win solution. It helps the farmers who don't have to throw good produce away, and it saves the public money because ugly fruit and vegetables are a lot cheaper. Now we're trying to take that same **principle** to other parts of the world."

Stuart knows it will not be easy. Farmers and grocery stores are not the only ones to waste food. "It's going to be a series of steps," he says, starting with people "managing the food in their kitchens a bit better to reduce waste." He hopes that by suggesting small changes in the ways that people eat, he can encourage them to "interact with food businesses to push for changes in the **supply chain.**"

## FEEDING THE 5000

One of the ways that Stuart has shown the value of wasted food has been by organizing huge meals for the public. The campaign is called "Feeding the 5000." Stuart has hosted events in more than 30 cities worldwide at which he and his team served 5,000 people meals made from quality fresh surplus ingredients that would otherwise have been wasted. The meals were perfectly edible. Stuart says, "People come, they eat the food, they say, 'Wow, that's delicious, why would anyone waste that?'" He adds that the solutions to food waste "are delicious and nutritious and, generally speaking, quite simple."

Stuart has not forgotten about the lessons he learned from his own pigs. He hopes that wasted food that cannot be eaten by humans can be used by farmers to feed their pigs. Many farmers use crops grown in other countries that must be shipped overseas, which is costly. By finding local sources of food waste instead, farmers can both save money and help the environment. Food will be saved from ending up in a landfill. Pollution caused by shipping crops from other countries will be cut down, too.

Countries such as Japan and South Korea already feed their pigs with human food waste. There are even farms outside Las Vegas that feed their pigs scraps from the city's restaurants. Stuart has tried out the idea in England at one of his Feeding the 5000 events.

"We reared a whole lot of pigs in London on food waste and fed 5,000 people on the pork," he reports. "It took us just one morning to locate all the sources of food waste we could use to feed the pigs, even though the law is really restrictive about what you can and can't use. And the pork that we produced was absolutely delicious. Like I said, we fed more than 5,000 people."

Stuart is also trying to figure out ways of using fruits and vegetables that are never harvested. Sometimes, farmers grow too much of a crop to sell, or they cannot sell it because of the way it looks. So perfectly good food is left in the fields to rot. Stuart has brought together groups of people that go into the fields and pick this extra food. The practice is known as **gleaning**. The food is then used to feed people in need.



**CURRY, ANYONE?**

In 2012, Stuart invited 5,000 people to an event in Paris, France. That day, he and his team served a giant curry made of twisted carrots and other “ugly vegetables” to eager diners.

**ONE BANANA, NOT SEVEN**

Food waste is not just a problem in wealthy countries. Even where people struggle to eat, food is wasted. Often, those countries grow the food that is served in the West. By talking to the large companies that buy the food, Stuart can figure out easy ways that some of that food can be used.

For example, if bananas grown in Ecuador are sold in bunches, some will likely go bad. Single bananas are more likely to be eaten immediately, reducing waste. This small change helps the environment, the farmers of Ecuador, and the companies selling the bananas. If they are able to sell all of their single bananas before they spoil, they save money. “If you’re having a lunch break and you want one banana, you want to buy one banana; you don’t want to buy seven bananas,” says Stuart. Easy suggestions like this one make

it easier to start conversations with the large companies that sell these products.

Stuart aims to take on food waste in the United States, too. He argues that Americans “have twice as much food as they actually need in the shops and restaurants to feed the population.” He believes that the models he has created will appeal to Americans who want to make changes. Because the United States wastes more food than any other country, the impact of saving even a small amount of it will be huge.

**THINK ABOUT IT!** ::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::

1. **Analyze Cause and Effect** How does wasting food affect people and the environment?
2. **Form and Support Opinions** Would you eat ugly fruits and vegetables? Why or why not?

**BACKGROUND AND VOCABULARY**

**bin** *n.* a trashcan

**comply** *v.* (kuhm-PLY) to follow rules or laws

**gleaning** *n.* (GLEEN-ihng) the act of gathering leftover fruits, vegetables, and grains

**principle** *n.* a rule or guideline for doing something

**supply chain** *n.* the series of people, companies, and procedures required to produce something