

## Imperfect Produce becomes Imperfect Foods

*The ugly produce delivery service expands to dairy and pantry items so that their customers won't have to go shopping at all. But is that totally a good thing?*

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Ugly produce mogul Imperfect Produce pulled a Prince last week when all their logos, web copy, and print materials transformed overnight to “Imperfect Foods.” The name change reflects two recent expansions in the company’s offerings. In May of this year, Imperfect announced they’d be including pantry items and snacks like almonds, dried mango, and quinoa in their boxes, and announced just in September they’d also be including dairy.

“Dairy was one of the most requested items from our community,” the company pronounced on their in-house [blog](#). “One of the most common pieces of feedback we got about our product offerings was that if we offered milk and eggs, folks wouldn’t need to go to the store anymore.”

In addition to responding to customer feedback, Imperfect also hopes expanding their selection will help reduce their carbon footprint. Indeed, [recent research](#) has shown that grocery delivery is both convenient *and* good for the planet. By offering most food goods, Imperfect Foods hopes to be able to answer for just about all their customers’ shopping lists.

“Saving our customers a trip to the store takes cars off the road,” the same blog post asserted. And, “if our customers still have to drive to the store to get the remainder of their groceries, these trips effectively eclipse the emissions savings of a delivery model.”

One other significant change with the added items is that not all the food will be imperfect or saved from waste. While there is tri-colored quinoa that’s not quite tri-colored, or whole almonds that are slightly chipped or dented, other dairy items like yogurt and milk are as flawless as those you’ll find at a grocery store. Though the company claims they’re doing everything they can to source from sustainable and small-scale producers, customers won’t get the same pleasure they get rescuing a hapless, misshapen tomato with their butter and cheese.

Imperfect Produce is only one of a slew of ugly produce companies that have popped up over the past decade, along with Northeast and Midwest-serving companies like Hungry Harvest and Misfits Market. The rise of such companies has raised a lot of important questions around how to address food waste. Ugly produce start-ups have faced a [fair amount of criticism](#) for monetizing and redirecting foodstuffs that could otherwise go to charity or food banks, and for taking business away from local CSAs by buying from industrial agricultural producers, and bolstering their income by buying off what would otherwise be a loss.

At the same time, advocates for ugly/unaesthetic grocery delivery argue that produce delivery services help combat the effects of food deserts in underserved areas, while helping farmers get paid more fairly for their goods and labor that otherwise get thrown out or donated without compensation. And, according to Imperfect Produce, major agribusinesses like Dole only [make up a small percentage of their suppliers](#).

Time will tell whether or not other imperfect delivery services will follow suit, and what the impact of expanded eco-friendly grocery delivery will be on the planet and the economy. While direct correlative effects on CSAs and industrial agribusiness are not totally clear, [numbers coming out](#) from companies like Imperfect Foods are encouraging for those concerned about food waste and enduring inequalities in food access: with over

80 million pounds of food waste redirected, 767 farmers and producers working with the company, 284,000 boxes delivered to low-income families (thanks, in part, to the SNAP program), and 3.2 million pounds of food delivered to non-profit and food bank partners across the country, Imperfect Foods has definitely made a dent in food waste. How their start-up model ultimately challenges or deals with the larger, systemic issues in food production and consumption that produce that waste to begin with is still to be seen.