

Commentary: Food Recovery & Waste Prevention- Los Angeles' Most Untapped Resource

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Food Recovery is an essential interdependent two-sided coin. It clearly helps with the supply of food to food insecure individuals in our region-- which have been recently assessed at between and 1.4 to 1.6 million individuals of all ages across LA County alone-- while also reducing the massive amounts of food waste going into our local landfills and thus reducing methane and others noxious gases being released into the environment (LA County Department of Public Health).



Photo Source: Food Forward

Though sustainability, intra-network communication and long-term viability remain some of the key issues the growing crop of food recovery organizations face, Los Angeles is home to one of the most robust, innovative and collaborative food recovery communities in the country. Despite this strength, trends identified in the Food System Dashboard show that the accumulation of food waste is outgrowing food waste recycling and recovery efforts at the state level. We must continue to strengthen our emerging food recovery infrastructure to maximize impact locally in Los Angeles and cultivate a replicable model that can be extended beyond our regional boundaries.

With our foodshed being home to major national food producers, small and big agriculture, and Los Angeles's thriving port, transportation infrastructure and distribution hubs, we are at the perfect nexus to build and grow the most robust food recovery organizations and network in the nation.

To achieve this vision, we must:

1. Begin to promote/educate the sector and public that curtailing food waste and fighting hunger are two sides of the same coin and should be interdependent with one another.

2. Establish a formal Food Recovery Coalition in Los Angeles so that we can: eradicate redundancies, share best practices, stand on each other's shoulders, collectively bargain with haulers and other appropriate bodies, and align logistics rather than continue to work in a siloed manner.
3. Build on the City of Los Angeles's new waste hauler franchise system to establish mechanisms that interface DIRECTLY with franchise haulers and the City of Los Angeles' Sanitation Department for quarterly round-tables where ideas, and grievances, are aired and worked through to strengthen recovery/hauler relationships.
4. Develop a hunger relief online intranet so vital information on pantries, shelters and other hunger relief organizations can be shared easily and data updated (See New York City's model at foodbankNY.org).
5. Cultivate closer and more consistent connections with farmers in our local foodshed to encourage continual communication regarding food surplus resulting from overproduction and/or bumper crops. This gives food recovery organizations more opportunity to plan for gleaning, redistributing and processing surplus food from local farms.



Photo Source: Waste Not