Share not waste

What's the issue

In the book (on page 33), we discussed some of the reasons that we, as shoppers, waste food. Maybe we bought too much, maybe our plans changed, maybe we had a taste of something and realised that we don't like it, after all. Yes, the ideal is not to buy too much, use everything we have and enjoy everything we buy — but reality doesn't always work like that.

When we have fresh fruit ripening too fast, fresh products fast approaching the use-by and opened packets of crackers that we know we won't finish, is there any option other than admitting defeat, and letting good food go to waste?

Yes. There are options. Even for those opened packets of crackers.

What we can do about it

We can give our excess or unwanted food away — to others in our community. There are neighbourhood networks and social sharing apps created with exactly this in mind: helping those with too much give freely to others who can use it.

Little Free Pantries
A network of publicly accessible pantries for store cupboard grocery items where locals are invited to place or take goods as they please. Inspired by the Little Free Library movement to share food, not books. A map on their website lists all the Little Free Pantry locations.
littlefreepantry.org

Community / Solidarity fridges
Similar to the Little Free Pantry movement but with fridges and fresh items rather than longer-life products that anyone can give to or take from for free. There's no single worldwide network and the name varies depending on location (they're called Ramadan fridges in the Middle East).
nevarasolidaria.org (Spain)
hubbub.org.uk (UK)

Olio
A free mobile app (available on both Android and Apple devices) that allows households and businesses to give and receive unwanted food for free. Olio started in the UK and now has almost 2 million users worldwide.
olioex.com

Buy Nothing Project
A free sharing network that connects local neighbours together using Facebook groups. Items are given freely, and can be gifted or requested (even swaps are not allowed). It's not solely dedicated to food waste, but lots of food is exchanged in the groups.
buynothingproject.org

Good Karma Network
Another neighbourhood network that connects suburb-specific communities via Facebook groups. They have a broader remit than the Buy Nothing groups, but items are often gifted. Most groups are located in Victoria, Australia.
goodkarmaeffect.com

Food banks

Food banks usually only take unopened packet food and tins, but they are a great option for items you won't use or don't need. Contact your local food bank to find out what they need (to ensure you're not donating something they don't) – a quick internet search will reveal your closest option.

Freecycle

A not-for-profit network of local free-to-join, volunteer run online groups dedicated to giving things away for free, in the spirit of reuse (and reducing waste).

freecycle.org

Freegle

A UK alternative to Freecycle (and registered charity) that operates in a similar way and with similar values. Their slogan is 'don't throw it away, give it away'.

ilovefreegle.org

Take action
– give something away for free

Find one food item in your pantry, fruit bowl, fridge or freezer that you know you won't use. Now, list it on one of the above sharing sites and see if you can give it away to someone who will use it.

Even if you know you will use everything in your pantry / fridge / freezer eventually, still give one thing away (or take the steps to try) just to go through the process, and make someone else's day.

If you don't have success on the first platform you try, choose another and try again.

Bonus action

Sharing networks are for receiving as well as giving. The next time you need an obscure ingredient, a small amount of a spice or seasoning, an in-season fruit or vegetable or some fresh herbs, try asking for it on one of the sharing platforms above. Worst case, no-one will be able to help you out this time. But you'll be surprised what other people will happily gift, when you ask.