Food waste
The Observer

The war on food waste has a new weapon: a £99 fridge camera

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/aug/12/food-waste-smart-homes-fridge-cameras

Phone app offers households savings for a fraction of the cost of a top-of-the-range smart fridge

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Up to 37,000 tonnes of vegetables go to waste each year. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod for the Guardian

The world's first wireless fridge camera goes on sale in the UK next month aimed at helping households slash food waste by being able to check exactly what they have in their refrigerator at any time.

As well as taking selfies to be sent to the user, the Smarter FridgeCam and app will also monitor use-by dates and send out automatic top-up reminders to buy more milk, for example. It will also encourage people to eat what they already have – typically festering at the back of the fridge or in the salad box – by suggesting recipes.

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The device joins tech initiatives such as mobile apps and scales that calculate the cost of food waste which aim to transform the way people think about what they consume.

Statistics from the waste advisory body Wrap show the average British family throws away food worth £700 each year. Bagged salads are among the most wasted foods, with Britons chucking out 40% of the salad they buy every year – equivalent to 37,000 tonnes, or 178 million bags.

The FridgeCam, which costs £99, provides a cheaper alternative to smart fridge brands like Samsung and Bosch. Samsung's Family Hub refrigerator, for example, costs £4,499. The device is produced by Smarter, founded in 2014 by young entrepreneur of the year Christian Lane.

"The supermarkets tell us that the way we shop has fundamentally changed," said Lane. "People are shopping little and often and using different shops. The more we developed and trialled this technology, the more we found that it could not just help reduce food waste but it also encourages people to shop in a smarter and more efficient way."

The company's biggest success to date has been its connected iKettle – the third generation, launched this month on Amazon, sold out on the first day. Operated remotely by smartphone, the kettle can be set to boil water for your arrival home or when you wake up in the morning.

The company initially found that the average fridge is opened and closed 20 times a day, though that can be for a variety of reasons. The data that each FridgeCam gathers when scanning and tracking food items goes into Smarter's shared consumer database. "Our platform gets smarter by learning from our customer network of FridgeCams," said Lane. "It is similar to how Tesla automatically improves by constantly learning from all the cars on the road."

A recent trial by Sainsbury's in Swadlincote, Derbyshire, used Winnow – an electronic scale developed for commercial kitchens and restaurants that weighs waste as it is thrown away – to show families the value of the food they dispose of. Hailed for cutting food waste by the likes of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage restaurant, it is being used by Ikea in its Reading store in a drive to cut food waste by 50%.

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