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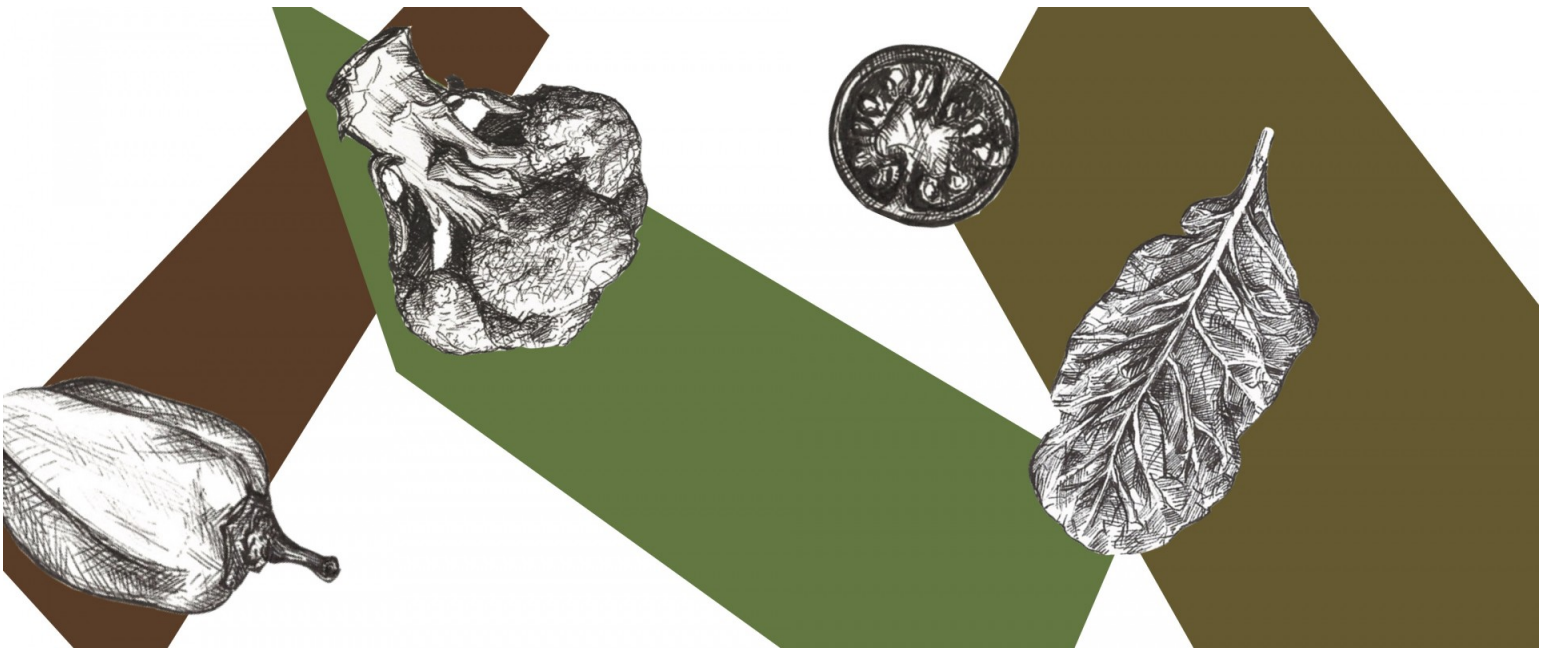
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THE FOOD WE WASTE: RETHINKING CONSUMPTION AND EXCESS AT TUFTS

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Madeleine Clarke and Marissa Donohue, Co-Coordinator of Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative

Next time you're in Dewick or Carmichael, stand for a moment in front of the dish return carousel. Observe what you see.

Perhaps it's a slow Saturday morning, and there are just a few empty coffee-stained cups on the trays, or maybe it's rush hour at lunch on a Monday. The carousel is overflowing with bowls, plates, cups, and an abundance of uneaten food. Salads, burgers, and sandwiches with one bite taken out of them, a whole apple here and there.

Have you ever considered what happens to this food? Have you ever thrown away food that could have been eaten? Have you ever thought about how much food has to be prepared every single day to feed Tufts students? How Tufts Dining predicts how much to make, and what happens when they make too much?

This is excess. This is wasted food. This is food that cannot be recovered within the structure of Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative and its Family Meals program, which redirects edible excess from the kitchens of Tufts Dining to our food-insecure neighbors. Yes, there are other possible uses for wasted food, such as compost or informal recovery through dumpster-diving. However, these options rank much lower on the Environmental Protection Agency's *food recovery hierarchy*. We are highlighting excess in the food system to increase awareness of the waste that cycles from visibility to invisibility on that rotating dish carousel daily.

Food consumption in affluent American culture adheres to a narrative of abundance. A cafeteria can never *run out* of food—what a scandal that would be! Excess is the expectation. Tufts Dining pays close attention to consumption data from Dewick and Carmichael and uses algorithms to find the perfect balance between abundance of food prepared and its actual use. Yet there is, and may always be, an expectation of excess put on Tufts Dining from its consumers—us, students.

We ask you to think about yourself as an actor in the Tufts food system. What personal choices do you make that skew the algorithm? How can you help Tufts Dining more accurately cater to the amount of food that will be *consumed* daily—not forgotten on the dish carousel, not composted, not made into rescued meals.

Wasted food occurs on the margins of a food system that, from an external point of view, may appear successful. One margin is the difference between the amount of food prepared and the amount of food that makes it onto a plate. This surplus exists to fulfill the expectation of excess, and this is where Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative fits into the equation, to make safe and healthy meals out of surplus, untouched food that can reach communities experiencing food insecurity. Is this a productive margin of excess? Possibly.

Tufts Food Rescue Collaborative (TFRC) is a partnership between Tufts Dining,

a local non-profit called Food For Free (FFF), a number of academic departments, and Tufts students. There are two programs within TFRC. First, the Leonard Carmichael Society (LCS) Food Rescue program picks up surplus food donated from local grocery stores and farmers' markets and drops it off at food pantries and shelters in the area. When you see boxes of bread, baked goods, and bruised pears in the Campus Center on Sunday mornings, these are leftovers from LCS Food Rescue. Any food that arrives at the Tufts Campus Center is the *excess of the excess*, the leftovers that could not be taken by recipient organizations.

The other TFRC program is Family Meals, which works on-campus in Dewick and Carmichael in partnership with Tufts Dining. Imagine dozens of trays full of General Gau's chicken, baked sweet potatoes, broccoli, stir-fried kale. Every day, Family Meals volunteers work in the dining halls, packaging surplus dining hall food into bags and meal trays. This food is then picked up by FFF and distributed to underserved families and individuals who do not have adequate access to food and kitchens. Last semester, TFRC packaged over one thousand meals, and an additional 2,096 pounds of bagged food to be made into meals at the Food for Free headquarters.

Fiona Crimmins, Director of the Family Meals program at Food For Free, commented on the value of the interconnections between FFF, TFRC, and many other partner and recipient organizations in this complex food web. "It's a real partnership," she said, "where both groups are working on the same issues: food waste, hunger relief, and spreading awareness of these issues. FFF wouldn't be able to rescue all the great surplus food from Tufts Dining, and

TFRC wouldn't have a conduit for their rescued food without FFF's network of recipients."

TFRC addresses and combats two of the most important issues in our food system: wasted food and food insecurity. In an ideal food system, this work would not be necessary. There would be no overabundance of food produced and perfectly edible food thrown away. There would be no disparities in access to wholesome food.

The other margin, complementary to the margin of expected surplus in production, is on the consumer end. It is the difference between cereal spooned from bowl to mouth, and soggy cereal left making the rounds of the dish carousel, uneaten. A shift in the consumer behavior of Tufts students can alter this margin and reduce the food that is wasted. What would it take to put an end to consumer-wasted food? Can we cultivate a campus culture of conscientious consumption?

Dr. Cathy Stanton, Senior Lecturer of Anthropology who teaches the Food Systems course at Tufts, reflected on TFRC's commitment to both "action-oriented" organizing and critical consideration of "the really challenging questions about why we waste so much food to begin with, and where food rescue fits in the bigger picture of attempts to make consequential changes in our food system." She continued, "Raising those more critical questions in a purely academic setting often feels unproductive, but linking them with

community-based work seems like a way to deepen our critique of the problems in the food system while still working on things that do some good in the world.”

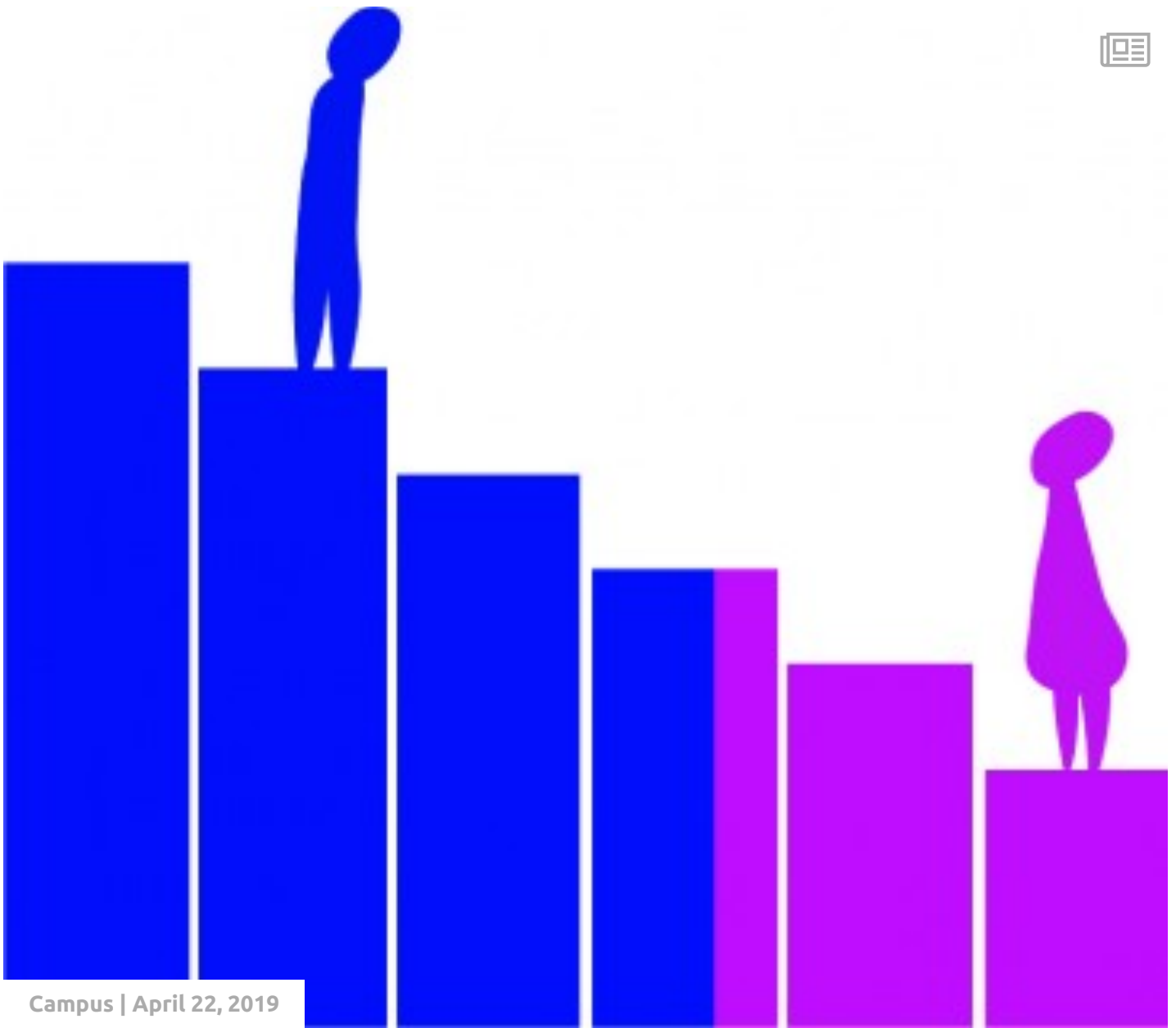
Food excess can be easy to overlook. As soon as a student makes the choice to discard food, that food becomes invisible, until an event like the Waste Less Dinners in Dewick and Carmichael asks students to scrape their plates into compost bins, which renders the collective waste of one weekday dinner visible and immediately measurable.

What if we take personal consumer responsibility to see our wasted food and to make it visible? Throughout this article, the words *wasted food* have been chosen over *food waste*. This small change places agency on the consumer. Food waste tends to be invisible, but wasted food is a product of us, the consumers. Moving away from excess and towards equity and food security is achievable through heightened visibility and conscientiousness.

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