



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?



Figure 1: FareStart's community mobile market provides fresh produce to communities for free and has redistributed 73,000 lbs of food to 4,680 households in 2022.

Internship and Methods



Figure 2: FareStart employees and I (left) volunteering at Oxbow Farms

- 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

UNRELIABLE VOLUNTEER BASE

"The lack of volunteers and labor makes it more difficult"
– Jim Eichner, Food Bank Farm

COMMUNICATING COORDINATION AND INTEGRITY

"Where do [donations] go, who benefits? What products do [they] need or use?"
– Jeff Iwaski, Full Circle

FUNDING AS NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

"The biggest problem for most non-profits is funding"
– Rebeca Bonilla-Myers, Oxbow Farms

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

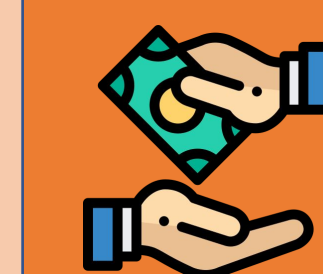
To ensure the longevity and sustainability of both **food recovery programs** and the **partner organizations**, programs should integrate:



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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