



Beyond Waste

Food Recovery & Redistribution Forum

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London Hall, Western University

Beyond Waste: Food Recovery & Redistribution Forum

Final Report

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Introduction

Beyond Waste: Food Recovery & Redistribution Forum (hereafter referred to as "the Beyond Waste Forum") was an initiative of the Middlesex-London Food Policy Council (MLFPC), in collaboration with Hospitality Services at Western University, with generous funds from Healthy Kids Community Challenge (HKCC). The aim of the event was to connect businesses possessing excess food with social agencies serving people who would benefit from access to this food, thereby reducing waste and hunger in the city of London. Additionally, the organizers hoped to debunk myths surrounding liability related to donating food, as well as to unveil the truth around the meaning of best before dates.

The Beyond Waste Forum was a half day event that took place at Western University's London Hall on February 22, 2018. Approximately 50 people attended and the audience comprised of members of social agencies serving marginalized families and individuals, academics, concerned community members, students, food producers, distributors and some grocers. The format of the event included a presentation on global food waste prevention policy trends; an overview of actions the City of London has and is currently undertaking to address hunger and reduce waste; and three panel presentations focusing on legislation, leadership in food recovery, and effective strategies supporting food rescue and redistribution.

The intention of this report is to provide key highlights from the Forum, focusing primarily on information that will support the minimization of food waste and the enhancement of food accessibility in London. It will be broken into sections covering each aspect of the event as outlined above, concluding with key findings.

Global Food Policy Trends

Paul van der Werf, an academic completing his PhD in the area of food waste reduction through Western University, kicked off the Forum by providing an international scan of food rescue initiatives. Throughout his presentation, it became clear many countries are taking the issues of food inaccessibility and unnecessary waste seriously. It seems this is particularly true in European and Scandinavian countries, where legislation either bans food waste or incentivizes businesses to donate excess goods. For example, France has implemented the *Food Wastage Act*, making throwing out edible or a usable food punishable with a fine of €3,750-75,000 and up to two years in prison. In contrast, Denmark's *Stop Wasting Food Movement* collaborates with the government to encourage grocery stores to avoid offering bulk food discounts, therefore supporting grocers and consumers to only buy what they need.

Paul pointed out that most of these global initiatives are relatively recent and have yet to be adequately evaluated for efficiency. Nonetheless, they all provide potential

frameworks for Canada to base its own legislation upon. He also shared the United States and Canada have started local initiatives, so it seems North America may be working to match its European counterparts in mitigating inequitable food access and redirecting food away from landfills.

In addition to discussing global trends, Paul also explained which parts of the food processing chain are most responsible for contributing to waste. He explained approximately 20% of food is thrown out at the distribution level, which involves grocery stores and restaurants disposing of spoiled or excess goods. This demonstrated a significant proportion of food could be made accessible to those experiencing barriers to accessing it, therefore greatly minimizing hunger and waste quickly and relatively simply.

Local Food Recovery & Redistribution Initiatives

Jay Stanford, director of London's Environmental Programs and Solid Waste department, touched on Paul's presentation and discussed the origins of local food waste by proportion. In addition to identifying ways in which consumers can minimize waste, he also shared US statistics demonstrating less than 14% of grocery stores choose to donate the excess food. This means approximately 86% of potentially edible food is being disposed of in America and Canadian statistics are quite similar.

Jay also shared initiatives taking place in this city to increase access to food, such as the *Curb Hunger Food Drive*, implementation of recommendations from the *Urban Agriculture Strategy*, and development of the *London Food Coalition*. These projects and groups are helping food recovery and redistribution efforts by tackling various factors contributing to waste and food inaccessibility.

Legislation and Liability Panel

Consisting of Paul van der Werf, Paul Shand, a lawyer who is well-versed in food industry legislation and passionate about social justice, and Dave Pavletic, a certified Public Health Inspector with the Middlesex-London Health Unit, this panel addressed questions surrounding best before dates, the *Good Samaritan Act*, and liability concerns around donating excess food. Though there were many important statements made throughout this portion of the Forum, two points stand out strongly.

First, Paul Shand shared that not only has there never been a case of a business being sued for sharing spoiled food, stores and restaurants are protected by the *Donation of Food Act, 1994*, so long as they believe the goods are fit for human consumption. In contrast, there is no protection for stores that offer discounts on food that has passed its peak freshness. This means that from a liability standpoint, it is actually safer to donate excess food than it is to sell it.

The second key take away from this panel discussion was the explanation of the difference between best before dates and expiry dates. Most food has a best before date, which means it is most fresh and nutritious up until that specific date. Once it has passed its best before date, the food typically remains edible for quite some time, meaning it is safe to share and donate. Expiry dates, in contrast, need to be adhered to much more closely and only appear on specific types of food, such as baby formula.

These two pieces of information are extremely valuable for grocers and restaurant owners because they help to remove barriers commonly identified that prevent donating surplus food.

Food Recipient Panel

After learning about legislation related to sharing excess food, attendees had an opportunity to hear from representatives of the agencies and groups serving people who do not have access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. The panel members included Debra Eastabrook of *Mission Services London*, Doug Whitelaw representing *Ark Aid* and the *London Food Coalition*, and Mike Bloxam of *London Food Bank*. All three individuals highlighted the significant need for financially accessible food, as well as the importance of acquiring nutritious, culturally appropriate donations to provide people with choice and autonomy when accessing food services.

Though treats such as cookies and candy are sometimes appreciated, it is goods such as fresh produce that often have the most significant impact for families and individuals experiencing inequitable access to food. The *London Food Coalition's* most recent innovation, a refrigerated food track that takes produce from the city's *Costcos* and delivers it to the *Salvation Army's Centre of Hope* for distribution to numerous agencies across London, has led to increased equitable access to healthy food.

Everyone on this panel indicated they rarely turn away donations and would greatly benefit from more grocery stores sharing excess goods on regular basis.

Food Donor Panel

Featuring David Van Eldik, Head Chef of *London Convention Centre*, Matt Swenson, Manager of *Old East Village Grocer*, and Ann Zok, along with her colleague Jacqueline Hassall, representing *Western University's Hospitality Services*, this panel discussed how they have overcome barriers to sharing food, and the numerous benefits related to doing so. There was consensus around the importance of ensuring that businesses order just enough food as needed, as well as the feel-good element of donating to folks who may otherwise not have access to nutritious meals. Furthermore, there was indication of donating helping each business economically. As many consumers are becoming more socially conscious, they are searching out food industry leaders that

match their values. This means grocery stores and other industry members who become well-known for their socially just practices tend to experience an increase in customers.

Additionally, the panelists had trouble identifying challenges related to donating excess food. This is likely a sign that many of the perceived barriers are myths and taking action to mitigate food inaccessibility is simpler than expected.

Key Findings

- ✓ Global trends indicate a movement towards minimizing food waste and increasing access to nutritious, culturally appropriate meals for all. London has the infrastructure, resources, and potential to be a leader in this movement.
- ✓ Approximately 20% of food is wasted at the distribution point of the processing cycle, therefore grocers, restaurant owners, and other food industry leaders can significantly increase food accessibility.
- ✓ The *Donation of Food Act* essentially removes all liability from donating food, making it safer to share excess rather than sell it at a discounted price.
- ✓ Food exceeding its best before date is typically suitable for donation, as it is still fit for human consumption
- ✓ Social agencies receive many requests for community members who experience barriers to access the food they need. Donations of goods such as fresh produce are extremely beneficial.
- ✓ Food industry leaders identify numerous benefits to sharing excess food and minimizing waste, while they have experienced few challenges to doing so.