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We must raise the alarm over food waste, but consumers are not the main culprits

Industry and distributors are firm allies in spurring us to buy and then discard edible food.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

As happens every year, alarming articles on food waste, bolstered by truly worrisome statistics, are flooding the media. Not that we're given to know how these figures were derived; but the numbers themselves induce anxiety. On 4 February, which is National Food Waste Prevention Day as conceived by **Andrea Segrè, Waste Watcher International** and the University of Bologna presented the report *Il caso Italia (Italy: a case study)*. According to the latest data, **every Italian discards 617.9 grammes of food per week: double the UN allowance**. The most wasted foods include fresh fruit (24.3 grammes weekly), bread (21.2 grammes), vegetables (20.5 grammes), salad greens (19.4 grammes) and onions, garlic or other bulbs (17.4 grammes). These data alone are sufficient evidence that **waste is not caused entirely by consumers**, but also in great part by distribution chains: producers, wholesalers, shops and especially supermarkets.



Large-scale distributors are the prime suspects

Large-scale distributors are the prime suspects, as they not only **discard unsold expired food in considerable quantities**, but also offer large bulk discounts. They seem to have recently realised that singles make up a third of all households while two-person families account for 20%: hence half of all Italian homes are inhabited by one or two people. Hence they have begun selling **smaller portions, which, however, cost more**. Furthermore, as many people no longer shop every day as was once commonplace, they **purchase more than necessary, so food might expire**. Precise expiry dates cause food to be discarded while still edible. Alas, the more forgiving 'best before' is rare: better to frighten consumers! Producers and distributors thus join forces to encourage more purchases and more waste of edible food. But resisting food waste, as we should, creates another problem: reduced consumption. If we buy only what we need, we won't waste food. Splendid. But then sales will crash, causing vast economic damage. **We must settle for a compromise**, yet the main culprits are not inept, wasteful consumers, but the entire modern system which props up the agrifood economy and makes it prosper.

ties, but also offer large bulk discounts. They seem to have recently realised that singles make up a third of all households while two-person families account for 20%: hence half of all Italian homes are inhabited by one or two people. Hence they have begun selling **smaller portions, which, however, cost more**. Furthermore, as many people no longer shop every day as was once commonplace, they **purchase more than necessary, so food might expire**. Precise expiry dates cause food to be discarded while still edible. Alas, the more forgiving 'best before' is rare: better to frighten consumers! Producers and distributors thus join forces to encourage more purchases and more waste of edible food. But resisting food waste, as we should, creates another problem: reduced consumption. If we buy only what we need, we won't waste food. Splendid. But then sales will crash, causing vast economic damage. **We must settle for a compromise**, yet the main culprits are not inept, wasteful consumers, but the entire modern system which props up the agrifood economy and makes it prosper.





A Carnival of sweetness

by Gabriella Pravato
Roma Eur Academician

Travelling along our peninsula, discovering the sweet side of the year's craziest festivity.

The Latin *semel in anno licet insanire* means 'madness is permissible once a year'. This is the essence of Carnival, the feast preceding Lent, which marks the passage between winter and spring. Each Italian region celebrates it with allegorical floats, assorted razzmatazz and abundant sweets, almost always fried.

Let's learn more about this Italian Carnival, starting with the aristocratic **region of Piedmont, which boasts five Carnivals**. The most famous is **the Carnival of Ivrea with its 'Battle of the Oranges'**, a symbol of liberty and rebellion against every tyrant. It is associated with two *maschere* (Commedia dell'Arte characters): Gianduia and Giacometta. **A savoury dish accompanies the feast: fazolà, bean stew with sausages**. Every Sunday during the Carnival season it delights Piedmontese palates at home but also in town squares, church halls and the refectories of the *Alpini* (mountain infantry).

A document dated 1476 reports that the Bishop of Aosta asked the Duke of Savoy to take *des mesures nécessaires de repression* (necessary repressive measures) to prevent the inhabitants of Aosta from wearing odd clothing such as *tintinabula vaccarum* (cow bells) and *des cornes diaboliques* (diabolical horns) on their heads. This was the *Mascre de la Coumba Freida*: the Combe Froide (literally 'Cold Hollow') Carnival. There are not only masks in **the small Valle d'Aosta region, but also sweets**: baked **jam-filled turnovers**.



Ancestral rituals, and as many sweets as there are masked characters

Harlequin, Brighella, Meneghin: **these maschere from Lombardy** correspond with **as many sweets** to celebrate the year's most cheerful, irreverent feast, including *lattughe* and *gale* fritters; *risulèn* biscuits made with yellow maize flour; *farsòe*, **Martino da Como's 'wind-filled fritters'**; and *làciàditt* ('finger-licking'), Reinette apple fritters.

Ancestral rituals, monstrous masks, dances with propitiatory leaps: this is Carnival in the borderland of **Trentino - Alto Adige**. It has three typical sweets: **grostoi**, simple fried sweet dough strips; the ubiquitous **Krapfen** (jam doughnuts); and **Strauben**, spiral fritters with cranberry jam. "*Ua passa e farina, pignoi e sedrini, e vecie bambini le brama de ver. Ne l'oiò ben caldo rotonde sgionfete par tante balene che nuda sul mar*". This old Venetian nursery rhyme describes **fritole, the Venetian Carnival fritters**, frying in hot oil as resembling many whales swimming in the sea (and craved by old and young alike). Spoonfools of a batter containing flour,

eggs, sugar, pine nuts and raisins are fried in oil and enjoyed with a dusting of icing sugar. In the small villages of Friuli - Venezia Giulia, young people, who still choose to preserve ancient Carnival traditions, colour or oil their faces and cover them with cotton wool or feathers and go door to door asking for a glass of wine.

In Friuli, Carnival has the fragrance of strucchi: deep-fried pastry bundles filled with dried fruit, chocolate, cinnamon, raisins, rum and pomace *grappa*.

Capitan Spaventa ('Captain Fright') is the *maschera* that most represents **Carnival in Liguria**. The vain, perpetually enamoured swordsman is associated, with **sciumette**. Spoonfuls of whipped egg whites and sugar are flung into boiling milk and enjoyed with pistachio custard and a dusting of cinnamon.

Instead, Emilia Romagna celebrates one of its Carnivals on water. Stately allegorical boats, wrought by the creativity and artistic ingenuity of valiant artisans, float majestically along the canals of Comacchio. Palates, meanwhile, are delighted by **intrigòun**: crumbly, crunchy dough strips and, respecting tradition, **fritters of rice** cooked in milk and fried **sweet tagliatelle**.

Italy's oldest and best-known Carnivals

Stenterello is a Tuscan *maschera*; and it is Tuscany where **the world's most famous Carnival was born: that of Viareggio**, with its characteristic allegorical floats. A typical sweet of the festivity is **berlingozzo**, loved by none other than **Lorenzo the Magnificent**. This crumbly, soft ring-shaped cake has orange and vanilla flavours and is aromatised with Vinsanto. **In Umbria** there are not only *frappe* and *castagnole*, but **also girelle: flaky pastry** rolled into a cornucopia containing pine nuts and raisins. Equally famous is **crescionda from Spoleto**: its ancient recipe calls for breadcrumbs, sugar, pecorino cheese, chicken broth and chocolate.

The Marche region boasts Italy's oldest Carnival celebration. A document dated 1347, preserved in the historical city archive at Fano, enumerates expenses for "El giuoco de charnevale" ('the Carnival games'). Not only the oldest but **the most distinctive**, since from the floats, **sweets are thrown in the traditional Getto** ('flinging'), during which **180 hundred-weights of chocolate are thrown** to the celebrating crowds.

"Ecco febraro in maschera Andar conviene al corso/ Il portamento fingere/ Il sesso e il discorso...". This rhyme exhorts people to go into the streets during 'masked February', concealing their true gait, gender and manner of speaking. This was the old Carnival descending from Saturnalia, celebrated **in ancient Rome, when people exchanged fried sweets called frictilia**: a custom that survives in the Eternal City through the whimsical sweets called *castagnole*, *bocconotti* and *frappe*. "Carnevale vecchio e pazzo s'è venduto il materasso per comprare pane, vino, tarallucci e cotechino" ('Old crazy Carnival sold its mattress to buy bread, wine, *tarallucci* and *cotechino*'). Thus wrote **Gabriele D'Annunzio** to celebrate Carnival in Francavilla in the province of Chieti. **Nowadays in Abruzzo it is characterised by propitiatory rites** of re-



birth, and is accompanied by a sweet called **cicerchiata**: a garland of fried, honey-soaked dough balls recalling the ancient legume *cicerchia*, or grass pea. On the evening of the last Sunday in Carnival **in Molise** the Deer Man appears alongside his companion, a woman dressed as a doe: both wear deer horns and goat skins. The whole region also **celebrates by eating scorpelle** (potato fritters) with **rosacatarre** (dough roses fried and soaked in honey).

In Campania, Pulcinella is centre-stage at Carnival, and **chiacchiere napoletane** are fried in homes. Traditional-minded people serve **lasagna, which can also be sweetened** by adding sugar, pine nuts, raisins and cinnamon to the meatballs therein.

In Puglia (Apulia), Carnival is synonymous with Putignano. A 631-year-old ritual features the character Farinella, half Harlequin and half playing-card joker. Equally famous are its **fritters** and **purcidduzzi**: small flour and water gnocchi flavoured with sugar, cinnamon and honey.

In Lucania (Basilicata) the Carnival character is the Rumita, the hermit (eremita). Covered entirely in ivy, he carries a staff surmounted by a branch of *pungitopo* (butcher's broom). Parades are accompanied by the sound of accordions, tambourines and cow bells, as tradition dictates, and people enjoy **chiacchiere and frittelle** (fritters) at home. However, home-made pasta with pork called *u sanguinacc* is mostly a distant memory.

The two-faced Calabrian Carnival

Carnival has two faces in Calabria: the *maschera* **Capitan Giangurgolo** who represents gluttony, and the wife of the Carnival King (Re Carnevale), **Corajisima**,

who appears emaciated and sad on Fat Tuesday, mourning the death of her beloved. Following **an 18th-century tradition, people enjoy chjina**: flaky pastry stuffed with bread, raisins, walnuts and chocolate, all flavoured with cinnamon and sweetened with fig honey.

"*Beddi cannuola di carnivali megghiu vucuni a lu munnu un ci nn'è*": meaning, 'Fair Carnival *cannolo*: there's no better morsel in the world'. This is contained in the **Inno al Cannolo** (Ode to the Cannolo) written in 1635. Indeed, it is with *cannoli* fried in lard until golden brown that **Sicily** celebrates Carnival. Filled with sugared *ricotta*, decorated with candied fruit, they first arose as a carnival prank: from the water fountain, instead of water, behold a spurt of *ricotta* cheese.

In Sardinia, the ancient tradition of *su carrassigare* persists. A man in a wooden mask or a soot-covered face goes from door to door gathering lard, fava beans, wine and sweets to be used for the celebration. In the land that the Romans once called Sandalia, **brugnolusu are the best-loved sweets**. They are fried little spheres of sheep *ricotta*, sugar, saffron, eggs, durum wheat semolina and *Filu 'e ferru* (Sardinian distilled spirits).

Thus ends our lengthy voyage along the Italian peninsula. It has given us glimpses of a celebration which can be joyous and cheerful, but also unnerving and magical, both sacred and profane, entwined with tradition or legend, but always greatly loved.

Gabriella Pravato





Candlemas and crêpes

by **Giancarlo Burri**
Padua Academician

Delicious Italian variants of Transalpine crêpes.

One of the many facets of the centuries-old battle for culinary supremacy between Italy and its Transalpine cousin, France, is the mystery surrounding crêpes, or *crepelle*. There is no explicit indication of where and by whose efforts these thin, rolled pancakes first arose, but it seems appropriate to recall the custom of celebrating Candlemas with crêpes beyond the Alps.

Preparation of crêpes for French pilgrims in Rome

According to a reliable source, in the 5th century Pope Gelasius abolished Lupercalia (a mid-February pagan purification feast) while also establishing Candlemas (2 February) to celebrate the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. To mark the new Christian feast, a large number of French pilgrims, tired and hungry from their long voyage, arrived in Rome one cold February night. The pope, touched by their plight, ordered his cooks to use all the flour, milk and eggs available to prepare light but nutritious food for them. The cooks brilliantly faced the emergency by cooking thin pancakes on hot iron plates. The French pilgrims so loved these new 'crêpes' (thus named because the pan-

cakes curled and crinkled as they cooked) that they became firmly associated with Candlemas.

The many Italian variants

In our own country, crêpes are called *crepelle* and have been adopted and ingeniously transformed since time immemorial in many delicious ways. The first known recipe for *crispellas* is in the 14th-century **Liber de Coquina**: "...Crispellas sic fac: habes farinam albam distemperatam cum ovis, addito safrano. Et pone ad coquendum in lardo tantum; et quando decocte fuerint, pone desuper zucaram vel mel. Et comede." (Mix white flour with eggs; add saffron; cook in lard; when cooked, cover in sugar or honey and eat.)

In Valsesia there are *miacce*, known in





the Canavese as *miasse* or *ofele*: in Valsesia they are made of white and maize flour, milk, eggs, cream, water and salt, while in the Canavese and Biella areas, maize flour predominates. All these ingredients are mixed and the result is deposited on a scorching lard-smear iron plate (*ferro da miasse*).

The word *miaccia* may be derived from *miglio* (millet), whose flour was used for "little flour flatbreads toasted on hot iron" in a recipe from 1448.

Traditionally, *miacce* were stuffed with cheese or local cured meats, replacing bread, while nowadays they are also enjoyed, folded in half or in four, with sweet fillings including chocolate, butter and sugar, chestnut purée or jam.

So thin as to be nearly transparent, *ciaffagnone* is typical of both Tuscan towns claiming to be its birthplace: **Manciano**

and **San Casciano dei Bagni**. It is a disc of dough made of water, flour, eggs and salt, cooked in lard on a long-handled iron pan, and, according to tradition, **topped only with a dusting of aged pecorino cheese**.

The pan's long handle means that the cook must be skilled in flipping the pancake in the air to brown it on both sides. *Crespelle* can also star in main courses, such as the refined and elegant *scrippelle 'mbusse* from **Abruzzo**. Originally from **Teramano**, this recipe was allegedly stumbled upon in the 19th century by **Enrico Castorani**, assistant to the cook serving the French officers stationed in Italy, who accidentally dropped some crêpes, which he was carrying to French officers, into a pot of chicken stock. To salvage the situation and avoid wasting food in those lean times, Castorani presented the delicious combination any-

way, to vast acclaim. According to their traditional recipe, *scrippelle* are made of eggs, water and flour, sprinkled with parmesan or *pecorino* cheese, rolled up and served in bowls with light and flavour-some chicken broth poured over them.

From Valle d'Aosta to Sicily

In Val d'Aosta *crespelle* are heartier, made of eggs, milk, flour and butter and stuffed with sliced cooked ham and squares of *fontina* cheese. Folded in half and then in 4, they are placed in a baking dish, smothered in béchamel sauce and baked. For the sake of gastronomic precision, it must be specified that the name *crespelle* or *crispelle* is also used for certain fritters, whether sweet or savoury, found in various Italian regions and most often stuffed with mozzarella and ham.

In Cosenza, Calabria region, *crespelle* are called **cuddrueddri**: fried flour and potato doughnuts. In their savoury variant they are filled with anchovies or dried tomatoes; their sweet version is dusted with sugar and may be stuffed with *ricotta* cream.

In Sicily *crespelle*, called **crispèddi**, also exist in **delightful sweet and savoury versions**. In Catania province there are savoury ones made with durum flour and filled with salted anchovies or *ricotta*, while in Ragusa province they are sweet, flavoured with fennel seeds inside and sugar and cinnamon or sugar and honey on the outside.

Giancarlo Burri





Rethinking restaurant categories

by **Giorgio Maria Rosica**

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Delegate

The University of Denver proposes a useful model for mapping the restaurant world.

In Italy, food is love, tradition must not be betrayed and each dish tells a story. But if we pride ourselves culinarily on both tradition and innovation, how does our classification of restaurants meet that standard?

As in Europe, in the USA there is also no standardised, official restaurant classification system. However, **a study by the University of Denver, Colorado, proposes a model based on the dichotomy of utilitarian and hedonistic dining, useful for mapping and communicating**

the array of restaurants on offer transparently and accessibly. Interesting and different. This model, based on an *open system*, proposes an interactive and flexible framework whose criteria can be 'tweaked' for personalised assessment. In short, it does not 'reduce' but rather 'expresses and showcases', **allowing diners to navigate an increasingly vast, competitive restaurant scene.**

The goal: to showcase a unique heritage

The model's **four categories**, representing unique combinations of culinary experience, ambiance and service, uses a continuum ranging from the functional to the hedonic, allowing restaurants to shine for what they truly are, as follows:

■ **Quick-Service Dining (High Utilitarian):** A **fast, essential** dining experience treating food as a basic necessity. Includes fast food, pizza parlours and self-service restaurants.

■ **Casual Dining (Low Utilitarian): Food quality, attentive service and an atmosphere which enriches** the sensory experience. Includes rustic restaurants (*osterie, trattorie*).

■ **Fine Dining (Low Hedonic):** Emphasis on pleasure, with **creative dishes and high-level service.** The meal is a voyage through flavours, aesthetics and creativity. Includes Michelin-starred and other gourmet restaurants.

■ **Luxury Dining (High Hedonic):** An **exclusive culinary experience** combining superlative cuisine, impeccable service and a refined ambiance which amplifies hedonic pleasure. Includes luxury or exclusively themed restaurants.

Assessment criteria

The model uses a **detailed scoring system** with **25 parameters** quantifying *functionality* (e.g. speed of service, price-quality ratio) and *hedonic experience* (e.g. originality, atmosphere). Points from 1 to 100 position restaurants along a continuum, helping diners to choose and restaurants to improve. Each aspect is rated between 1 and 4, and a maximum score of 100 indicates excellence in all 25 aspects. The four categories of restaurants are assigned through a score of 1 to 25 for quick-service restaurants, 26-50 for casual dining, 51-75 for fine dining and 76-100 for luxury restaurants.



Such scores do not merely classify but also **allow customers to create their own assessment scale** for a more personalised, interactive restaurant selection experience.

This model is also useful for culinary tourism and online platforms

Italian cuisine is a mainstay of our country's appeal to tourists. This model offers visitors **a compass for navigating our many culinary offerings** from street food to Michelin-starred restaurants. It provides a clear, accessible and immediate impression that showcases the options and could even **encourage greater awareness among tourists**, granting more visibility to smaller local restaurants that focus on quality and authenticity. Nowadays, customers prioritise transparency in food choices; digitalisation amplifies this demand. Integrating the scoring systems of online platforms **could revamp restaurant reviews, making them more objective and meaningful**. Such a tool would help restaurants to communicate their commitment to quality, sustainability and social responsibility while reaping a competitive advantage.

Showcasing innovative Italian cuisine while also cherishing our traditions

Italian cuisine is not static but continuously evolving. This model showcases both tradition and innovation, demonstrating that **it's not a matter of choosing between past and future, because we can combine both dimensions**. A clear map of the Italian restaurant scene would help us to present our culinary heritage better. And who knows: perhaps one day we'll be able to exclaim, after a memorable dinner: "That little place? A solid 60! I recommend it".

Giorgio Maria Rosica

