

## Ugly Fruits and Vegetables

At the age of seven, I saw a man through my car window that was on the sidewalk digging through the trash. He was dirty and had ragged clothing that barely clung to his scrawny shoulders. I watched as he leaned down so deep into the trashcan that I thought something must have caught his arm and was dragging him down. It was a surreal moment for this young girl at the age of seven, and I was more curious than unsettled by the shocking display. But then, the stoplight turned green and I felt the car lurch forward, quickly transporting me back into my world. Later, at the age of 11, I had my first encounter with the vegan movement known as “freeganism” through a late night news story on the TV. Freegans, as they call themselves, are vegans who only eat the fruits and vegetables after they have been thrown out by supermarkets. “There’s millions of pounds thrown out each year,” claimed one freegan as a video clip of him diving down into a dumpster and coming up with bags of uneaten, untouched, fruits and vegetables played on the screen. I turned to my father, “Millions of fruits and vegetables are thrown out each year? Do not enough people buy them?” He shrugged in response. “I think it’s more that the supermarkets throw away the ‘defected’ produce before they even hit the shelves, because honestly, who would buy them?”

Those were my first encounters with homelessness, hunger, and food waste in Hawaii. How could these people be starving in the streets, when millions of pounds of food were just being cast aside. Fresh produce was being thrown out for being ‘defective’; in other words, they were too ugly for supermarket standards. Honestly, I didn’t even connect the two together until my sophomore year of high school when my French teacher showed us a video on a sustainability movement happening in France known as “legume moche,” roughly translating to ‘ugly vegetables.’ People had taken notice of the insurmountable amount of fresh produce being

thrown away annually because they were considered 'ugly.' For example, when one looks up 'legume moche,' images of morphed potatoes and 'double' carrots that humorously resemble two-legged life-forms are the first images to appear; these are the types of produce thrown away because no supermarket wants to sell something not aesthetically pleasing. The 'Legume Moche' movement in France helped to take away this common stigma of imperfection; the produce was sold at a reduced price to promote sales and highly encouraged in the community through social media. The movement grew so big that soon, the ugly produce actually sold out faster than the 'perfect' produce, and food waste in France was cut down significantly.

I propose implementing a modified plan in Hawaii, similar to 'legume moche', that specifically fits the needs of our community. Due to cultural differences between America and France, it would be more difficult to eliminate the stigma of imperfection when talking to Americans. Instead, we should take a majority of those ugly fruits and vegetables being thrown away and give them to those in need. The food bank never has access to enough fresh produce, and they are a viable organization to donate this food to. Creating this establishment between not only supermarkets and the Food Bank, but also integrating produce farmers who often are the first to decide whether a fruit or vegetable is up to their standards, would be a key first step in limiting food waste in Hawaii.

Homeless people are not the only ones affected by extreme poverty in Hawaii. People with jobs struggle every day to feed their families, often being forced to choose between paying bills or putting food on the table. In fact, according to the Hawaii Food Bank, 287,000 people currently rely on food support. By allocating the produce that would otherwise go to waste to people in need, we help to end hunger for our neighbors and support a healthy living style in Hawaii.

This plan should be modified in the long term to address other problems. For example, with some work, we could create a model that directly models, if not surpasses the Legume Moche movement in France in the sense that it becomes the best fit for Hawaii. It supports healthy eating while combatting obesity, offers another solution to combating hunger in Hawaii, and reduces food waste. I hope to further explore this plan; working with other students at the Student IUCN or International Union for Conservation of Nature Conference, we developed this plan, and I introduced it to my school. With the support of our Interact Club, I hope to further bring this plan to those in need.