

Andrew Hoffman

## Imperfect Foods: Ugly Produce and an Attempt to Reduce Food Waste

It was a bright sunny day in mid-spring of 2019—typical weather for San Francisco, California—and Ted Johnson<sup>i</sup> exhaustedly decided to go out for a walk near the headquarters of his employer, Imperfect Foods. As the company's director of public affairs, he needed some time away from the computer screens adorned with audacious headlines claiming that the company was doing a disservice to the issue of food waste. Imperfect Foods innovatively worked to reduce the amount of food loss at farms—mainly due to high aesthetic standards set by grocery stores—by increasing consumer awareness and encouraging the purchase of healthy but distorted fruits and vegetables. However, critics had loudly denounced the company's tight relationships with large-scale industrialized farms.

Such farms' highly mechanized operations allowed the agricultural sector to meet the increasing demands for quantity, yet environment advocates cited ecological degradation of farmland and waterway pollution from colossal amounts of synthetic fertilizers. Food justice advocates were appalled that a company stating a commitment to progress in the food system would even think to engage in commodifying food surplus from the industrialized farms they called "big ag."

Johnson revisited the noble principles that Imperfect Foods was founded on and still believed it could be a force for good in the battle for food security and justice. He circled back toward his office, knowing that several public-facing events were ahead, and he needed to provide a solid communications strategy recommendation to the executive team to rectify a misconstrued portrayal of the company.

### Company History

Imperfect Foods' Founder Ben Simon first became interested in addressing food waste in a campus dining hall. In 2011, Simon, a freshman at the University of Maryland, watched good food get tossed in

<sup>i</sup> Ted Johnson is a fictional character.

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