

What's wonky?





**Why and how Dash uses
imperfect but perfectly
good produce**

What's the issue?



In a landmark 2011 report, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that 1.3 billion tons of the world's edible food – one third of global production – is wasted every year. This amount of perfectly good, nutritious food could feed three billion people. And it's a worsening problem – with a 2021 report from WWF revising this figure upwards to over 2.5 billion tonnes, or closer to 40% of all food produced.

Food waste is an environmental disaster due to the huge volume of greenhouse gases emitted through its production and distribution life cycle. Consequently, reducing food waste is deemed by some researchers to be the third most effective weapon we have in the fight against climate change (Project Drawdown, 2017).



40%

**of all food produced
is wasted**

In the UK an estimated 9.5 million tonnes of edible food waste was thrown away in 2018, with a value of over £19 billion and a footprint of more than 25 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (House of Lords, 2021). These figures are once food has entered the supply chain, however we know there is further need to tackle primary level waste on farms, with wastage levels of 10-16% in a typical year (Farm Waste Report – Feedback, 2018).

Growing up on farms, DASH co-founders Jack & Alex witnessed the cause and effect of food waste first hand and felt compelled to act.

As the idea for a new range of unsweetened sparkling waters took form, it felt natural to use the product as a vehicle with which to do this. So, in 2017 they launched DASH Water – sparkling spring water infused with wonky fruit; including the bent, curved and misshapen produce which others say no to simply because they are judged on looks, not taste.



How does
'wonky' fruit
come into this?



Through research and conversations with Feedback, the pioneering UK based food waste charity, we have identified two key drivers of food waste on farms, both of which are rooted in the irresponsible buying behaviours of retailers, buyers and other major market players:

A. Fruit that is 'wonky' or imperfect in appearance

- Supermarket procurement is guided by stringent grading requirements (Supermarket Scorecard – Feedback, 2018).
- Fruit & vegetables that do not meet premium grade specifications with strict standards for appearance, weight and colour can struggle to make it on to grocery shelves.
- The nutritional quality and value of these rejected goods is exactly the same for the consumer and requires the same economic input from the farmer to grow.



- As supermarkets have over 85% of the market share of UK grocery shelves (McKevitt, 2017), this can leave farmers without compensation and with no market to sell their “wonky” produce to.
- By working with DASH, farmers know that they have a customer that judges on taste, not looks. In advance of the harvest, we agree to purchase “wonky” produce from their farms to ensure that it is not at risk of going to waste.

B. Surplus produce

- When speaking with farmers, we realised they were often under pressure to produce more fruit and vegetables than they could sell.
- This is due to what Feedback has identified as “a climate of fear” in which supermarkets hold the power to switch supplier if the farmer fails to meet their volume requirements or cosmetic standards. This situation is a consequence of the UK grocery sector being dominated by a small number of retailers who wield an excess of power in the market whereby farmers cannot afford to lose their buyers.

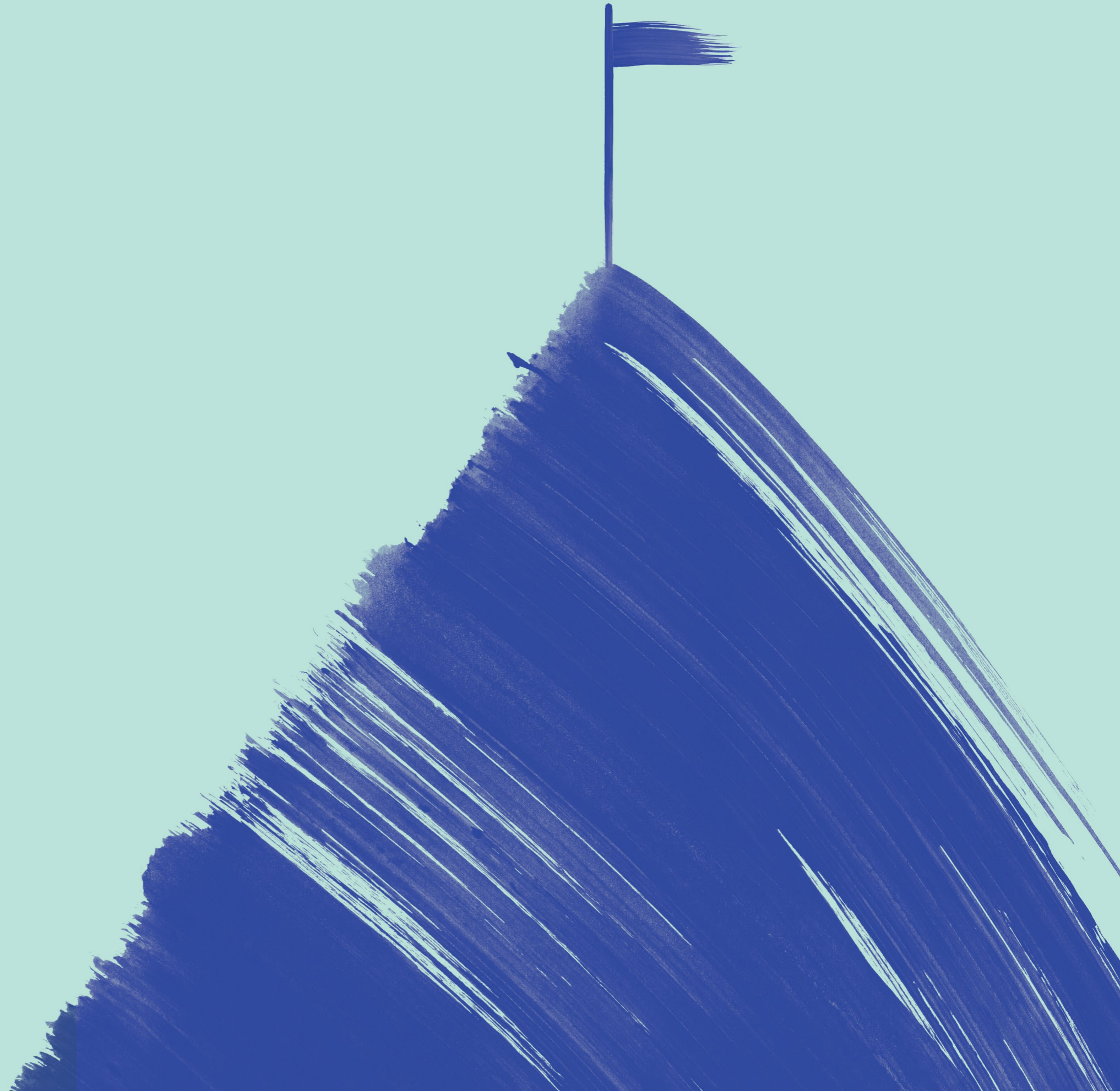




- In the unpredictable world of crop growing, this has forced farmers towards a policy of overproduction in order to maintain key contracts (Farm Waste Report – Feedback, 2018). In the case of a good harvest, surplus crop may simply be left wasted in the field with no market to serve.

- At DASH, we connect with farmers before the harvest and agree to buy any surplus fruit and vegetables to ensure that it is not at risk of going to waste. This gives our farmers assurance that their produce and hard work will rightfully end up with consumers.

Dash's mission



At Dash, our mission to tackle endemic food waste is twofold:

A. To raise awareness of the wasteful “wonky” issue, and to highlight that imperfection should be celebrated. We want to bring an end to irresponsible buying behaviours and to see delicious fruit and vegetables of all shapes and sizes in retail aisles.

B. To lead the way by ensuring that in our own drinks we are using fruit and vegetables that others say no to. We give the farmers we work with peace of mind that their wonky or surplus produce will end up on shop shelves.



We would never claim to be the only people who use fruit and vegetables in this way. However, our aim is to encourage consumers to demand that it becomes the norm rather than the exception; to rebel against the status quo in order to prevent the catastrophic levels of food waste we're seeing worldwide.

We know that our mission to raise awareness could ultimately have a more significant impact than the amount of fruit and vegetables that we alone can put to good use.

Nevertheless, we believe that actions speak louder than words, which is why we hope to empower others to have a positive impact through the example that we set. It is only by working together and at a national and global scale that we will enact meaningful change in the fight against food waste.



It is well worth noting that the food waste issue is a complex and rapidly moving one, with root causes and drivers that have and will shift over time. Certainly, there is no single origin or solution. We will continue to communicate with our partners, friends and growers in order to continue developing our own understanding. We note that in some key areas the message is already resonating, with various retailers taking positive steps such as offering wonky fruit and vegetables sections within their stores. These are actions that we celebrate and encourage others to follow.

We know that we are by no means perfect ourselves, and we have a long way to go in our journey towards crafting a more sustainable future for consumerism. But we believe that small changes can add up to make a big difference, and we encourage everyone to join us on the journey, one curly cucumber and lopsided lemon at a time.





References:

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