

EVERY DAY THIS WINTER, I CLIMBED the stairs from Toronto’s subway, and before bundling into the Canadian cold and a landscape of hibernating plants, I passed a public service poster reminding commuters about how many tomatoes Canadians throw out daily. Part of the city’s “Love Food Hate Waste Canada” campaign, the posters encourage zero waste buying and zero waste cooking, sending commuters to a website that has everything from recipes to tips for freezing, drying, and canning and also induces a pang of guilt by shifting the inefficiencies of the industrial food system onto home cooks and family shoppers (midwinter, those tomatoes are grown far, far away). “One third of all food produced globally is wasted. Shocking, eh?” reads the campaign’s website. “The truth is that Canadians are throwing out more food than they realize—food that could, at one point, have been eaten” (<https://lovefoodhatewaste.ca/about/food-waste/>). Looking at that poster, my mind typically drifted to the mathematics (dividing the number of discarded tomatoes by the population of Canada, it works out to each Canadian tossing a bruschetta’s worth of tomatoes daily). I thought also of my own fridge, wondering (susceptible as I am to food politics) about what lurks in the back, at the dividing line between cold storage and slow-moving rot. And then, I thought about what I was cooking for dinner.

That daily experience—a mixed salad of food politics, government advocacy, corporate evasiveness, consumer guilt, gastronomic pleasures, cooking, and the life cycle of food itself—informs this special issue of *Gastronomica*. As an editorial collective, we have spent the last few months thinking a lot about the many entwined meanings of “saving food”—from preservation to curation to nostalgia to archiving to salvation. We intend to bring in many voices; as a collective of fifteen, we can draw upon our own perspectives and experiences, but also on others we know, or wish to meet, or have encountered through different media. Can the many meanings of “saving” help us understand in new ways the intersections of food pleasures, politics, and production, the overlap between activism, cooking, museum and archival practice, and the constant race to cook and prepare foods before they rot?

From wrapping leftovers in plastic wrap to fermenting ingredients to curating museum exhibits to creating seed libraries and archives, we all “save” our food. Translated into a public service slogan, “loving food, hating waste” reflects a far larger public and activist concern about the fate of our foods in the Anthropocene, this contemporary era of climate change and global inequality. At the everyday level, as diners, cooks, activists, teachers, growers, and consumers, we face the challenge that ingredients can be food or waste. In “The Race against Rot,” members of the new collective participated in a public forum at the University of Toronto; the rich conversation that flowed among the crowd has been transformed into a written conversation. Donna Gabaccia and her students Nana Frimpong and Gillian MacCulloch at the University of Toronto describe their efforts to experience the everyday act of saving food by learning how to make pickles.

What is canned in the cupboard, lies rotting at the back of the fridge, or tossed is, today, politicized. In her topical intervention into the problem of food waste, Leda Cooks argues that while efforts to “save” and redistribute food often *appear* to be an obvious solution, “food rescue and donation maintain inequities in the food system.”

Beyond preserving, fermenting, freezing, drying, and smoking, does food—its traditions, its materials, and its products—need saving? We often worry that food is being lost—as generations age, as strains of crops are rendered extinct, as the climate changes, and as highly-processed foods proliferate. Paul S. Kindstedt and Tsetsgee Ser-Od take readers on a fascinating journey into dairying and cheesemaking practices that continue in Mongolia today from their Neolithic origins in Southwest Asia. They trace the evolution and migration of these practices, shedding a critical light on how climate change and globalization shape and affect the endeavor to save historical food preparation. Sharon Hudgins, meanwhile, reflects on her own experiences in Siberia during the early days after the fall of Communism, learning to save food in new and unexpected ways.

We envision preserving food traditions, regional iterations of cuisines and recipes, ingredients, seeds, products, and more through an astonishing array of strategies that draw upon small-scale seed and recipe exchanges, family and community cookbooks, seed banks, and museum collecting. Efforts to “save” food have their long antecedents in the transmission and mobility of food products, recipes, and knowledge. Can those histories provide new understandings for contemporary anxiety about the loss of both bio- and culinary diversities? Collective member Helen Veit reached out to Sean Sherman and Elizabeth Woody to explore what “saving food” means to them and their Native American communities; the conversation considers preservation but also loss. Harry G. West extends our renewed fascination with food and rot, as he argues that while traditional cheesemaking is materially a process of the “managed decay” of milk, the affective appeal of preserving its heritage also fundamentally implies the “savoring of dying traditions.”

Can food, as well, save us? Food is mobilized as a strategy of national and community belonging, a form of urban or economic development, and as an example of intangible cultural heritage. Sylvie Dumelat focuses on Moroccan-born visual artist Ymane Fakhir’s video installations that feature her grandmother’s practiced gestures transforming raw materials into staples like bread and sugar loaf. The article speaks directly to a key concern of this volume on “saving food,” namely, the dialectic between tradition and modernity: how does the past inform the present and the future? Increasingly, nations have turned to global organizations like UNESCO in order to protect a local dish or ingredient. Yet do heritage politics protect (or ossify) food traditions?

For an individual, including the iconic food writer M.F.K. Fisher, food might also represent a means to physical and social salvation. Victoria Burns challenges the widespread reception of Fisher’s “memoir” as an uncensored window into the life of Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher, urging readers to treat the book “as an imaginative recreation of lived experiences.” Ines Sučić, Tihana Brkljačić, Ljiljana Kaliterna Lipovčan, Renata Glavak-Tkalić, and Lana Lučić together remind us that food, just as it occupies much of our time and consumes much of our budgets, can also be a source of happiness. Asking ordinary Croatians, “What is happiness for you?” they trace the association between food and subjective well-being.

In this, our second issue of *Gastronomica* with an editorial collective, we continue to offer provocations. Together, collective members and authors have initiated new conversations about what it means to save food (and to be saved by it). Look for more responses to our invitation to consider “saving food” in future issues!

—Daniel E. Bender for the *Gastronomica* editorial collective, Toronto, July 2019