Feeding the Hungry with Wasted Edible Foods

A local attempt to feed the hungry and reduce food waste and its disposal costs from NJ restaurants.

Tag Words: Hungry; Edible Food Waste; Non-Profit; Leftover Food; Transport; Homeless; Hunger

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Summary

Hunger is a serious problem worldwide. There are many hungry Individuals and families struggle daily to feed themselves, even areas such as New Brunswick, NJ. At the same time, restaurants and other organizations are carelessly throwing away edible food items every day. In order to attempt to solve both of these issues, we propose to create an non-profit organization that would bring these excess edible foods as donations to shelters and other places that help to feed the hungry. To determine the level of interest in restaurants in the area willing to donate, we surveyed area restaurants about their willingness to supply their leftover edible food and their waste disposal costs. With this information we developed a business plan to create a way to transport the food items to places that can provide the food to homeless and hungry people.
The Issue: The Hunger Problem

Every 3.6 seconds, someone dies of hunger (http://library.thinkquest.org/C002291/high/present/stats.htm) Unfortunately, people all over the world every day do not have enough to eat. It is a struggle just to survive and to get the nutrition a human body needs to function. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1/3 of the world population is under fed, and another 1/3 is starving (http://library.thinkquest.org/C002291/high/present/stats.htm). It is estimated that undernourishment is the underlying cause of over 3 million deaths, and the cause of 35% of disease in children under 5 years old (http://www.who.int/pmnch/topics/maternal/hunger_malnutrition/en/) Poor nutrition caused by starvation can have not just negative effects on the individual, but the economy of the affected area, by causing loss of economic output due to persons being mentally and physically impaired and thus less productive (http://www.who.int/pmnch/topics/maternal/hunger_malnutrition/en/). It is a severe issue connected to the global economy and well-being that needs to be addressed.

Even in the U.S. there is significant disability due to hunger issues. It is estimated that 11.3% of American households are experiencing food insecurity, which is described as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods…”, while another 3.9% are experiencing Hunger, defined as “uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food; the recurrent and involuntary lack of access to food”. In New Jersey alone, those percentages become 7.7% experiencing food insecurity, and 2.1% that are hungry http://www.ocpp.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?page=iss080116hunger). These statistics do not, however, include those who do not have homes and therefore could not be part of a census. According to the 3rd Annual homeless assessment report to congress, there were 672,000 homeless persons nationwide, 1/3 of them being part of families (http://www.hudhre.info/documents/3rdHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf) and in New Jersey there are estimated to be over 300,000 homeless people (http://www.nhchc.org/hchirc/directory/NJ.html).

Clearly, estimating the numbers of homeless can be difficult, however looking at the figures present, there is clearly a huge number of homeless persons living here in NJ that no doubt are also hungry or starving and need assistance in being fed. Over 73,000 tons of food is wasted in America every day, despite the starving people found in our own backyards (http://www.stopthehunger.com/). This waste contributes to landfills and causes harm to our environment. This wasted food can, and should, be directed to the hungry and starving people in our neighborhoods who are unable to get it on their own. This would not only help the hungry people in a given community, but would also address the waste removal costs and landfill volumes. By reaching out to our neighbors, we hope to make a difference in our own community by feeding the hungry and reducing the food waste products at the same time.

The Service Project: Non-Profit Organization

We have proposed to create a non-profit organization “Hunger Solutions” will help feed the hungry and help restaurants reduce their waste and disposal costs. This is an effort to help those in the local area get the food and nutrition they need. In order to create a non-profit organization that will be responsible for doing this, we first need to determine if there are restaurants willing
to participate. In order to get help from restaurants who have extra edible food to give, we addressed their waste disposal costs as a benefit to them. We developed a questionnaire with a letter describing our proposed idea and sent it out to restaurants in the area. We also wrote letters to the editor in hopes that they would be published and would help gain public support. From the results we have gained thus far, we developed a business plan that outlines what we will do and what funding we need to do so.

The Details
First we will begin by going to local restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores or any other type of food vendor and administering surveys about how much food/waste they have after each meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and also at the end of the day. After we do this the restaurants who want to participate will be welcomed. We do not plan on turning anyone away. Even if they have a small amount of food that is being thrown away, we would still want to include them in the donation process.

We also proposed to supply a “sticker on the door,” which is a sticker restaurant can place on their door to show that they are participating in such a great community service project. The sticker will hopefully show customers that this restaurant is a caring establishment, which will in turn benefit the restaurant owners. Additionally, restaurant owners and employees can have the satisfaction of knowing that they are making a difference by helping us in this endeavor.

Developing the Level of Interest:
Below are the letter of intent and questionnaire we sent to restaurants in the New Brunswick area. Following this is the data we received back up to this point in time.

Letter of Intent

Dear Restaurant Manager/Owner,

We come to you as concerned, motivated students from Rutgers University, asking for a moment of your time and a bit of your cooperation. In order to reduce waste materials and disposal costs resultant from restaurants and other food organizations while also benefiting the members of our community, we propose a non-profit, volunteer based plan of action. Together with a preexisting charity organization, we hope to work with you in feeding the hungry and decreasing the amount of food waste here in New Brunswick. All that you as a restaurant have to do is allow us to take unwanted, prepared and perishable excess food products from you at the end of the day, or whatever time is most convenient. The removal service would be arranged via this charity organization to come by at a time of your convenience and transport food items in refrigerated vehicles to local organizations to feed the hungry. We only want what you can spare and will not be able to use. This food, instead of going to landfills, will instead feed hungry people here in New Brunswick who are down on their luck. This would also be helping YOU as a restaurant in cutting waste removal costs! In addition to participating in this project, we would provide you with a decal for the door of the restaurant to advertise your participation in giving back to the
community. In these times of economic downfall, there are more hungry people than ever who need our help!
For now, we are investigating the level of interest in the New Brunswick area. In order to get the help from a non-profit we need to know there are enough restaurants and persons interested in participating. Enclosed is a short questionnaire for you to fill out to help us organize this project, providing us with information on what food and how much you would be able to donate, and what times it would be most convenient to arrange for removal. Thank you so much for your consideration. You will be making a huge difference in the community and we are sure you will be appreciated!
Sincerely,
Jessica Murphy, Christine Rizkalla, and Victoria Ezgilioglu
Rutgers University, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Questionnaire___________________________________________________________

Establishment Name: ____________________________________________________
Manager/Owner Name: ____________________________________________________
Contact phone number :(___)_____________________________________________
Address of Establishment: ________________________________________________
How much total waste, on average, per week or day do you create?
How much do you pay, per week, to remove the waste?

Would you like to donate if an organization like our wanted your help?

Restaurants Responses___________________________________________________


John, Manager, demonstrated willingness to participate. Stated that there were 150 lbs of edible food waste every week and they pay $600 in costs for waste removal. Every Monday and Tuesday they are will to donate 10% of their profits to a non-profit organization. They are very community-oriented and said they would be willing to donate their food.

Panera Bread: 871 Us Highway 1, North Brunswick, NJ 08902-3361 (732) 249-3113

Steve, Manager, responded saying that their location is already donating to New Jersey Food Bank. They reported they package the food and the food bank picks it up the following day. They said they donate between $400 and $700 worth of food everyday. They do not pay for waste removal.

Rossopomodoro: 875 US Highway 1, North Brunswick, NJ 08902-3345 (732) 247-3500
Jack, Manager and owner, said that they would be willing to donate their food. He reported throwing out about a pie and a half every night and that they do not pay for waste removal.

**Chili’s:** 867 US Highway 1, North Brunswick, NJ 08902-3345 (732) 545-7955

The manager John reported that he wasn’t sure if they’d be willing to donate food as we would have to ask the corporate office for permission. Also stated that his restaurant does not create much waste nor do they pay for its removal.

**Café Primavera:** 2 JFK Boulevard Somerset, NJ 08875 Phone: 732-828-4088

Anthony, manager of Café Primavera. Estimated that there was about 100 lbs of food waste a week, and that they did not pay for the removal of waste. He said they would be interested in donating food to a good cause as long as the pick-up and removal was provided by the non-profit.

**Boston Market** 900 Easton Ave. Somerset, NJ 08873

Amanda reported that she didn’t think they paid for waste removal and would need to work it out with corporate for the food donation. They need an organization’s name and information to provide to them. They seemed likely that they would participate.

Based on the responses we received, we estimate that there is a moderate level of interest in the area and with a more solid proposal we could gain the participation of a number of restaurants in the area, making our project worthwhile. Many restaurants did not have the problem of waste disposal costs affiliated, however still demonstrated interest in donating.

The Business (Start-up Costs and Description)

From the information we gathered by questionnaire responses, we developed a business plan for the development of a non-profit organization called “Hunger Solutions”. This business will be run by volunteers and based on campus at Rutgers University. It will need to obtain a refrigerated truck and means of packaging and transporting edible food from restaurants to distribution locations.

Any categories of foods are accepted including, but not limited to: bread, baked goods, perishable foods, fresh meat, fish, poultry, dairy, fruits, vegetables, and prepared foods. The pickup of food can either be done at the end of the day, or can be done after breakfast, lunch, or dinner (meal times are according establishments needs). This will make disposal of food less of a hassle for the food establishments and will also cause less waste.

Then restaurants will begin by separating the food they would like to be picked up. After the edible food is separated (on location), volunteers will arrive in our refrigerated trucks, put the food in clean plastic containers and place them in our truck. Then the food is then taken to an area where the homeless need it most. This depends on what location needs it the most depending on what time of the day the food is picked up. The food is picked up from restaurants and delivered free of charge.

Below are the details of the funding required to run a non-profit organization that will accomplish these goals.
Since Hunger Solutions is a non-profit organization we will need funding from the government for trucks, gas, employees, and other items. Here are our estimated costs:

Fixed Costs

Refrigerated trucks ................................................................. $50,000
Insurance .............................................................................. $1,500
Website & phone .................................................................. $10.00
Salaries ............................................................................... $20,000
Maintenance ........................................................................... $5,000
Total ...................................................................................... $76,510

Variable Costs

Misc. Supplies ......................................................................... $1,000
Food Containers ...................................................................... $200
Cleaning costs ....................................................................... $520
Dolly ...................................................................................... $30.00
Total ...................................................................................... $1,750

Total (Fixed + Variable): $78,260

Issues include:

- Generating interest in our organization
- Finding reliable drivers
- Getting funding
To whom it may concern,

My name is Victoria and I am writing to you today regarding a global problem, hunger. All types of people suffer from this world-wide crisis, including women, children and all types of races. I have traveled to countries where poverty and hunger is a tremendous problem, however, there is only so much one individual can do in a foreign country where one does not reside there. Therefore a few individuals along with myself have come up with an idea to help our surrounding area. We will be contacting and creating contracts with restaurants around the Central Jersey area which will allow us to take their unused edible food to places where it is needed most such as shelters, soup kitchens etc.

The amount of food that goes to waste could feed a large amount of the hungry and malnourished in our area. Our philosophy is that if we can come home to a hot plate of food at night why shouldn’t our neighbors? We see how difficult it can be to be able to afford food, especially if you are homeless or living out of your car, so we believe we can make a difference in the central Jersey area simply by transporting this food to a more convenient location.

By using refrigerated trucks the process will move much more smoother and also allow us to transport from anywhere that is of reasonable driving distance. Additionally, restaurants will have to pay less to dispose of the food and will feel much better knowing this perfectly edible food is not being thrown away for the raccoons to eat.

I hope you will take this project into consideration and do whatever you can to help my organization out. The hungry cannot help themselves so it is up to those more fortunate to do what they can. Thank about it… who would you rather give your left over food to…A raccoon or a starving child?

Thank you for all of your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Victoria Ezgilioglu
It is with dedication and enthusiasm that I write this letter in order to inform the public of what we hope to accomplish by our efforts. As a class project, we began a campaign to try to feed the hungry here in our school’s epicenter of New Brunswick. Based on a model of a non-profit organization centered in Northern New Jersey, our proposal is to simply take the food that would otherwise be thrown away from restaurants in the area and bring it to homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and any other preexisting establishment that could provide the collected food to hungry people. Calling our group “Rutgers feeding the hungry”, our plan is based on the idea of simply reducing would-be waste and redirecting it where it can be gratefully utilized and appreciated.

This project is currently underway, as we have been contacting the local restaurants in order to determine if there is substantial interest out there to bring this idea to fruition. Once we have determined the level of interest, we can then apply for the funding to provide refrigerated trucks, travel expenses, and other necessary items to make this idea possible. Then we can recruit more volunteers to drive the trucks, set up what distribution centers we will deliver too, and begin helping to feed the homeless while simultaneously cutting costs of disposal, and tonnage of wasted food that presently are filling our landfills.

What we need now is for the public to be aware and supportive of this hopefully endeavor. Hopefully with the support of the community, more restaurants will be willing to contribute, and more potential volunteers will be aware of the service we would like to provide. Please share this letter with the readers of the Observer in hopes of putting this message out there to try to make a small change in our part of the world. Let us realize that it is this simple and we can actually help make New Brunswick a better place. Every little bit helps, and if we all do our part and realize how easy it could be, we can make a difference in the world and be the change we seek!
Sincerely,
J. Murphy

New York Times
620 8th Ave
New York, NY, 10018

The growing problem of hunger in the United States is one that is getting only getting worse as time goes on, especially with the declining economy. People are skipping out on meals and hunger is adding to the increase of people needing health care; hunger is just adding to the pool of problems regarding our health care system. Our proposed plan will play “Robin Hood” and transport, in refrigerated trucks, leftover food from restaurants and other establishments to homeless shelters, churches, and other open community areas. These establishments have also been given a questionnaire asking their total amount of edible food per week, and how much it costs. Our plan will help these establishments save on the cost of disposing of the food and will help the poor. We plan to set up certain times at which we can pick up the packaged food, put it in a refrigerated truck and transport it to the various needy locations. Our plan will create more jobs, as it is a government funded, non-profit organization.

Thank you,
Christine Rizkalla