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## Real too good to go

PHILADELPHIA (WPVI) -- Have you ever wondered what happens to leftover slices at a pizzeria, or bagels, pastries, even full meals that just don't get sold?Sadly, many eateries end up tossing it in the trash at the end of the night.But now, there's an app that just launched in Philadelphia, preventing that food from going to waste.It's called "Too Good to Go" and there's a big benefit for customers.In saving food from becoming waste, you save big money on takeout and help save our small businesses too.This is food that often can't get donated or served again the next day but is fresh and ready to eat at the moment.This app offers surprise bags of some of Philly's finest foods that are too good to go at a fraction of the price."Forty percent of food goes to waste," says Judy Ni, owner of Baology in Center City. "You could feed people. It's crazy."With the brand new app "Too Good to Go," that's exactly what local eateries like Baology are doing: feeding people. The concept is what they call a win-win-win.First, for customers, you can grab good take-out meals at one-third of the price."It's a lower rate because obviously if we were throwing it away, it wouldn't make a difference anyway," Ni says. "It's a great way to get food in the bellies of people at a more affordable rate and the food is perfectly good."These are meals that can't be sold tomorrow, but are still fresh and delicious right now, like the custom-made macaroni and cheese bowls at Mac Mart in Center City."Say we build something wrong, or if someone cancels an order, we are now left with that product and we can't sell it," says Marti Lieberman, the co-owner of Mac Mart.But now, they can offer it up as a "surprise bag."The second win is for small businesses who need the help now more than ever."This gives us a wonderful opportunity to get paid for our food costs and also feed some customers who may or may not have tried our food before," Lieberman says.The third win is for the planet.This app keeps good food from going to waste."We have saved more than 65 million meals from the trash," says Too Good to Go co-founder Lucie Basch. "That's food that ended up in stomachs instead of in the trash."In just a few weeks, more than 4,000 meals have been saved and savored here in our city."Philly is definitely now on board for the mission," Basch says. "It's been so impressive to see that every meal we put on the platform is being saved."The inventory of surprise bags just depends on what's leftover at any given time.Dozens of local restaurants are on board.Click here for details. Report a correction or typo Too Good To Go (TGTG) is fighting food waste in the supermarket with a new \$31 million funding injection led by Blisce. Existing investors also participated in the round and employees were given the opportunity to snag a stake in the startup, too. Users download the Too Good To Go app, which shows them a list of participating stores. For a small fee of no more than \$6, you can pick up a surprise bag of food that would have otherwise been thrown away, but is still perfectly good to eat. Too Good To Go says the bags offer around three times the value of the food inside. It claims to have "saved" over 50 million meals over the last five years. Because participating stores were already planning on tossing out the food, tossing it into a few grab bags instead doesn't add very much additional labor, according to co-founder and head of global expansion Lucie Basch. "The promise we make to stores is that it should be as simple as throwing food away. That's why it is a surprise bag, as well," she tells AFN. "We don't want them to spend any time on the platform registering the products. They just list the number of bags they have." Although some may sneer at the idea of a mystery bag of food, the surprise factor provides some appeal. During the Covid-19 pandemic, cooking has become one of the most common ways that quarantined city dwellers are staying off boredom. It also affords an opportunity to try new foods, while the Too Good To Go app's filters allow users to ensure they only get vegetarian or vegan surprises if required. "They love not knowing what they are going to get," Basch says. "They can rate what they get on the app and the average rating is 4.8 out of 5. I think they trust us." Finding the right VC fit Unlike many startups, the Copenhagen-based company waited several years after launching its app in 2016 to bring in VC investors. "We have been approached by VCs many times but we never really saw that they were being respectful enough of our values and our mission," Basch says. "Often what we were asked for in terms of due diligence is mainly for key performance indicators [KPIs] and we were interested in doing something a bit different from a traditional company." Blisce made a perfect match based on its consideration of things outside of KPIs, like the startup's diversity and inclusion policy, governance credentials, and increasing its scores as a purpose-oriented 'B Corporation,' according to Basch. Operating across 15 European countries with 30 million users, Too Good To Go will use the funding to fully launch in the US market, starting with New York and Boston. The app already has nearly 200,000 customers and 1,000 active food-providing partners across both cities, Basch says. So far, its pilot scheme has saved 50,000 meals-worth of food in just three months, she claims. The next US targets for the startup are Philadelphia and Washington, DC. The West Coast is next on the list, with a possible appearance in Illinois. It aims to grow its 750-strong workforce by hiring 150 US-based workers in 2021. Are we winning the fight on food waste? Food waste has been a consistent agrifoodtech theme in the past few years. The size of the problem is something most folks can agree on. Basch states that one-third of the food we produce winds up in the waste bin. Those scraps are responsible for 8% of greenhouse gas emissions. But is the lengthy and ever-growing list of startups attempting to tackle the problem actually making a dent in our landfills? From back-of-house software platforms to food-waste-to-fertilizer and food-derived cleaning products to bio-based crop inputs, the number of models adopted by startups is seemingly endless. "The great thing with food waste is that we all have a role to play. There is always something we can do," Too Good To Go is one of the solutions where you can save a little bit of food every day," Basch says. "All of those put next to each other equals more than 120,000 meals we saved from the trash. That's a great way to show that little actions at small scale actually have a huge impact when they are put next to each other." We're launching our new Beyond Profit series: a selection of interviews to highlight the work of purpose-led brands who are exploring better ways to do business. Like Ecosia, these companies put people and planet before profit, and exist as vehicles to further social change. Today, we're excited to kick off this series with the #1 anti-food waste company, Too Good to Go.1.6 billion tons. That's 114 million school buses. More than 228 million African elephants. Approximately 9 Mt. Everests. It's also roughly the amount of food produced for human consumption that gets lost or wasted on an annual basis. And those 9 Mt. Everest's worth of food waste? That's responsible for roughly 8% of our global greenhouse gas emissions each year. In fact, if food waste were a country, then it would be the third highest emitter of GHG emissions.At Ecosia, we plant trees because they fight the climate crisis by removing CO2 at scale. Trees help mitigate climate change, restart water cycles, stop desertification, and restore ecosystems. But climate change is a problem that requires many complimentary solutions. By connecting stores with leftovers to consumers who are looking for a discounted meal, anti-food waste app Too Good to Go has saved over 70 million meals to date, and prevented over 193,000 tons of CO2 from entering the atmosphere. We sat down with Lucie Basch, Co-founder at Too Good to Go, to learn a little more about why they do it.We all agree that global warming is one of the major crises of our time, with a complex array of contributing factors. Why did Too Good to Go decide to hone in on tackling food waste?At Too Good To Go we truly believe that fighting food waste is one of the most impactful actions we as a society can take against climate change. With this in mind, we wanted to focus our efforts on inspiring and empowering everyone to take action against food waste and climate change in an easy, fun and accessible way. By connecting app users to surplus food at restaurants, cafes and grocery stores at the end of each business day for a third of the price, Too Good To Go presents a win-win-win solution in which consumers get great food and great value and store owners no longer throw away delicious surplus and are able to recover some cost. Ultimately, all of us can work together to build a greener planet by reducing food waste and CO2 emissions.We've learned that food waste has a huge environmental and carbon footprint. What are some other things you were surprised to learn about food waste?The statistics around food waste are startling to think about. For example, 1/3 of food goes to waste globally, which equates to \$1.3 trillion worth of food. And in the U.S. 40% of edible food is wasted on an annual basis, which amounts to throwing out a midsize SUV filled with food every second!It's also crazy to think about how food systems consume about 30% of our available global energy. In fact, 25% of the earth's freshwater supply is used to produce food that's never eaten. By wasting this food, we are not only wasting the actual product, but also the resources and energy used to create it.Impact is obviously embedded into Too Good to Go's business model. How does that play out when it comes to thinking through and making decisions around Too Good to Go's growth strategy?As we continue to grow, we want to ensure we are growing with intention. We plan to be accessible to consumers on a national scale in 2021, and will have a presence in many of the largest U.S. cities by the end of this year. Since we launched stateside seven months ago, we've built strong momentum on the East Coast in cities like New York, Boston, Philadelphia and D.C. Now, we're very excited to turn our attention to the West Coast and will be launching in the Bay Area, Seattle and Portland over the next few weeks!Too Good to Go has seen huge growth in the past few years. Since it was founded in 2015, you've expanded to 15 countries, including launching in the Bay Area just yesterday. As a societal problem, food waste has been around a long time. What do you attribute this rapid growth and success to?The food waste issue is something that has, until now, somewhat flown under the radar. The need to connect the dots between food waste and climate change is crucial, now more than ever, while offering tangible ways people can take action on a daily basis, and make a difference. Our success is attributed to the ease of our app, and how it easily gives app users a way to live sustainably and fight climate change on a daily basis. Over 38 million conscious consumers and 87,000 mindful partners have joined our global Waste Warrior community, and we love being the source for fun, anti-food waste tips so everyone can incorporate these great habits into their lifestyle. Seeing the excitement and joy that app users get from picking up their Surprise Bags, and hearing from our partners that they haven't had to throw away fresh food, is our inspiration to continue working toward building a greener planet with zero food waste.How could others – either organizations or individuals – replicate the impact that Too Good to Go is making? What can you tell people who are interested in starting a purpose-driven business, but are worried about competing with businesses that pursue profit at any cost?Understand your passion and just do it. Businesses are already seeing the need to balance purpose and profit. For example, according to a recent study by Zeno Group, 94% of global consumers say it is important that the companies they engage with have a strong purpose. If your business has a clear purpose and mission, and the ability to execute on it in an impactful way, anything is possible.What's next for Too Good to Go? What else would your team like to achieve and how are you progressing towards those goals?Since our U.S. launch in September 2020, Too Good To Go has already amassed over 500,000 app users, saved 250,000 meals, and added over 2,000 food shop partners across New York City, Boston, Jersey City, Philadelphia and D.C.—and we're so excited to continue to expand across the U.S. in 2021!In the short term, we're focused on spreading the word about our app, while raising awareness about the massive food waste issue and its implications for climate change. In the long term, we're starting to think through how we can have a greater impact beyond the Too Good To Go app in the U.S., such as affecting change in food policies. For example, in the UK we've recently partnered with many influential food brands on a date labeling campaign, which is raising awareness around the differences between use by and best by dates and how they can often contribute to the issue of food waste. And similarly in France, we created an anti-food waste pact where over 40 food & beverage companies, like Nestlé and Danone, partnered with us to reduce the 'best before' and 'use by' date labeling confusion on their products.Good News! Too Good to Go has just launched in San Francisco. To learn more and start fighting food waste, download Too Good to Go's app by visiting toogoodto.go.org. Lucie Basch knew that people threw away food that was perfectly good to eat — bananas with a few black dots on the peel, cans of beans just past the expiration date. But when she started working at Nestlé's factories in the United Kingdom in 2014, she realized the world had a big problem. Much of the food she saw go down the production line — chocolate bars, coffee capsules, and cereals — would never be eaten. One-third of the food produced worldwide, Basch learned, ends up rotting in fields, the back of people's fridges, or in the dump. It's an urgent problem for the climate: Food waste accounts for as much as 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Decomposing food releases so much methane that if food waste were a country, its emissions would make it the world's third-worst polluter, behind China and the United States. "I realized that we need to build a better food system," Basch said. "And for me, I really wanted to use technologies to connect people at the right time at the right place to enable them to make a difference." Basch, a native of France, teamed up with entrepreneurs in Europe to create Too Good To Go — an app that helps bakeries, restaurants, and supermarkets sell their excess food to locals in the form of affordable "surprise bags." These businesses put their leftover bagels, croissants, and noodle bowls in mystery bags you can reserve through the app for \$4 to \$6. Then you stop by the shop during the scheduled pick-up window. It's essentially dumpster diving by smartphone, except that you pay for the goods instead of digging through a dumpster with a flashlight. More than 38 million people around the world have downloaded the app so far. In recent years, food waste has become the basis of a growing industry. Three U.S. companies — Hungry Harvest, Imperfect Foods, and Misfits Market — buy "ugly" produce, pack it up in cardboard boxes, and deliver it to people's homes. A Colorado-based company called Food4Fiven seeks out surplus food from farmers and large distribution centers and finds ways to sell or donate it, a San Francisco startup, Full Harvest, takes blemished produce from fields and sells it to juice makers and other businesses. Preventing excess food from heading to the dump was once the domain of counterculture movements like the "freegans" — a loose group of vegans who made exceptions for animal products that they scavenged from dumpsters. New apps and business models are now taking these approaches and scaling them up, aiming to keep food from landfills and maybe turn a profit while they're at it. The word "freegan" was originally coined as a joke. It was allegedly minted in 1994 by the activist Keith McHenry after he found a wheel of cheese in a dumpster. Six years later, a pamphlet called "Why Freegan?" turned the joke into a manifesto, defining freeganism as "an anti-consumeristic ethic about eating" and the "ultimate boycott." A prominent group of freegans in New York City became a media spectacle in the mid-2000s, appearing in the New York Times, on The Oprah Show, and in coverage all around the world, often featuring footage of the group's weekly dumpster dive. Freegans saw food waste as a symptom of a broken economic system, not the problem itself, said Alex Barnard, an assistant professor of sociology at New York University. He was active with the New York City group during its height and later wrote a book on freegans and food waste. "The idea was that food waste is this incredibly poignant symbol of a failure of capitalism. There's all this labor and animal suffering and exploitation that goes into these commodities," Barnard said. "But what an amazing additional tragedy: that all of that suffering happens for something that isn't even consumed." A woman with a group of "freegans" pulls a bagel out of a garbage bag outside a shop in New York City in January 2006. STAN HONDA/AFP via Getty Images These days, Barnard doesn't meet many people who call themselves freegans, but their efforts have had a lasting effect. Whereas food waste used to be seen as a symptom of the excesses of capitalism, now it's seen as a problem on its own. And that problem is easier to solve than the bigger issue: overproduction. "The root of the problem is, we produce way more calories than we can possibly consume," Barnard said. "At some point, your food waste movement has to actually decrease production." Critics like Barnard say that in the scramble to commodify food waste, many of these business ventures have lost sight of the big picture — that the Nestlé's of the world are simply producing too much food. Still, there's some evidence that food waste-fighting apps are alleviating the situation at hand. A study last year looked at the app OLIO, a platform for people looking to give away food and other household items to their neighbors. After analyzing 170,000 posts on OLIO over the course of about a year and a half, researchers found that almost \$1 million worth of food was diverted from garbage cans, the emissions equivalent of between 87 and 156 metric tons of carbon dioxide. One of the co-authors of that paper, Jonathan Kronen, a visiting assistant professor of environmental studies at Boston College, has written that food is getting commodified "from cradle to grave." Kronen believes that businesses started focusing on food waste once "information became cheap"; that is, when nearly everybody had a smartphone, it was easier for bargain hunters to know when those day-old muffins were up for grabs. Not everyone is convinced that all of the companies fighting food waste are solving real problems. The businesses that sell "ugly" fruits and vegetables, for instance, have been criticized for profiting off produce that didn't really need diverting, as much of it was already getting sold to restaurants or fed to animals. To make sure that the food sold on the app wouldn't have otherwise been donated to food banks, Too Good To Go teams up with local hunger-relief organizations in the cities it operates in. "It's super important that we fit into the existing ecosystem, and that we can help each other," Basch said. Though Kronen is concerned about the unintended consequences of commodifying food waste, he's also excited about the latest crop of companies like Too Good To Go. Their business models are scaling up in the ways that other efforts haven't. "You know, people have been dumpster diving for a really long time, and there have been 'gleaning' organizations for a really long time, and food waste has gone up and up and up," he said. Basch sees Too Good To Go as complementary to dumpster diving. "I think a lot of Too Good To Go's waste buyers are dumpster divers themselves," she said. "The goal is really to make it more systematic." Not everyone is comfortable digging through a company's bins in the middle of the night, after all. Too Good To Go and similar apps still face obstacles to widespread adoption — namely, what Kronen refers to as the "ick factor," the notion that "second-hand" food is unsanitary. Basch stresses that when you buy a surprise bag on Too Good To Go, you're getting the good stuff. "You're actually just saving the food that would have been sold full price just 10 minutes earlier," she said. On the whole, Too Good To Go users appear to be happy with the contents of their mystery bags, which have garnered an average rating of 4.8 out of 5 stars on the app. Last fall, Too Good To Go started up in New York City, Boston, and other East Coast cities. This month, it has expanded to the West Coast, launching in San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland. More than 700,000 Americans have downloaded the app so far, according to a spokesperson. On a typical scroll through the Seattle app, you'll find mystery bags of bagels and udon noodle bowls that have already sold out, alongside plenty of bottles of nearly expired olive oil ready for the taking. (One can only make so much pesto.) "We know that we're saving close to 200,000 meals every day now, but it's just a drop in the ocean, really, so we need to do more, we need to go faster," Basch said. Too Good To Go estimates that on average, each "meal" (meaning each surprise bag) sold averts 2.2 pounds of food from the dump. That's the carbon-emissions equivalent of fully charging a smartphone 422 times.

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