



# PERISHABLE FOOD RECOVERY

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



## INTRODUCTION

Every month 103,464 individuals are accessing BC's food banks, 1/3 of which are children. Since 2008 these numbers have risen by 32%<sup>1</sup> and continue to rise.

At the same time, food waste is at an all-time high. It is estimated that we waste more than \$31 billion dollar's worth of food every year in Canada, much of this being healthy, viable, nutritious food that instead of making its way to those at risk of hunger, is being unnecessarily sent to landfills and dumps. As disturbing as that number is, it doesn't reflect the complete story. It is estimated that the true cost of variables like energy, water, land, labour, capital investment, infrastructure, machinery and transport means that the cost of wasted food is actually closer to \$100 billion a year.<sup>2</sup>

Why is so much food being wasted in our country? It is estimated that more than 40% of all food produced in Canada is wasted. For example, 30% of fruits and vegetables are rejected by supermarkets because they aren't attractive enough for consumers. Additional waste through processing, retail, transportation and consumers all contribute to edible food never reaching those who need it in BC and the rest of Canada.

Consider as well that waste contributes to methane gas production. In fact, about 20% of Canada's methane emissions come from landfills and according to Environment Canada, "Methane is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of its global warming potential".

BC's Provincial Government took a crucial first step to end food waste in BC when it introduced the Farmers' Food Donation Tax Credit in 2016. Designed to encourage farmers and food producers to donate viable food which would otherwise be wasted to food banks and other charitable organizations.

The prospect of additional perishable food for individuals at risk of hunger, highlighted an unfortunate reality in BC however. Out of Food Banks BC's 100 food bank members only 3 or 4 had sufficient refrigeration capacity to receive the surplus of perishable food that was now available.

BC's Provincial Government then took the next critical step. In 2017, the BC Provincial Government made a donation of \$10 million dollars to Food Banks BC specifically earmarked to increase refrigeration and refrigerated transportation capacity, resulting in a network-wide opportunity for every member food bank to begin recovering surplus perishable food that would have otherwise gone to waste.

---

<sup>1</sup> Food Banks Canada, Hunger Count Report 2016

<sup>2</sup> Value Chain Management International Inc. 2014

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This **Perishable Food Recovery Program Guide** is designed to assist food banks of all sizes to take advantage of viable, surplus perishable food. Accessing food that is “fit for consumption”, but not “fit for sale” can be the key to accessing new avenues of food donations.

The processes and protocols contained here are the experience of food banks that each went from scarcity to abundance when they moved to a complete food recovery model. Each of these have increased the variety, quantity and nutritional content of what they are able to share with their clients; each has stopped or significantly reduced their food purchases, and each contributes to a total zero waste model for their own community.

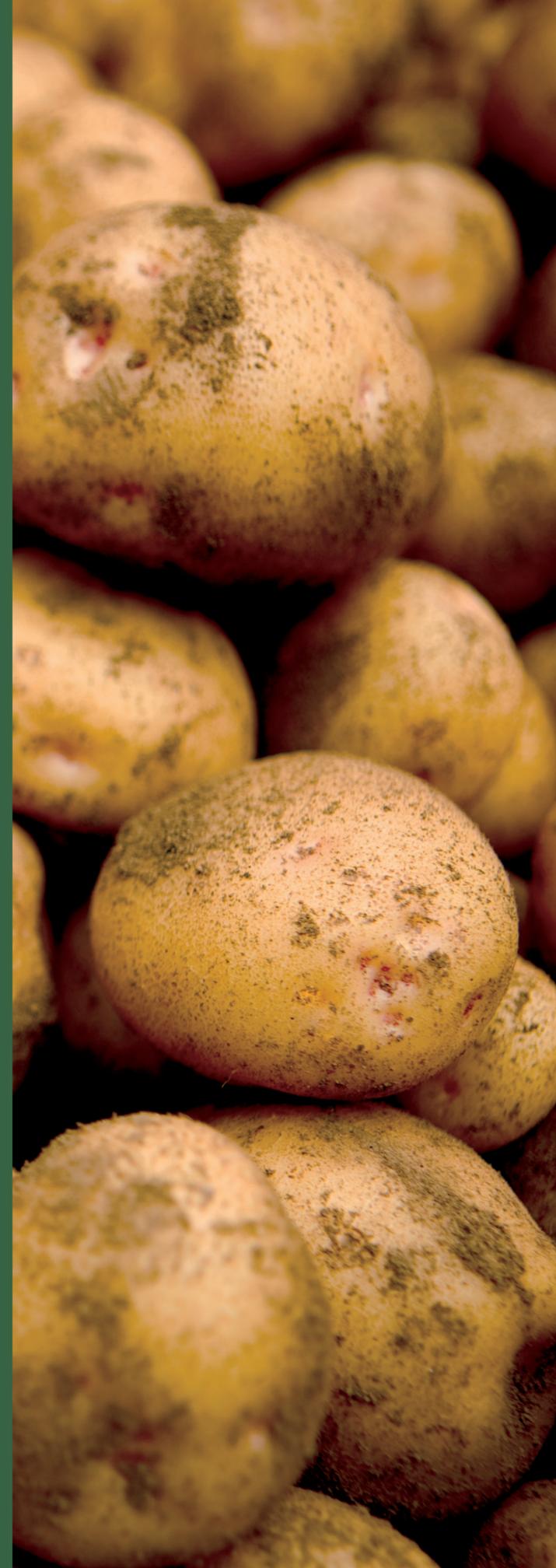
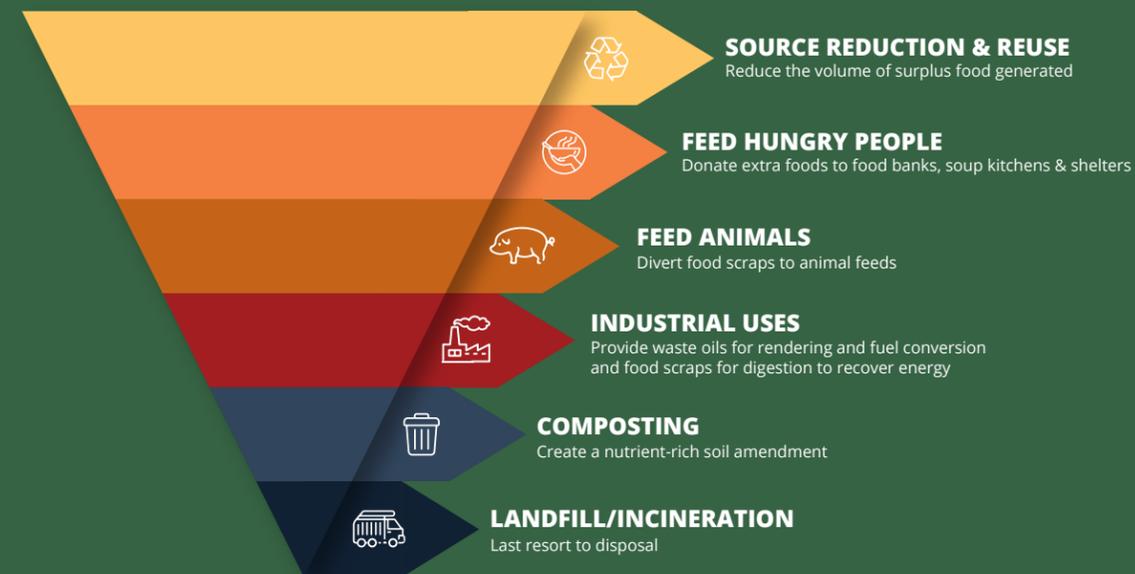
**Definition: Perishable Food Recovery** is an initiative to redirect perishable food that would otherwise be wasted. Perishable Food Recovery addresses the environmental, social and economic issue of food waste by taking surplus perishable food and finding the best and most appropriate use for that food.

Surplus food fits into three categories:

- 1 fit for human consumption
- 2 fit for animal consumption
- 3 fit for composting

A Perishable Food Recovery initiative partners with donors, such as wholesalers, grocery stores, food retailers, farmers, and restaurants, to access all perishable food (regardless of viability) and distribute these appropriately. Edible foods are distributed to individuals, families, and community agencies. Inedible foods are either used for animal feed, or used for compost.

# RETHINKING WASTE



# GLOSSARY

**Agency**—any social service organization that may prepare or provide meals and/or food. For example, a soup kitchen or school lunch program.

**Best Before Date**—product manufacturer’s date until which the unopened product will retain its durable life if properly stored. *\*Does not necessarily indicate food is unsafe or not fit for consumption.*

**CFIA**—the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is a regulatory body dedicated to the safeguarding of food, animals, and plants, which enhance the health and well-being of Canada’s people, environment and economy.

**Client**—often refers to the individuals that access the services of a food bank, may also be referred to as members or recipients.

**Donor**—any individual, farmer, business or organization that has surplus food available for donation.

**Expiry Date**—the date before which the quality of a product remains acceptable for its intended use. Usually applied to drugs, infant foods and supplemented nutrition for seniors.

**Food Recovery**—collection of all surplus food and redirecting it to best and most appropriate use.

**Gleaning**—the harvest of fruit trees or gardens when surplus is identified.

**Surplus Food**—Any foods that may be close-dated, past the best-before date, overstocked, damaged packing, changed packaging, cosmetically undesirable, mislabeled, recovered from bulk packaging where only a portion is inedible, unharvested fields or orchards.

**Stakeholder**—Anyone that would be affected by the food recovery program. For example, food bank, donor, client, grocery, farmer, municipal government, waste management company.

**Waste**—Any product that is redirected to the landfill.



# STEP 1 | RESEARCH AND DECISIONS

Things to consider before implementing a perishable food recovery initiative.

1

## Is a food recovery program missing in your community?

Create a list of existing programs and services such as:

- Any existing perishable food recovery programs
- Food hamper, meals or other emergency food relief services in your community
- Other ways that food may reach people at risk of hunger (i.e., meals on wheels)
- Any local municipal support or assistance

2

## Who is the best person/organization in your community to lead and initiate this project?

- Is there someone who already has a relationship with food retailers?
- Is there a person who feels passionately about waste-reduction, or nutrition/food security?
- Who has existing infrastructure that could support food recovery i.e., warehouse, cold storage area?

3

## How will food be safely transported?

- Do you need a refrigerated vehicle?
- Do you need freezer blankets?
- Do you need bins, icepacks or coolers?
- Can you make it from pick up to cooler/freezer in less than 2 hours?
- How will you track food received, ie: weights, volume, counting?

4

## Where will food be safely stored?

- Do you have building or access to a building that can accommodate the food recovery operation?
- Dolly and pallet friendly (consider curbs and door-sills)
  - Loading bay
  - Barriers to efficient loading and operation
  - Forklift

5

## How will food be safely distributed?

- Create list of local agencies/schools that provide food or meals for people. What systems are already in place? For example: food banks, Salvation Army, shelters, church groups, outreach societies
- Will you deliver to agencies or require them to pick-up?
- How will you distribute food in a time sensitive manner i.e., pick up coordinated with distribution?

6

## Who will my donors be?

- Compile a contact list of stakeholders, such as:
- Food donors: grocery/convenience stores, coffee shops, food producers, bakeries, commercial farmers/ranchers, restaurants, caterers, rod & gun clubs
  - Associations: restaurant association, food manufacturers/producers, any related association with a local office/headquarters
  - Government and other: related municipal committee (i.e., social planning, solid waste management), local health authority, community nutritionist

7

## What will I do with surplus that is not fit for human consumption?

- Are there opportunities to provide surplus food for animals?
- Are there opportunities to provide surplus food to compost?

8

## How will our food bank finance and support the perishable food recovery program?

- Create a budget and consider start-up costs
- Can funds be redirected that are currently being used to purchase products?



# STEP 2 | UNDERSTAND SAFE FOOD HANDLING

Your responsibility is to ensure that food is appropriately transported and safely stored.

Refrigerated product needs to be maintained at 4 degrees Celsius. Frozen product needs to be maintained at -18 degrees. No refrigerated or frozen product may be out of the cooler or freezer for more than 2 hours.

Your ability to meet these criteria is necessary to give assurance to donors, partners and recipients. *Contact Food Banks BC for additional information on Safe Food Handling.*



# STEP 3 | UNDERSTAND AND SECURE RESOURCES

Physical, human and financial resources are all part of a perishable food recovery initiative. For anyone beginning a recovery program, it is recommended to begin small. Consider beginning with just one store or donor as you build processes and operations. This will generally involve a driver, a vehicle, a coordinator, some physical space and funding. For example:

## PHYSICAL RESOURCES

1

### Work space

Required for receiving, storing and sorting food prior to distribution. Be prepared to grow, make it scalable. Where possible, build bigger than you imagine you will need. For example:

- Warehouse
- Borrowed facilities
- Office
- Tent or portable shelter

2

### Transportation

Required for pick-up of surplus food from a variety of donors. All pick-up methods need to ensure that consistent refrigeration is maintained, or travel is under 2 hours. For example:

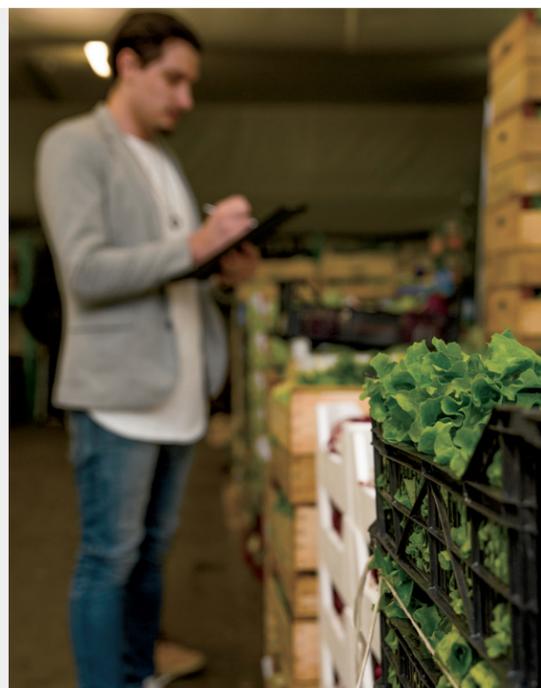
- Refrigerated vehicle, may range from small van to larger truck
- Community bike
- On foot—for near neighbour donor
- Delivered by donor
- Supplied by a community partner

3

### Materials

Required for the sorting, storage and distribution of perishable food received:

- Bins, totes, boxes, containers for collection and distribution to agencies, farmers, or for recycling/composting. Consider carefully the filled weight for bins, donor requirements, storage capacity restrictions, colours for easy sorting, etc.
- Method to wash/sanitize bins, tables and work area, water supply, hoses, bleach
- Weight Scale—bath scales, pallet scale, floor scale, commercial industrial scale
- Sorting tables—may be folding, easy to clean, standing height, plastic or stainless steel
- Markers to mark off bar codes
- Refrigerated/ Freezer storage
- Method to move food—Volunteers, dolly, pallet jack, pallets, forklift
- Method to track—clipboard, computer, spreadsheet, Google form



## HUMAN RESOURCES

Each of these duties may be filled by one or more person which may be either a volunteer and/or staff person. Contact Food Banks BC for more information on sample job descriptions.

1

### Driver

The driver is the “face” of your program, and will have the most interaction with your donors and recipients. Make sure your driver maintains the integrity of the program through food safety, friendliness and professionalism. A good driver is essential to the success of the program.

2

### Coordinator

Oversees all aspects of the program. For example:

- Creates and builds donor relationships
- Ensures food safe practices are followed
- Conducts, and/or arranges for staff or volunteers to run the recovery operations
- Reviews, evaluates and builds program

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Consider the infrastructure investment for hardware as well as ongoing operating costs. Examples of possible funding:

1

Apply for any available grants

2

Consider reducing or eliminating food purchases to redirect funding to food recovery program

3

Events/fundraising—useful for establishing your program but less effective for sustaining the program

4

Community sponsorship—Most municipalities are interested in reducing landfill waste

5

Corporate/Business sponsorship—corporations are interested in linking their name with a non-profit society to show community support



## STEP 4 | BEGIN COLLECTION AND DISTRIBUTION

1

### Approach targeted store/donor (identified during Step 1, #6)

- a. Provide information on the food recovery program. *Contact Food Banks BC for more information on sample job descriptions.* For example, a donor package might consist of:
- Program overview and Welcome letter, including benefits to donors in cost savings and positive marketing
  - Liability information
  - Donation guidelines
  - Materials supplied to donors for collection
  - Other partners involved
- b. Formalize any required documents or agreements
- c. Provide solutions to objections and concerns
- d. Customize procedures for each individual donor or store to their preferences
- e. Offer as a trial or pilot project over a specific time frame
- f. Set pick-up schedule according to individual donor's preferences
- g. Ensure you follow through with what you have promised the donor

2

### Make first pick-up

- a. First pick-ups from donors are generally minimal or even non-existent. These will grow with daily regular visits from the driver
- b. Express gratefulness and appreciation with each pick-up

3

### Follow your planned procedures/protocols

Regardless of size of pick-up, follow your plans for the transporting, receiving, sorting, storing and distribution. Continuously evaluate and refine procedures

4

### Request Donor Feedback

After the 3rd pick-up and ongoing, request feedback from the donor and other stakeholders: refine processes

5

### Establish donor recognition procedures

Consult donor to determine what kind and method of recognition they prefer. For example, displaying logo on website, on pick-up vehicle, social media, anonymous, etc.

## STEP 5 | PROMOTE PROGRAM IN THE COMMUNITY

1

### Create a Name, Logo and Catchphrase

Your perishable food recovery program may be easier for donors and the community to remember if it has a name, as well as a logo and catchphrase. Adding these to your marketing materials make it more easily identifiable for new donors, partners and supporters.



2

### Find opportunities to speak in your community

- Services Clubs, Rotary, Lions
- Schools
- Unions
- City Council, Municipal Government
- Seniors' groups
- Invite stakeholders to special events at your operation
- Invite community for tours
- Grocery Store meetings (invitation by store manager)
- Businesses, corporations
- Use volunteers/staff as ambassadors, fans and passionate supporters
- Radio or local TV

3

### Create Marketing Materials

- Consider creating materials that you can use to promote your program in your community. For example:
- Website
  - Brochures
  - Business Cards
  - Videos (You Tube)
  - Social Media (Facebook page)
  - Signage
  - Branded vehicles
  - Bins, totes, collection boxes
  - Staff and volunteer badges, t-shirts, hoodies, bags



# STEP 6 | CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

Collecting data provides information which will be crucial to donors, the community, future grant writing, and internal tracking as to whether or not your goals are being met. Even when starting with just one store, ensuring that all food collected is recorded from the start of your operations is vital.

## METHODS OF EVALUATION

1

### Food Bank Efficiency Ratio (based on food distributed to people)

This ratio can be a simple tool to evaluate the effectiveness of a perishable food recovery program as compared to a prior system that might have purchased food.

You may use this ratio to assess the improvement of any system in your overall cost efficiency.

In the two examples below, the food bank which has spent \$2,500 instead of \$10,000 will have improved its efficiency ratio from 5 to 20:

$$\frac{\text{Total weight of all food distributed}}{\text{Total funds expended}} = \text{Efficiency Ratio}$$

$$\frac{50,000 \text{ pounds}}{\$2,500.00} = 20 \qquad \frac{50,000 \text{ pounds}}{\$10,000.00} = 5$$

2

### Simple Weight of food

Establish what food you will weigh that will demonstrate perishable food recovery growth. Track the additional healthy, nutritious food now being received. Consider tracking individual types of perishables.

- a. Meat
- b. Produce
- c. Dairy
- d. Bread
- e. Other perishables



3

### Money Saved in Food Purchased

Compare either a month by month or annual savings gained from reduced food purchases. For example this example from Nanaimo Loaves and Fishes Food Bank:

## FOOD 4U FOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM

"In August of 2012 the shelves of Loaves and Fishes were quite literally empty. The food we were distributing to clients was the food we received each day. Clients could come once a week and receive a meager hamper containing 5 nonperishable food items, a loaf of bread and 1 liter of milk. This level of service required us to spend over \$10,000 a month on food purchases.

In September 2012 we suspended all food purchases and launched the Food 4U Food Recovery Program. This was a difficult and fundamental change in our operations, but one that delivered dramatically better service to our community. Rather than purchasing food we now invest in wages, trucks and overhead to operate our Food 4U Food Recovery Program.

By investing our money in food recovery we are able to now supply clients with their choice of almost unlimited fruits, vegetables and bread 5 days a week along with substantially more nonperishable food than ever before. We have discovered that through food recovery, food banking can be about working with abundance rather than scarcity; the results speak for themselves."

	2012	2016
Value Food to Clients (excluding bread)	\$800,000	\$3,000,000
Monthly Food Purchased with cash	\$10,000	\$400
Value of Food provided for every \$1 in cash spent	\$1.78	\$5.98

### Other things to evaluate for efficiency

1. Sorting processes
  2. Warehouse procedures
  3. Pick-ups from donor, schedules and procedures
  4. Donor/store feedback
  5. Agency pick ups
  6. Volunteer involvement/feedback
  7. Food and Financial donor growth or involvement
- Tracking information is vital so review your progress often. When objectives are not being met, use flexibility to refine goals and processes and plans.

### Identify Growth Opportunities

- Encourage feedback from all stakeholders. For example:
- Use store comment boxes: Positive comments will encourage stores to participate
  - Gather success stories to share with stakeholders
  - Continue recruiting new donors
  - Revisit potential donors previously approached with your success stories and examples, encourage their participation
  - Continue to build infrastructure, you may need to re-invest in additional, bigger equipment as your program grows

# COMMON OBJECTIONS ABOUT STARTING A FOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM

## There are no available grocery stores in our community

Consider the food sources for the community if there are no grocery stores—these will be your targeted sources.

For example:

- restaurants
- farmers
- wholesalers
- trucking/transportation companies
- resorts
- gleaning
- community gardens

## Grocery stores do not cooperate, or head office has not given permission

- Mend any relationships, invite to events, give opportunities to have meaningful relationships, enlist advocates for your food bank
- Offer a trial or a pilot project for a specific time frame
- Invite local stores and staff for tour, give them a visual, show them what you are doing
- Stores are trying to avoid negative media attention on waste—explain to them how they will benefit by not wasting surplus food
- Donating food helps the stores by saving dump fees—show stores how they will save money—approach from a business perspective
- It will take time to develop a relationship with your local grocery stores, keep trying

## Liability issues and concerns

- Explain Bill 10 and the Food Donor Encouragement Act (Provincial)
- Good Samaritan Act (Federal)
- CFIA website—Best Before dates are not a safety issue
- Explain to them how you ensure the safety of the food you receive. Temperature control, safe transportation, storage, and distribution
- Brand control—bar codes crossed off (no returns)
- Have a packet of information in print that they can read and understand—be willing to use the donor's agreement instead

## No staff or volunteers are available

- Start small—engage just one store for one day per week to begin, perfect your processes, create structure and procedures
- Encourage the support of your community, publicize what you are doing and how it positively affects the community and environment
- Consider redirecting funds away from purchasing food to a paid staff member
- Partner with other community organization such as churches, volunteer organizations or practicum programs
- Corporations can be encouraged to volunteer in groups as a team building initiative

## Too expensive

- There are expenses, but food recovery will put more healthy food in clients' hands per dollar spent than any other system. Be financially aware of where money is being spent
- Work experience grants, Food Banks Canada Capacity, Service Canada Summer student, YMCA summer student exchange, Canada World Youth, United Way funding, Community Gaming grants are worth exploring

## Food Bank will become a dumping ground

- Yes—however all food received can still be utilized in some way; food bank, animals or compost
- Even if half is unfit for consumption, it will be more than you would have received and as well, the other half has been diverted from a land fill
- Track donation history for each donor—assess the value of food received over time—if not a good fit for food bank, redirect donor to farm or compost



## COMMON OBJECTIONS CONTINUED

### Too labour intensive, too much processing and handling

- Encourage the support of your community, publicize what you are doing and how it positively affects the community and environment
- Start small, one store, one day per week—grow your volunteers when they understand the positive environmental effects. Most communities are eager to be involved when they understand the positive environmental effects
- Partner with other agencies when they realize the variety and abundance of food available

### Already doing food recovery

- Food recovery involves every category of perishable products, meat, dairy, produce, bakery items, prepackaged meals, farm produce, gleaning projects
- Zero-waste is the ultimate goal as it maximizes the healthy food available to clients while reducing landfill waste and methane production
- Initiate 7 day or regular, dedicated collection from donors
- Accepting all donations
- Proactively seeking new relationships for donation sources
- Food recovery is making it easier and simpler for a grocery store to donate product rather than disposing of it

### No farmers to take waste—urban areas

- Delivery to areas where farmers are able to receive
- Consider other options to dispose of waste product, contact local disposal company
- Many communities have urban chickens, make daily pick up available for individuals—for example, an advertisement on “Urban Hens”
- Contact community gardens, offer waste for composting
- Contact SPCA or Wildlife organization that may take meat or produce for animal feed
- Pay or partner with disposal company – factor in cost savings in food surplus against cost of disposal
- By starting your project on a small scale, the options for waste disposal will grow as well

### It is undignified to give leftovers to people that are hungry

- There is a tremendous amount of healthy, viable fresh product available
- There may be only one bad item in a bag which can be culled while saving the rest
- There are misconceptions around best before dates. Make your community aware of how best before dates work
- Increase awareness in your community about what food recovery is
- If you have a client choice system, then clients may choose products they consider appealing
- Donations are carefully assessed when received, anything that is not suitable is used for other purposes
- Every food bank should choose the level of acceptance that they find appropriate for their food bank



Food Banks BC thanks and acknowledges the following food banks for their work in pioneering perishable food recovery as well as their assistance in creating this guide.



Food Banks BC is the Provincial Association of BC's 100 member food banks. Together our vision is a hunger free future for our province and we exist to support, assist and empower food banks. Each year we facilitate the delivery of over \$4 million dollars of donated food to our food banks across the province, and this includes 'to the door' FREE delivery of food to every rural food bank in our province. As well we run the Food Banks BC Sharing Coupons—a partnership with grocery stores that gets fresh, healthy, perishable food to people at risk of hunger. The program raises close to \$1 million dollars and 100% of the donation stays with each local food bank too. Additionally, with close to half of our food banks being run solely by volunteers, our education and instruction on topics like food safety, volunteer recruitment, financial best practices, means that they have the best tools possible to assist people in their own communities. We are a proud member of Food Banks Canada.





This document has been designed with support from Food Banks Canada.



#100 – 12761 – 16th Avenue, Surrey BC, V4A 5H7 | 604-498-1798 | [www.FoodBanksBC.com](http://www.FoodBanksBC.com)

Executive Director and Media Spokesperson, Laura Lansink | 778-838-0930

Charitable Registration Number 861331130 RR0001

 FoodBanksBC |  @realfoodbanksbc