THE SURVIVAL OF FOOD RECOVERY PROGRAMS: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

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Context/Background

- Food waste has major social, environmental, and economic impacts, notably financial losses and food insecurity.
- Food recovery programs, like FareStart’s, are designed to divert food from going to waste and redirect it to hungry communities (Figure 1).
- However, these programs face challenges such as funding, infrastructure, and labor that decreases efficiency and output.

Research Questions

- What are the inefficiencies of food recovery programs from the perspectives of partner organizations?
- What strategies can be implemented to address these obstacles?

Internship and Methods

- Assisted in daily food recovery operations.
- Gathering, redistributing, value-added processing
- Visited food recovery partner sites (Figure 2).
- Formal interviews with 7 of FareStart’s food recovery partners.
- Conducted research and literature review.

Results: Identified Inefficiencies

3 Main Inefficiencies of Food Recovery Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unreliable Volunteer Base</th>
<th>Communicating Coordination and Integrity</th>
<th>Funding as Non-Profit Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The lack of volunteers and labor makes it more difficult”</td>
<td>“Where do [donations] go, who benefits? What products do [they] need or use?”</td>
<td>“The biggest problem for most non-profits is funding”</td>
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Figure 3: Diagram of the three components of food recovery partnerships that presented difficulties, determined by interview responses from food recovery partner organizations.

Findings: Recommended Strategies

To ensure the longevity and sustainability of both food recovery programs and the partner organizations, programs should integrate:

- A shared volunteer network between partners and food recovery organizations and increased public outreach on volunteer opportunities.
- Donation reviews/receipts to donors detailing amount, initiatives used in, and recipients.
- Participation in additional services other than donations to increase support of partners financially.

Broader Significance and Implications

- Recovered food is the primary source of meals provided by hunger relief organizations for low-income, vulnerable, disadvantaged communities.
- More assessments on food recovery programs are needed as metrics and measured outcomes are inconsistent across evaluations.
- Improving food recovery programs starts with getting feedback from stakeholders across the entire food recovery network to identify areas for opportunities and address difficulties.

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