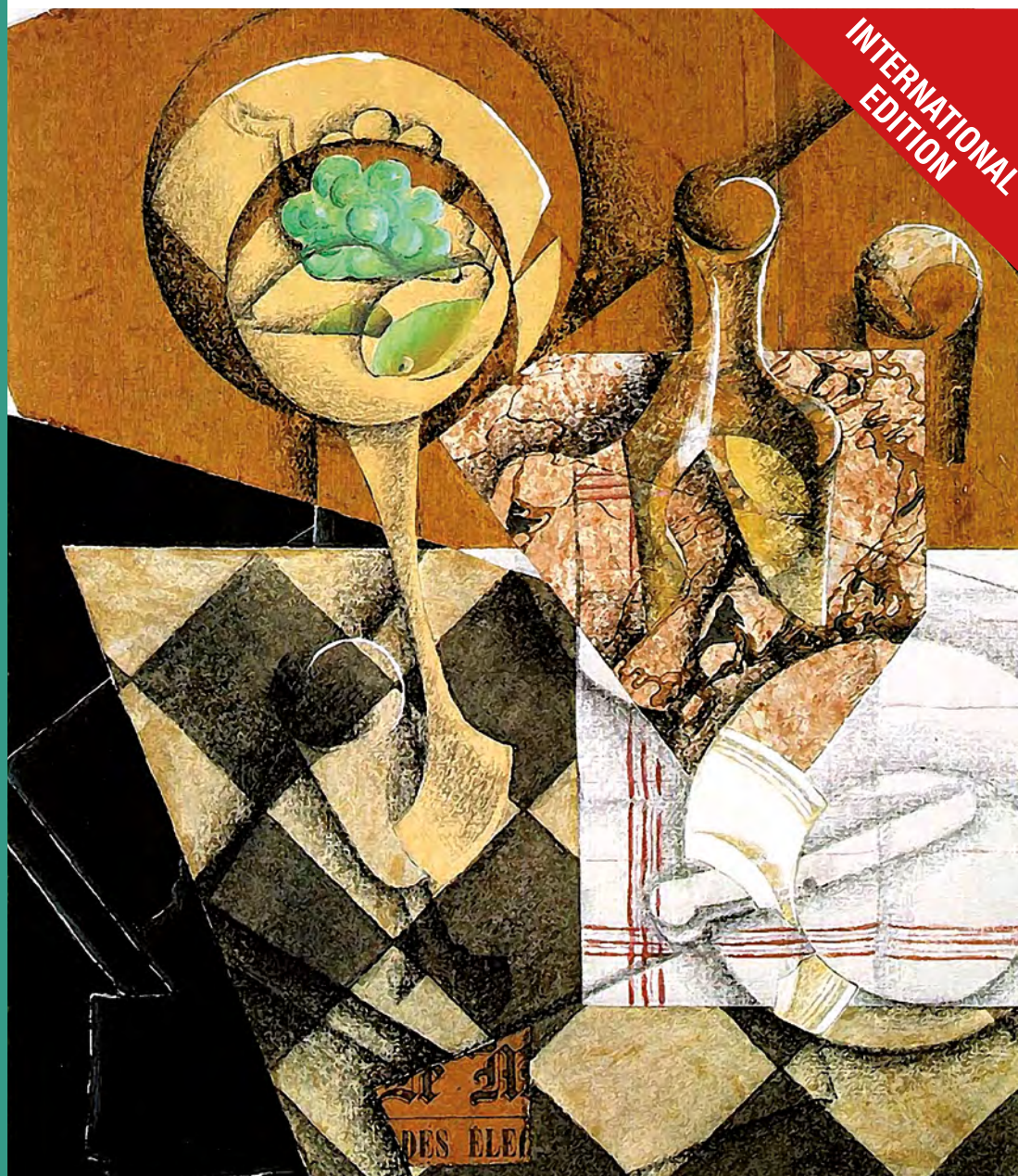


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È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of The Fruit Bowl (1914) by Juan Gris, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands*

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The feedbag generation

by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia

Inexorable compromise between taste and convenience.



Francesco Cirio



Labor-saving long-life ingredients have taken a lengthy evolutionary path. In Italy this began in Turin as long ago as 1856, when **Francesco Cirio** (the very same who founded the well-known eponymous brand) used the method invented by **Nicolas Appert** in 1795 to make tinned peas. Following scant success, he relocated to Castellammare di Stabia where he began preserving **peeled tomatoes**, forever changing the way this mainstay of home cooking was used. Soon housewives reaped the benefits of tinned pre-cooked beans and chickpeas, followed by a plethora of ready-made sauces in jars, tins or cardboard packs. **Freezing** brought a great leap forward, initially with such basic ingredients as vegetables, fish, crustaceans, meats and much more, and subsequently with a limitless variety of ready meals to heat (in a pan or microwave oven) and serve. Hugely convenient; hugely successful. Yet these handy replacements hardly compare with their fresh counterparts.

loose produce) and often insipid, but simply emptying a pouch into a tureen is frightfully convenient. Modern kitchens witness the repeated washing and draining of lettuce with increasing rarity. Remember the grated parmesan rinds once available in shops? They were cheap and useful but they tasted, unsurprisingly, of rind. Now, in many areas the consumption of **grated bagged cheese** has outstripped that of intact pieces intended for grating.

We will increasingly move towards better, more affordable, ecologically packaged products

The new century has supplied kitchens with pouches containing fresh long-life ingredients

Finally, the new century has supplied kitchens with fresh products packed in pouches using the **'modified atmosphere'** technique, which are all the rage in supermarkets. Modified Atmosphere Packaging (**MAP**) is a technology which uses gases such as nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide to **preserve ingredients leaving their nutritional value, appearance and flavour practically unchanged**. Its advantages are enormous: fresh food storage reduces food waste. The only major hurdle is that at least for now, this technique generates considerable plastic waste. The success of what are technically termed **'fourth-range products'**, such as bagged pre-cut salads, pre-made minestrone etc, has caused them to exceed the space assigned to fresh produce in many shops. They are very expensive (sometimes costing 4-5 times more than

Today, high-quality PDO-certified cheeses, even highly aged ones, are industrially packed in pouches: they are long-lasting and emancipate us from using a cheese grater, cleaning it, and perhaps injuring ourselves with it (but an excellent grana, freshly grated, is peerless). And then there is the vast category of **cured meats**. Lovely colours, delicate fragrances, flawlessly cut and arranged in alluring tray packs; an impressive selection of origins, curing methods and ageing times. One might argue that a good ham, freshly sliced, is incomparable. True! But it is just as true that the very same ham, eaten just hours later or the following day, is no longer the same: oxidation will irrevocably alter its colour and flavour. These reasons for successful pre-packaging have likewise contributed to the disappearance of traditional food shops, out-competed by the dizzying array of supermarket products. A one-way street? Most assuredly. We will increasingly move towards better, more affordable products, hopefully with more eco-friendly, less detrimental packaging. We are facing an acceptable compromise between flavour and convenience, at least on average, among general consumers. Discerning Academicians will doubtless know how to proceed.



Hazelnut: the crunchy side of the menu

by Gigi Padovani

Journalist, food writer

*This little fruit is by now
a star in the kitchen,
and not only in sweets.*

They were once picked by hand, kneeling with a basket fastened to one's waist, creeping through the grass. This was primarily done by women and children, in the countryside of Piedmont, Lazio, Campania and Sicily. Now everything has changed. This year, too - from late August until mid-October - machinery blankets the Italian hills, replacing workers, vacuuming up the nuts dropped by the open bracts,

the leafy structures protecting the nuts in their shells. **The hazelnut harvest for 2019, however, has left a bad taste** in Italian producers' mouths, emphasises **Sergio Lasagna**, President of the Piedmont PGI Hazelnut Consortium, representing 1,200 members: "Unfortunately spring frost has hindered ripening of the buds, leading to a **50% production decline in our region**, with a very unstable market always affected by competition





On the left: selecting hazelnuts during processing; below: toasting hazelnuts



for sweet products (spreads, pralines, chocolate bars, biscuits) but wants to save money on basic ingredients.

Italy is the top hazelnut producer in Europe

Italy is the top hazelnut producer in Europe, followed by Spain (with orchards concentrated in Catalonia, in Reus and Brunyola), but **the market for processing and commercialisation is monopolised by Turkey**, accounting for 70% of the worldwide market: in recent years Turkey has increased its production tenfold. Low yields per hectare are offset by reduced labour costs.

The only strategy to revivify our production of *Corylus avellana* (a name deriving from the city of Avella, in Campania, where it is still cultivated) is that of quality and of boosting local growth and distribution. For years, this has been the work of the National Association named *Città della Nocciola* (Hazelnut City), overseeing over 200 hazelnut-growing municipalities. Its President and founder, **Rosario D'Acunto**, also former Mayor of Giffoni Sei Casali, says: "This fruit which grows in the shadow of Italian church spires represents a magical understanding between humans and nature. Today many consumers choose to travel here and live in these eco-friendly rural towns which respect nature. They offer a collective hospitality, local products, events and tastings which are a novelty for national tourism". **There is a rich catalogue of hazelnut specialities.** These are mostly sweet: from the **baci-style chocolates of Alassio** or Cherasco, to the **calzoncelli** of the Monti Picentini area;

with Turkey". **Gerardo Alfani**, President of the Giffoni PGI Hazelnut Consortium, adds: "The harvest was late this year, so we'll only have the precise figures in early November. We had pollination difficulties in spring, and yield per hectare has fallen by approximately a third from last year. **Luckily the hazelnuts are beautiful, healthy and of excellent quality**".

Great chefs have also begun using hazelnuts in savoury dishes

For several centuries, this little health-giving fruit has been a major ingredient in the art of pastry chefs, ice cream makers

and chocolatiers; great chefs have also begun using it in savoury dishes. It is a high-quality product which unifies Italy, defended by three European rankings. **Two are PGI** (Protected Geographical Indication): **the 'Trilobata' from Piedmont and the 'Tonda' (round) from Giffoni; one is PDO** (Protected Designation of Origin, more strictly regulated): **the Roman hazelnut.**

In late September, Brussels authorised regulation changes much anticipated by the producers in the hills loved by Pavese and Fenoglio: the orchards in a hundred or so townships in the Langhe area have been **designated as a Langhe 'cru' territory for the tonde trilobate cultivar.** Yet growers are underpaid for their hard work by industry, which craves hazelnuts

"Hazelnut and Vicciola® wafer" by Damiano Nigro®

from the **caschettes** of Belvì (Sardinia) to the **hazelnut crisp** of San Marco dei Cavoti; from the **gianduiotto** chocolate of Turin to the **pangiallo** of Latium; from the Sicilian **quaresimali** biscuits to the **Pizzo Calabro truffle** (a PGI-ranked frozen speciality); from the myriad varieties of **torrone** to the **tozzetti** of Tuscia. In 2012 the list gained another intriguing entry: **Vicciola beef®**, veal raised on hazelnuts and other natural foodstuffs, registered by the Turin butcher **Pino Puglisi**, who sends it all over Europe: very tender, almost sweet, lean, and very low in cholesterol.

Creamy gianduia spread, created in Alba by Pietro Ferrero, is a worldwide success

And we must not forget **gianduia spread**, created in postwar Alba thanks to the insight of Pietro Ferrero, now a worldwide 'Made in Italy' success. Paradoxically, after the industrial product, there followed artisanal spreads and in recent years even '**zero-kilometre creams**'. About twenty growers in Piedmont, Liguria, Latium and Campania have equipped themselves to process



their produce in their own facilities, creating small jars of excellent spread with a high hazelnut content, up to 50% or 60%.

Corylus avellana has recently entered kitchens to offer its crunchy side, conferring **unmistakable aromas and flavours to savoury dishes**. Indeed, in his *De re coquinaria* - the famed ancient Roman cookery manual - **Apicius** recommended dressing 'the meat of quadrupeds' with a flavoursome cold sauce mostly consisting of spices, onion, dates and hazelnuts. Centuries later, **Vincenzo Agnoletti**, a 19th century cook in the service of Marie Louise, Duchess of Parma, published a recipe for "preserving Hazelnuts or Filberts". Later, **Giovanni Vialardi**, a cook for the House of Savoy,

described a milk-based spread in his *Trattato di cucina, pasticceria moderna (Treatise on Cooking: Modern Pastry, 1854)*, while **Pellegrino Artusi** (1891) recommended a "Hazelnut Pudding" with "*avellane*". In the Villa d'Amelia restaurant in Benevello (Cuneo), the Michelin-starred chef **Damiano Nigro** has held an event for several years entitled "**La nocciola in tavola**" (Hazelnuts at the Table) wherein chefs from all over Italy present their dishes 'contaminated' by hazelnuts. Its latest edition included some surprising inventions: "**Hazelnut and Vicciola® wafer**" by Nigro; "**Stuffed raviolo** with rabbit *genovese* sauce" by **Domenico Candela**, chef of George's Restaurant at the Grand Hotel Parker's in Naples; "**Arctic char** in the manner of the Prince-Bishopric of

Trent", by **Alfio Ghezzi** (who spent years at the Locanda Margon in Trento, two Michelin stars); even a **pizza with Pallone di Gravina cheese** (from Gravina di Puglia) presented by the pizza master **Paolo Ghidini** of Al Fienile in Palazzolo sull'Oglio (Brescia).

Some years ago, **Irma Brizi**, the professional taster who directs the Hazelnut City Association, founded the yearly event "**Nocciola Day**" (Hazelnut Day), always held in early December; this year it will be on Sunday the 8th. She launches an appeal: "no more American peanuts or cashew nuts with aperitifs: try toasted and salted Italian hazelnuts". And in fact, they are sublime with a glass of Alta Langa or Franciacorta: try it and see.

Gigi Padovani





Two worlds, one cuisine

by **Elisabetta Cocito**
Turin Academician

*In Ecuador,
two restaurateurs
from Liguria
creatively integrate
Italian cuisine
with Latin-American
ingredients,
maintaining
the harmony
of our tradition.*

Much has been said regarding taste, studied by anthropologists, philosophers, gastronomists and many more. I believe that it defies precise definitions and conceptions: if prima facie it seems the most instinctive and straightforward sense, in reality **taste perception** is a complex operation **involving all the senses and even the intellect** through memory, culture and education. Hence it is an intimate process occurring between the body and the mind, offering an opportunity to link them in a fertile and fruitful rapport.

Experiencing other countries' foods is an effective way to get closer to their culture

In particular, experiencing the food of other peoples is an effective way of get-

ting closer to their culture, a way to 'taste' and internalise the land that one visits when travelling, its flora and fauna, the places where food is made, by whom and how and with which tools.

Taste fosters complicity and 'blending' between different people and food becomes a cultural mediator, engendering new discoveries and newly forged identities. The other, the exotic, once signalled wealth and social status. With 'a fine purse and fine steeds' a gentleman could once deck his table with foods brought from afar, even out of season, impressing his guests and reinforcing his powerful image. Only the poor were tethered to seasonality and by whatever meagre goods the surrounding land could provide.

Today exoticism is available practically to everyone, and speedy transport and storage techniques have made us forget the pleasure of appreciating what were once termed 'first fruits' or products from distant lands kept for special occasions.

Moving towards the taste of the 'other' becomes a way of building knowledge

So value is gained by whomever can turn food into a means of mutual understanding, to promote connexion and love; hence the 'voyage' towards other flavours becomes a method for constructing knowledge. It is no coincidence that the great travellers of yore, from **Montaigne** to **Chatwin**, peppered their tales with descriptions of tastings or meals in foreign lands. This is also how traditions



are accrued: **exotic ingredients 'contaminated' local ones until they in turn became local, and vice versa.**

Meanwhile new products appear constantly, stimulating the inventiveness of cooks and the enthusiasm of diners: this is given the explanatory name '**fusion cuisine**'.

Despite many abysmal imitations and hybridisations of our cuisine abroad, luckily there are also skilled expatriate cooks who represent it honourably, and able foreign cooks who bring their cuisine to Italy or interpret ours creatively and laudably. I would like to describe **what I consider a noteworthy example** of this last phenomenon.

A Ligurian restaurateur couple, **Luigi and Angela Passano**, own a family agricultural business in Lavagna (Genoa), and some time ago they found a second home in Ecuador. Through their cooking, they have succeeded in demonstrating once more that difference can unite rather than dividing. Apprentices of Gualtiero Marchesi and founding members of the Rinaldo Zerega Stockfish and Salt Cod Academy, they have opened the highly acclaimed restaurants Riviera and da Luigi in Guayaquil. There they offer an original cuisine, fruit of lengthy creative efforts to integrate Italian cooking with Latin-American ingredients, maintaining the harmony, the simplicity and the freshness of our tradition.

They started by inventing a recipe for spaghetti, strictly Italian, dressed with raw tomato, extra-virgin olive oil and avocado. It was a great success, encouraging them to create other felicitous combinations. Among their most interesting dishes, one memorable creation is **fish carpaccio with lemon, oil and a sauce made from naranjilla** (a tropical fruit), which adds pleasing tartness to the combined ingredients.

Plantain, a tropical fruit similar to banana and eaten cooked, is a staple in many tropical and sub-tropical areas, being affordable and nutritious. Following various investigations, Luigi and Angela succeeded in kneading it, in combination with its own flour, into pasta: **maltagliati, gnocchi and stuffed**



pasta served with Italian sauces - unusual but delicious.

Manioc (yuca or cassava) is a root which is eaten cooked, is a staple for millions of people and was already used by the Maya. In both restaurants it is worked into **crepelle** (Italian crêpes), **gnocchi and sauces**. Much space is dedicated to avocado, thanks to its versatility. They also use **achiote**, an almost forgotten small tropical fruit, **for colouring food**: when soaked in oil, its seeds release a flavourless orange/coffee-coloured pigment.

Fusion dishes in Ecuador make the most of local products and Italian quality foods

Many other examples are possible, but what is noteworthy and should be emphasised is their extensive knowledge of the local produce and land, which stands out in their cuisine. Using produce from their own agricultural business in Ecuador, and their original homeland's traditional food heritage, Luigi and Angela create food which diners of any nationality can appreciate. Through their work they also wish to honour the efforts of the many farmers who cultivate local species in an intact natural setting, which then become precious ingredients to create surprising flavours and combinations in their 'Ligurian-Latin-American fusion' food. Hence they achieve two aims: making the most of local produce in Ecuador, and contemporaneously familiarising people in that country with

the outstanding elements of Italian tradition. In Ecuador, therefore, guests approach food which for them is exotic, for example **spaghetti, mixed with ingredients familiar to them, such as avocado**, or they are pleasantly surprised by plantain gnocchi with pesto. The meeting of cultures doesn't end here. Angela and Luigi's son, **Paolo Passano**, gained a degree from the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo and remained in the family's agricultural business in Lavagna, where he opened La Bilaia, an agricultural tourism hotel whose annexed restaurant uses home-grown produce.

Here he implements the practices learned from his parents, but above all, he has inherited their love of the fruits of the good earth, developing a profound knowledge of the potentialities and methods for using South American products too.

His restaurant also serves Ligurian food prepared with products from his family's agricultural business and revisited with an elegant and light touch **in combination with the flavours of Ecuador**. His guests have thereby come to know new flavours and aromas from a distant but perhaps not so unknown land, considering Liguria's long history of migration towards Latin America. This may partly explain why the menus in both Guayaquil and Lavagna are so appreciated: two equal cuisines, but mirror images of each other, constituting an affectionate call from those who have gone, bringing part of their homeland, to those who have stayed, knowing that a part of them lies across the sea.



Waiters or dish bearers?

by **Rossana Ragionieri**
Empoli Academician

The professionalism of the dining room staff makes a difference.

The figure of the waiter, **who greets, escorts diners to their table, gives recommendations**, takes orders, and brings the bill, is very important in the restaurant world, though often overlooked. However, we frequently enter welcoming and pleasantly furnished premises with delicious, ably prepared and beautifully presented food, yet **leave disappointed by the service**. If instead of a waiter we find a mere dish bearer, we will probably not return to that restaurant.

Sloppy, uninformed, inadequate, often poorly presented

“Sloppy, uninformed, inadequate, often poorly presented”: **Maria Luisa Coppa, President of the commerce, tourism and service union ASCOM, pulls no punches** when assessing the waiters of Turin during the presentation of the professional courses organised by the Italian food and wine magazine *Gambero Rosso*, pointing out their lack of professionalism. They are often students wanting pocket money or young people in their first job, as if no specific skills were necessary to serve customers, take orders and keep tables properly stocked. Just as frequently, waiters don’t know the ingredients of a dish and must ask in the kitchen, or **are unable to fascinate customers, directing them towards memorable flavours and experiences**. Instead, a professional in the dining room can competently embody the entire operation’s efficiency, and presenting this to



the best advantage is of no little importance. Many hoteliers also lament the shoddy preparation of job interviewees. For instance they are ignorant of clients’ possible food allergies or special dietary requirements; they sometimes do not speak or understand foreign languages; **and they have insufficient passion, willingness to learn, team-working ability and motivation**.

Admittedly, we often have a restricted idea of waiters: they serve customers. Is this true? **From antiquity to the middle ages, the cupbearer, equivalent of today’s sommelier, was paramount among those serving in the dining room** and was a trusted attendant who prevented poisonings. What we, today, consider as **waiters appeared in the early 14th century in the service of Pope John XXII** and thereafter became near-universal in aristocratic courts.

In 2018, **Marco Lungo** wrote in an article that “in the restaurant world, the job of the future is that of the waiter”, identifying the dining staff as the weakest link in many restaurants and explaining that “the main problem, then, is changing the attitudes of owners, employees and clientele: a change for which we hope in the long term, also because it determines the professionalism of those who serve our meals”. When in the late 19th century **César Ritz** laid down the law regarding French hospitality and founded his hotel chain, he and **Auguste Escoffier** reformed the ho-

spitality paradigm: **individual tables, monitored by waiters who apportion food and represent the final link between kitchen and customer**.

In the 19th century, César Ritz, with Auguste Escoffier, reformed the hospitality paradigm

Recently, waiterless restaurants have appeared, with orders taken by apps and online payments: for instance, *Data Kitchen* in Berlin, Europe’s first automated restaurant. If, however, waiters are present as occurs in most restaurants, their specialised education, expertise and current knowledge are indispensable, and so are a professional demeanour, multilingualism, **an affable manner and polite behaviour**. They should likewise display psychological sensitivity, since admittedly clients are often exaggeratedly demanding or may be odd, nervous or prejudiced. The fact remains that we go to restaurants to eat well, but also to feel good and have an enjoyable evening; hence we increasingly consider the quality of service important as well as the food, in a development that characterises successful businesses and will make them stand out. And it will still be the waiter, responsible for serving customers and satisfying their various needs, who will make the difference.



Domestic food waste

by **Gabriele Gasparro**
Rome Delegate

The figures continue to be worrisome, accounting for considerable economic value.

Among modern society's disconcerting features is its enormous food waste: products allowed to expire, domestic waste, surplus food bought and not eaten. What stands out is **domestic food waste, accounting for 43% of total food waste**, according to data from Milan Polytechnic. 15% of this

proportion is traceable to Italian overeating. The various campaigns against this have seemingly been ineffective, since the data gathered from research organisations continue, alas, to be alarming. They indicate that in our country food waste still brings concomitant high economic waste, approximately 16 billion Euros of which 12 billion are caused by food waste in homes.

There are many ways to modify our consumption habits

Reading these figures, we immediately perceive to what extent food waste is consequent upon our consumption habits. There are many ways to reduce the

amount of food that ends up in the bin: for instance, careful shopping, resisting impulse buys, and not purchasing food packages that we don't think we can finish in time. Among the many ways to tackle this problem, we must also consider using **appliances which optimise food storage** by prevent spoilage, while others help us to use every part of purchased ingredients and save money by making food from scratch instead of buying pre-made food. For example, **vacuum-packing machines** allow better food storage: meat, fish, cooked food and other foods can be sealed securely and kept longer in the fridge or freezer. Also useful are **drying machines** which remove liquids from ingredients, allowing longer storage. **Mixers**, even of the wand type, are indispensable. These appliances

promote use of every part of basic ingredients, reducing waste. Using such tools we can, for instance, prepare soups, purées or sauces using the stalks, leaves or other parts of vegetables which are usually discarded because of difficulties rendering them edible in other ways. **Mincers** can also help to limit waste. These accessories can help us to process ingredients which are too dry to be otherwise used, thereby salvaging them (e.g. stale bread or cheese rinds).

Many years ago, in difficult times, advice about efficient food use was given because food was scarce; today, that same advice is given because food is too abundant.

