

Food Donation Workgroup

Legislative Report

Organics Management Law 2.0 ([HB 2301](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2301&Initiative=false&Year=2023))

By

**Solid Waste Management Program**

Washington State Department of Ecology

Headquarters Office

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* [**Use Food Well Washington Plan**](https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/reducing-recycling-waste/organics-and-food-waste/sustainable-food-center/use-food-well-washington-plan)
* [**Food Center webpage**](https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/reducing-recycling-waste/organics-and-food-waste/sustainable-food-center)

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## Acronyms

**DES –** Department of Enterprise Services
**DOH** – Washington State Department of Health
**EPA** – Environmental Protection Agency
**ECY** – Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology)
**FDA** – (US) Food and Drug Administration
**GHG** – greenhouse gas(es)
**HRO** – Hunger Relief Organization
**LHJ** - Jurisdictional Health Department/ Local Health Jurisdiction
**K-12** – Common designation for US schools – grades kindergarten (K) through grade 12.
**LSWFA** – Local Solid Waste Financial Assistance
**OSPI** – Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
**PCFWC** – Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment
**PPG** – Public Participation Grants
**PAYT** – Pay-As-You-Throw
**ReFED** – Rethink Food Waste through Economics and Data
**RCW** – Revised Code of Washington SME – Subject matter expert
**UFWW Plan** – Use Food Well Washington Plan
**USDA** – United States Department of Agriculture
**UN FAO** – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
**WSDA** – Washington State Department of Agriculture
**WCS** – Waste Characterization Study
**WRAP** – Waste and Resources Action Programme (UK)
**WRRF** – Water Resource Recovery Facility
**WRI** – World Resources Institute
**WRRED** – Waste Reduction Recycling and Education Grants
**WSDA** – Washington State Department of Agriculture
**WWF** – World Wildlife Fund

## Definitions

#### Waste Management and Organics

**Anaerobic Digestion**A process through which bacteria break down organic matter—such as animal manure, wastewater biosolids, and food waste—in the absence of oxygen.

**Composting**The biological degradation and transformation of organic solid waste under controlled, aerobic conditions. Natural decay under uncontrolled conditions is not considered composting.

**Compostable Product**A product specifically manufactured to break down in a composting system at the end of its useful life. May be made from plastic, paper, plant fibers, or other materials that provide form and function.

**Compost Contamination**Any chemical, physical, biological, or radiological substance found in collected organics or finished compost that does not naturally occur in the environment or occurs at elevated concentrations.

**Contaminant**A substance—chemical, physical, biological, or radiological—that does not naturally occur in the environment or is present at levels above natural background concentrations.

**Energy Recovery**The conversion of solid waste into usable energy under federal and state regulations. Methods include mass burning, refuse-derived fuel incineration, and other high-temperature combustion processes. (WAC 173-350-100)

**Organics Recovery Collection Areas (ORCA)**By January 1, 2027, cities and counties with a solid waste plan must provide year-round organics collection to:

* All residential customers (excluding multifamily residences)
* Non-residential customers generating over 0.25 cubic yards of organic waste weekly
By April 1, 2030, organics collection service must be extended to all customers, except multifamily residences.

**Business Organics Management Areas (BOMA)**As mandated by 2022 and 2024 state laws, specific areas in Washington are designated annually (per RCW 70A.205.545) where businesses must arrange for organic waste collection to reduce organic waste generation.

#### Food Systems and Food Waste

**Food System**A network of resources and processes involved in producing, transporting, processing, selling, and consuming food, as well as its environmental, social, and health impacts.

**Food Waste**Waste derived from the storage, preparation, cooking, or serving of food for human consumption, including edible and inedible parts like peels, shells, bones, and spoiled food. Does not include animal excrement or dead animals not intended for consumption. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Wasted Food**The edible portion of food waste. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Surplus Food**Excess food that is produced but not consumed or used.

**Food Waste Reduction**Efforts to:

1. Prevent and reduce edible food waste.
2. Match surplus edible food with food banks and distributors.
3. Use inedible food for animal feed, energy recovery, composting, or other biological systems. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Prevention**Avoiding the wasting of food at the source, which provides the greatest environmental and cost-saving benefits. (Also known as source reduction.) (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Recovery**Processing inedible food waste to extract value through composting, anaerobic digestion, or as animal feed. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Rescue**The act of saving surplus edible food for redistribution. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Food Rescue**Redistribution of surplus edible food to individuals or organizations in need.

**Food Waste Reduction Act**ESHB 1114 – Establishes statewide goals and initiatives for reducing food waste. (RCW 70A.205.715)

**Use Food Well Washington Plan**Washington State's strategic roadmap to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030.

#### Food Access and Donation

**Donor**Any person, company, or organization that donates food to a Donated Food Distributing Organization.

**Donated Food Distributing Organization (DFDO)**A charitable nonprofit (501(c)) organization that distributes food free of charge. (King County)

**Good Samaritan Food Donation Act**Provides limited liability protection to those who donate food in good faith to feed the hungry, as long as the food is safe and handled responsibly. (RCW 69.80.031)

**Hunger Relief Organization (HRO)**An organization that collects surplus edible food from donors for redistribution to individuals in need.

**Washington Commodities Donation Program (WCDP)**Procures Washington-grown foods at risk of being wasted and distributes them to hunger relief organizations in the state.

#### Food Infrastructure and Supply Chain

**Cold Chain Management**A temperature-controlled supply system that keeps food cold from production to purchase, minimizing spoilage.

**Food Hub**A centrally located facility that aggregates, stores, processes, distributes, and/or markets locally or regionally produced food.

**Value-Added Food Processing Hub**Community-based facilities that minimally process crops—mainly from small and mid-sized farms—or repackage food into smaller quantities for consumers.

**Supply Chain**The interconnected network of activities, entities, and resources involved in producing and delivering a product to its end user.

**Shelf-Life**The estimated duration that a food product remains safe for human consumption.

#### Community and Government Roles

**Food Pantry**A distribution center where individuals and families can access free food.

**Food Banks**Nonprofit organizations that store and distribute large volumes of food to local food programs.

**Local**A limited geographic area, such as a neighborhood, city, or county.

**Local Government**A governing body operating at the city or county level.

**Jurisdictional Health Department (JHD)/Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ)**Local or regional public health departments responsible for community health oversight.

**K-12**The education system covering kindergarten through 12th grade in the U.S.

**Climate Commitment Act**Washington State law that caps and reduces greenhouse gas emissions from major industrial sources, allowing flexible, cost-effective reductions.

**Greenhouse Gases (GHGs)**Gases including CO₂, CH₄ (methane), N₂O, H₂O vapor, and O₃ that trap infrared radiation and contribute to global warming.

**HEAL Act (Healthy Environment for All Act)**Legislation establishing a statewide framework for environmental justice, making it a mission priority for state agencies.

**Pacific Coast Collaborative (PCC)**A partnership among West Coast states and British Columbia to accelerate progress on climate, energy, transportation, and food waste reduction.

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**Collaborations between government agencies and private-sector companies to finance, build, and operate public services or infrastructure.

**EPA Food Waste Hierarchy**A federal tiered system prioritizing food waste solutions:

1. Source reduction
2. Feeding people
3. Feeding animals
4. Industrial uses
5. Composting
6. Landfilling or incineration

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## Executive Summary

In 2024, the Washington Legislature passed HB 2301, directing the Department of Ecology to convene a [**Food Donation Workgroup**](#_Appendix_A._Legislative) to identify strategies to expand the rescue and donation of surplus edible food from commercial sources. This work supports the state’s goals under the 2019 Food Waste Reduction Act to cut food waste by 50% by 2030, while advancing food security and climate objectives.

Hunger relief needs are growing—**one in four Washingtonians** relied on food assistance in 2024, with a record **13 million visits** to hunger relief organizations (WSDA, 2024). At the same time, **an estimated 480,000 tons** of surplus food are generated annually from food service, retail, and manufacturing sectors (ReFED, 2025) much of it still edible and recoverable.

To address this critical need, Ecology convened eight meetings from July 2024 to April 2025, with [41 Workgroup members](#_Appendix_B._Food), gathering insights through discussion, surveys, and review of national best practices. Members identified persistent barriers—such as limited funding, staffing, and infrastructure, and opportunities for improved coordination and standardization.

The Workgroup reached consensus on **nine (9) actionable recommendations** to improve Washington’s food rescue system. Key priorities include expanding scalable pilot programs and infrastructure, increasing grant funding for surplus food recovery, investing in school-based food rescue efforts, and securing sustainable long-term funding.

Additional focus areas include providing technical assistance to standardize best practices, launching statewide education and outreach campaigns, enhancing data tracking through the Food Data Hub, supporting local health jurisdictions in promoting safe donation practices, and developing a statewide collaborative map to coordinate food donation and recovery efforts.

## Introduction

### Background

In 2024, the Washington Legislature passed [House Bill 2301](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2301&Initiative=false&Year=2023). Section 701 of the bill ([Appendix A](#_Appendix_A._Legislative_1)) directed the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to convene a Food Donation Workgroup (“the Workgroup”) to study and recommend strategies for improving the rescue of edible food from commercial generators, including food service providers, grocery stores, and food processors.

There has never been a more critical time to use food well in Washington State. Since 2020, the demand for food assistance continues to grow, as does the cost to provide food assistance, and food donations have not kept pace with demand. A historic number of Washingtonians – one in four people- rely on food banks, pantries, or meal programs for assistance, while an estimated 40% of the food produced in the United States is wasted (WSDA, 2024). A significant portion of this food is lost along the supply chain before it can reach those in need. Common barriers to edible food rescue include limited storage and transportation capacity, as well as insufficient funding and staffing.

According to the *Draft 2024 Washington State Hunger Relief Capacity Report*, 77% of participating organizations serve their communities through food pantries. Although the overall number of organizations reporting capacity challenges has declined slightly, the top five barriers remain consistent: availability of volunteers (59%), freezer space (59%), refrigerated space (59%), dry storage space (48%), and access to other necessary supplies (38%). Notably, 5.6% of organizations continue to refuse food donations due to capacity limitations—highlighting an ongoing gap between surplus and need (UW, 2025).

Washington’s commitment to addressing food waste is not new. In 2019, the Legislature unanimously passed the Food Waste Reduction Act ([RCW 70A.205.715](https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=2301&Initiative=false&Year=2023)), which set statewide goals to reduce food waste by 50% by 2030, relative to 2015 levels. A key component of this goal is the reduction of wasted edible food.

Commercial food generators in Washington are estimated to contribute approximately [480 tons of food waste](https://insights-engine.refed.org/food-waste-monitor?break_by=sector&indicator=tons-surplus&state=WA&view=detail&year=2023) (ReFED, 2025), representing 13.1% of the state’s overall food loss. This represents a significant opportunity to advance food rescue initiatives and move closer to meeting the 2030 food waste reduction goals.

The Workgroup was established to address these challenges and support the state’s broader efforts to reduce food waste. The Workgroup focused on three strategies to increase access to edible surplus food and to keep food out of landfills: preventing food waste at the source, rescuing surplus edible food, and managing remaining materials through recovery systems such as composting or anaerobic digestion. Through collaborative partnerships and ongoing dialogue, the Workgroup identified actionable recommendations grounded in research and member input.

## Research Summary

### Research Process

The Food Donation Workgroup’s research process was designed to develop actionable recommendations to improve food donation practices in Washington State. From July to November 2024 and again from January to April 2025, the Department of Ecology facilitated this effort in close collaboration with 41 Workgroup members ([Appendix B](#_Appendix_B._Food)).

Over the course of eight monthly meetings, Ecology and Workgroup members reached consensus on nine (9) actionable recommendations. These meetings served as a forum to discuss barriers, share experiences, and explore potential solutions related to food donation and recovery.

#### Data Collection and Engagement

Initial data collection occurred from July to November 2024 through meetings and surveys. Monthly surveys, structured around key research questions from the legislative directive, provided additional insight. Responses were analyzed using SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), frequency analysis, and thematic analysis. This process revealed 10 recurring themes: Logistics, Partnerships, Infrastructure, Incentives, Technology, Best Practices, Policies, Pilots, Transportation, and Metrics.

##### Recommendation Worksheets

Between August and November 2024, Ecology invited detailed proposals via recommendation worksheets from both Workgroup members and the public ([Appendix C](#_Appendix_C._Recommendation)). A total of 30 worksheets were submitted—27 from representatives of 25 organizations and two from members of the public.

##### Literature Review

To supplement Workgroup input, Ecology conducted a literature review examining best practices, challenges, and opportunities in food donation from other jurisdictions. This review provided context and alignment with broader regional and national efforts.

##### Technical Review

To strengthen the credibility and feasibility of the recommendations, Ecology engaged a panel of technical experts to review select proposals. These experts offered targeted feedback on regulatory considerations, operational viability, and alignment with industry standards. Their input helped refine and validate the recommendations, ensuring they are both practical and evidence-based.

## Workgroup Recommendations

Key Insights
The process surfaced critical insights into the persistent challenges and emerging opportunities within Washington’s food donation system. These findings underpin the Workgroup’s final recommendations and align with the goals of the *Use Food Well Washington (UFWW)* Plan and the state’s 2030 food waste reduction goals.

Key systemic barriers and opportunities identified by the Workgroup include:

* **Funding and Staffing**: Ongoing gaps in financial resources and workforce capacity remain major constraints for food rescue organizations.
* **Infrastructure Limitations**: Challenges such as insufficient transportation and cold storage continue to restrict donation volume and efficiency.
* **Collaboration and Standardization**: Greater coordination and consistent practices across sectors are essential to scale food rescue efforts effectively.
* **Public-Private Partnerships**: Strong PPPs are viewed as a vital mechanism to drive implementation and expand impact.
* **Food Safety and Cold Chain Management**: Ensuring food safety, particularly through improved contamination prevention and cold-chain control, is a central concern.
* **Systemic Transformation**: The recommendations aim for bold, systems-level change rather than isolated interventions.
* **Sustained Investment**: There is a clear need for long-term funding, incentives, and staffing support to build resilience and capacity across the system.
* **Research and Outreach**: Expanded technical assistance, research, and public engagement are necessary to strengthen food rescue infrastructure statewide.

### Recommendations Summary

Through research, workgroup input, and collaboration, the Workgroup reached consensus on nine (9) actionable recommendations to strengthen the state’s food rescue system. These prioritized recommendations include expanding pilot programs and infrastructure, increasing grant funding, supporting school-based food rescue, and securing long-term funding.

Other focus areas involve standardizing best practices, statewide education efforts, improved data tracking, promoting safe donation practices, and creating a collaborative statewide food donation map. Additional research needs and non-consensus items are listed in [Appendix D](#_Appendix_D._Recommendations).

#### Food Donation Workgroup Recommendations

1. Strengthen Food Donation Through Scalable Pilots and Infrastructure
2. Fund the Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program
3. Invest in School Food Rescue Infrastructure and Programs
4. Identify Sustainable Funding to Expand Food Donations
5. Provide Technical Assistance to Address Barriers and Standardize Food Donation Best Practices
6. Implement Statewide Education and Outreach Campaigns
7. Advance Statewide Data Tracking Through the Food Data Hub to Support Food Rescue and Donation
8. Support Local Health Jurisdictions in Guiding Safe Food Donation and Connecting with Hunger Relief Organizations
9. Develop a Statewide Collaborative Food Donation and Recovery Map

**[graphics key – note on graphics design plan]**

### 1. Strengthen Food Donation Through Scalable Pilots and Infrastructure

**Recommendation:** Invest in scalable pilot programs and cold-chain infrastructure to enhance Washington’s food donation network, reduce food waste, and improve safe access to surplus food. Prioritize public-private partnerships (PPPs) to distribute both cost and implementation responsibilities across sectors.

Washington’s food donation system faces significant logistical barriers, particularly in transportation, cold storage, and contamination risks, all of which hinder the safe recovery and distribution of perishable food. Addressing these challenges through targeted pilot programs and infrastructure investments will help build a more resilient, efficient, and equitable system across the state.

By focusing on food safety, enhancing cold-chain infrastructure, and fostering multi-sector collaboration, Washington can significantly increase food recovery while minimizing waste. Scalable, data-informed pilot programs and PPPs present a flexible, fiscally responsible path forward that includes, but does not solely rely on, state funding. Potential funding sources include existing mechanisms such as Food Center Grants. The Workgroup recommends the following key actions:

1. Launch Targeted Pilot Programs
Fund pilot projects through Food Center Grants to test decentralized food recovery models, such as:
* Regional aggregation or rural drop-off hubs
* Small-load or last-mile delivery services
* Managed cold-chain logistics in partnership with private logistics providers

These pilots will help identify scalable, cost-effective solutions that can be adapted to Washington’s diverse geographical and community contexts.

1. Expand Cold-Chain Infrastructure
Provide grants or incentives to improve access to refrigerated vehicles and cold storage, particularly in underserved or rural areas. Allow funding for:
* Cold storage equipment and energy-efficient upgrades
* Refrigerated transport vehicles
* Real estate or facilities for aggregation and distribution
* Digital tools to track storage conditions and ensure food safety compliance

Leveraging underutilized infrastructure and facilitating cost-sharing with retailers and community partners can maximize the impact of these investments.

1. Establish Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)
Foster collaboration between state agencies, private logistics and food businesses, local governments, and hunger relief organizations (HROs) to co-finance and co-develop infrastructure. While the government plays a facilitative role, the long-term success of these efforts depends on shared ownership and investment across sectors.
2. Support Training and Education
Fund training programs for food donors and HROs on food safety, contamination prevention, and efficient food recovery practices. Ongoing technical assistance should be provided to ensure safe handling, storage, and transport of donated food, especially perishables.
3. Invest in Applied Research
Fund applied research to evaluate the outcomes of pilot projects and identify best practices for scalable food recovery, donation, and waste prevention. The findings should guide future investments and ensure that statewide systems align with community needs.

Policy AlignmentThis approach looks to developing partnerships and understanding some of the challenges of infrastructure needs between donors and HRO’s. An example of a unique partnership focused on last mile deliveries is found from DoorDash’s program DASH [**Connecting People with Charitable Food through New Home Delivery Partnerships | Urban Institute**](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/connecting-people-charitable-food-through-new-home-delivery-partnerships) (Waxman, 2023).

### 2. Fund the Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program

**Recommendation:** Fund the [Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.23.330) (WCDP) to increase donation, reduce food waste, support farmers and processors, and increase access to healthy, locally produced food for Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) across the state.

Transportation and infrastructure costs often prevent Washington farmers and food processors from donating surplus, nutritious food to communities in need. The WCDP, administered by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), addresses this barrier by funding the redirection of surplus commodities to HROs. Initially funded with one-time state funds in FY2025, the program now requires ongoing support to scale its impact. Leveraging existing funding mechanisms, such as [Climate Commitment Act (CCA)](https://ecology.wa.gov/Air-Climate/Climate-Commitment-Act), could provide a stable funding pathway (Czyzewski, 2024).

By funding WCDP and implementing equity-focused improvements, Washington can significantly expand food donation, reduce waste, and ensure more equitable access to nutritious local food—building a more resilient and inclusive food system. The Workgroup recommends the following implementation considerations:

Enhancing Equity and Access:
Sustained funding should be paired with equity-centered program improvements to ensure a broader range of participants can access support. Applying [HEAL Act](https://ecology.wa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/environmental-justice/heal) principles to the Requests for Proposals (RFP) process, in partnership with the [Department of Enterprise Services](https://des.wa.gov/about/agency-overview/initiatives/supplier-diversity-state-contracts), will help diversify outreach and participation. Simplifying the application and reporting process—eliminating match requirements, extending grant cycles, and offering flexible funding—will make the program more accessible to smaller organizations, including those serving non-English-speaking and historically underserved communities.

Technical and Operational Support:
To further expand equitable participation, targeted technical assistance should be provided to help small and resource-limited organizations navigate the application process. Additionally, funding should support infrastructure, transportation, and personnel costs, including incremental increases to build long-term organizational capacity.

Policy Alignment:
This approach aligns with national models for inclusive and equitable food waste grantmaking. For example, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) highlights successful practices in cities like Denver and Baltimore that prioritized equity, simplified grant processes, and increased participation from smaller and community-based organizations (NRDC, 2020).

### 3. Invest in School Food Rescue Infrastructure and Programs

**Recommendation:** Invest in food rescue infrastructure and programming within K–12 schools to rescue food, reduce food waste, enhance sustainability, and support community access to nutritious food. Funding should prioritize equitable access, compliance with federal and local food safety guidelines, and long-term capacity building.

Schools are a critical intervention point in Washington’s efforts to prevent wasted food. Implementing food rescue strategies—such as share tables, food donation partnerships, and waste tracking systems—can reduce surplus, educate students, and strengthen community food access. These efforts also align with state climate, food security, and food waste reduction goals. The Workgroup recommends the following actions and considerations.

#### Key Actions:

* **Implement Food Share and Donation Programs**
Support schools in establishing or expanding food share tables and donation protocols that comply with USDA, DOH, and local health jurisdiction (LHJ) guidelines, including "offer versus serve" policies and ensuring adequate time to eat. Where applicable, facilitate partnerships with Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) to ensure that USDA-provided foods are properly overseen and distributed.
* **Prevent Waste and Track Surplus**
Encourage food waste prevention strategies—such as smarter meal planning—and support the use of simple tracking tools to monitor surplus and identify trends for donation or redistribution.
* **Leverage and Expand Existing Infrastructure**
Use existing school kitchens, partnerships, and WSDA programs (e.g., Farm to School) to scale rescue efforts efficiently and sustainably.
* **Ensure Equitable Grant Access**
Simplify grant application and reporting requirements, eliminate matching funds, and offer multilingual support and technical assistance to ensure smaller districts and schools serving historically underserved communities can participate.
* **Provide Sustainable Funding**
Offer flexible, multi-year grants (e.g., two-year terms with a streamlined renewal option) that support operational costs such as staffing, transportation, and food safety training. Potential funding sources include Food Center Grants, WSDA programs, or other state-level mechanisms.

#### Policy Alignment and Considerations:

* Complies with USDA rules regarding donation of federally provided food, which may require oversight by a local nonprofit.
* Builds on DOH and LHJ food safety guidelines and existing school meal frameworks.
* Encourages public-private partnerships and community engagement.
* Incorporates prevention and tracking as key components of long-term success.

**[examples or case study links – the research team is still looking into this focus area and could use resources if you have them!]**

### 4. Identify Sustainable Funding to Expand Food Donations

**Recommendation:** Establish sustainable funding to support Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) in hiring staff for flexible pickup schedules, including evenings and weekends, as well as funding job training programs like a 6-month Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) program, transportation contracts, and food safety training.

HROs often face staffing shortages, relying on volunteers, leading to inconsistent pickups, food spoilage, and operational instability. By funding staff positions with fair wages and benefits, HROs can enhance operational efficiency, reduce turnover, and increase food donations, benefiting both employees and communities.

By incorporating diverse and sustainable funding mechanisms, this recommendation can help strengthen the infrastructure needed to ensure reliable food rescue efforts, creating a more equitable and resilient food donation system for Washington State. The Workgroup recommends the following elements, mechanisms, and policy considerations.

#### Key Elements:

* **Sustainable Staffing Support:** Provide multi-year grants for staff positions with flexible pickup schedules, fair wages, and job training, including CDL certification. Prioritize long-term stability and reduce reliance on short-term funding. Hire from client/volunteer pools to foster local employment.
* **Training and Capacity Building:** Fund job training programs, including food safety and CDL certification, to build HROs' long-term capacity.
* **Transportation Solutions:** Ensure ongoing funding for refrigerated vehicles and transportation infrastructure to support food recovery.
* **Employment Creation:** Hire from existing client or volunteer pools to strengthen local communities and create sustainable jobs.

#### Sustainable Funding Mechanisms

To ensure the longevity and scalability of food rescue and donation efforts, it is crucial to secure diverse, sustainable funding sources. These may include:

##### State-Level Grants and Public Health Funds

* Washington Commodities Donation Grant Program – see page 20.
* Federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) & Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): These federal programs offer funding to support food distribution infrastructure, and their integration with state-level initiatives can ensure more reliable food recovery operations.
* State Waste Reduction Funds (e.g., CalRecycle): California’s CalRecycle program offers examples of successful funding models for food recovery, providing grants to support food waste reduction initiatives, including staffing and infrastructure. Washington could model similar programs to fund both short-term needs and long-term system improvements, potentially through the Food Center Grants. (CalRecycle, 2025).

##### Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

* Leverage Local Business Contributions: Encourage private businesses, especially in transportation, logistics, and food sectors, to contribute to food recovery with shared infrastructure like refrigerated transport and cold storage.
* Cost-Sharing Agreements: Partner with retailers and logistics providers to co-finance food recovery infrastructure, including shared storage and delivery resources, to reduce individual financial burdens.

##### Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) & Community Investment Funds

* SIBs for Food Recovery: Use Social Impact Bonds to finance food recovery infrastructure, with potential returns based on improved waste reduction and food distribution efficiency.
* Philanthropic & Corporate Contributions: Engage philanthropic foundations and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs to support food recovery, job training, and community development.

##### Policy Considerations

* Coordination & Alignment: Align state, federal, and local funding to avoid duplication and maximize investment impact.
* Long-Term Sustainability: Shift from short-term grants to sustainable funding models, reducing reliance on government funding and increasing PPP and corporate contributions.
* Regulatory Flexibility: Ensure policies adapt to emerging needs, such as food safety changes or new technologies requiring funding adjustments.

##### Policy Alignment:

Building partnerships and looking to community connections can contribute to sustainable funding opportunities and the investment needed for infrastructure development.

**[Any more case studies?]**

### 5. Provide Technical Assistance to Address Barriers and Standardize Food Donation Best Practices

**Recommendation:** Direct the Food Center, in partnership with the Department of Health and WSDA, to lead a coordinated effort to overcome operational barriers to food donation by developing standardized best practices and offering technical assistance, training, and tools to support food donors and Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs).

Inconsistent food donation processes across the state create confusion and limit recovery efforts. This recommendation promotes a voluntary, collaborative approach to make food donation safer, more accessible, and more effective—without imposing regulatory requirements. The Workgroup recommends the following strategies and implementation considerations:

#### Key Strategies:

* **Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):**
Co-create adaptable SOPs with food businesses and HROs for donation, rescue, and recovery, applicable to both small and large operations.
* **Offer Technical Support and Training:**
Provide free or low-cost waste audits, multilingual training, and technical assistance to encourage adoption of safe donation practices.
* **Facilitate Collaboration:**
Support donor-HRO partnerships through shared tools, model agreements, and co-developed resources like toolkits and handouts.
* **Leverage Existing Funding:**
Utilize current resources, such as Food Center Grants, to support implementation without adding new funding burdens.
* **Recognize Participation:**
Establish recognition programs to incentivize leadership in food donation and waste reduction.
* **Ensure Accessibility and Equity:**
Offer multilingual materials and tailored support for BIPOC communities and organizations with limited English proficiency.

#### Policy Alignment:

* Participation is voluntary and aligns with existing food recovery efforts. The focus is on support, not enforcement or monitoring.
* The initiative aims to scale up proven local practices, not duplicate existing programs.
* This approach focuses on expanding training and standardized procedures across all levels of HROs and donors, incorporating lessons from the *PCFWC-Land-O-Lakes Case Study* on employee engagement, multilingual materials, and effective implementation (PCFWC, 2024).

### 6. Implement Statewide Education and Outreach Campaigns

**Recommendation:** Fund and expand statewide education and outreach initiatives to build strong community partnerships and drive local engagement.

The Food Center’s programs are critical in reducing food waste across Washington. By fostering community partnerships and local engagement, these initiatives will raise awareness, improve food handling, and empower individuals and businesses to adopt sustainable practices, benefiting both communities and the environment.

The Workgroup recommends the following education and outreach strategies:

* **Continue Food Waste Reduction Campaigns:** Expand the [*Use Food Well*](http://teams/sites/W2R/PolicySection/UFWW/UseFoodWell.org) campaign to help individuals and businesses reduce food waste by emphasizing cost savings, practical strategies, and food rescue. Encourage surplus food donations to local food banks and hunger relief organizations to prevent waste and support communities.
* **Raise Awareness on Food Donation Quality:** Educate donors on the importance of [quality and safety in food donations](https://www.nrdc.org/resources/liability-protections-and-safe-food-donation). Promote early donations by providing incentives and educating businesses about tax credits to encourage earlier donations of edible food, thus reducing waste.
* **Promote Safe Food Handling Education:** Offer training for businesses and consumers on safe food handling practices throughout the entire food lifecycle. This will help foster accountability and reduce waste.
* **Build and Strengthen Partnerships:** Support ongoing initiatives to forge stronger partnerships between governments, local organizations, and food businesses. Programs like the [Pacific Coast Food Waste Commitment](https://pacificcoastcollaborative.org/food-waste/) (PCFWC) connect food businesses, government agencies, and non-profits to collectively address food waste. Similarly, programs like [Eat Local First](https://eatlocalfirst.org/) strengthen local, cross-sector partnerships to ensure a sustained effort to reduce food waste.
* **Public Recognition and Awards:** Celebrate businesses and community organizations excelling in food waste reduction and donations. Publicly recognize these efforts through state campaigns and events to inspire others to adopt similar practices.
* **Expand Policy Awareness and Resources:** Direct the Food Center to expand resources on existing state and federal food waste policies and incentives. Ensure local businesses and organizations are fully informed of available regulatory support and tax incentives.

#### Additional Resources for Campaigns:

* [NRDC’s "Food Made to Be Eaten" Campaign](https://www.nrdc.org/bio/nina-sevilla/food-made-be-eaten-new-videos-encourage-food-donation)
* [Harvard Law on Food Waste Policies](https://www.nrdc.org/resources/liability-protections-and-safe-food-donation)
* [ReFED Food Waste Insights and Commentaries](https://www.refed.com)

### 7. Advance Statewide Data Tracking Through the Food Data Hub to Support Food Rescue and Donation

**Recommendation:** Support continued development of the Food Center’s Food Data Hub to enable standardized, secure, real-time tracking of food rescue and donation. This centralized infrastructure will improve coordination, efficiency, transparency, and equity across Washington’s food donation network.

By protecting proprietary data and meeting the needs of both large systems and individual users, the Food Data Hub will enhance logistics, demonstrate impact, support food safety, and align surplus food with community needs. With broad food system participation, it can be a foundational tool for reducing waste, advancing food rescue, and strengthening food security statewide. The Workgroup recommends the following implementation considerations.

#### Food Data Hub Implementation Considerations:

* **Voluntary Participation:** Encourage adoption through incentives rather than mandates, especially for small businesses and hunger relief organizations (HROs).
* **Data Privacy:** Prioritize proprietary protections through aggregation, anonymization, and secure systems.
* **Phased Rollout:** Pilot with willing partners before broader implementation.
* **Identify Community Needs:** Standardized data helps pinpoint gaps and direct resources where they are most needed.
* **Clear Data Standards:** Define key metrics (e.g., food type, volume, timing) while considering capacity limitations. Example key metrics from the ongoing Food Center research can be found in [Appendix E](#_Appendix_E._Donation).
* **Technical Support and Outreach**: Provide training, assistance, and outreach to ensure equitable access and usability. This assistance paired with the following mapping recommendation may increase donor participation and quality donations statewide.
* **Build Strategic Partnerships:** Reliable data helps connect donors with HROs, matching supply with demand more effectively. Strategic partnerships can support awareness, adoption, and long term success of the Food Data Hub.

#### Policy Alignment:

Understanding the gaps in food recovery data and developing a comprehensive approach to meeting Washington State’s waste reduction goals align with the needs of both donors and HRO’s to increase the amount of donatable food.

### 8. Support Local Health Jurisdictions in Guiding Safe Food Donation and Connecting with Hunger Relief Organizations

**Recommendation:** Support local health jurisdictions in providing consistent food safety guidance on food donation and maintaining up-to-date lists of hunger relief organizations.

Local health jurisdictions (LHJs) vary in their interpretation and enforcement of food safety laws related to food donation. This inconsistency creates confusion for food donors, businesses, and hunger relief organizations (HROs), potentially resulting in avoidable food waste and safety risks.

Improved clarity, consistency, and accessibility in food donation practices will reduce food waste, enhance food safety, and strengthen the state’s hunger relief network through better coordination between public health agencies and community partners. The Workgroup recommends the following actions to support Local Health Jurisdictions:

* **Develop Consistent Statewide Guidance**
The Department of Health (DOH) should collaborate with LHJs to create uniform food safety guidance on food donation. This should include best practices applicable across all jurisdictions to reduce confusion and ensure safe food handling.
* **Identify and Address Barriers**
DOH, in partnership with LHJs, food donors, and HROs, should identify regulatory or operational barriers that hinder effective food donation. This will inform targeted improvements and standardization efforts across counties.
* **Provide Technical Guidance within Existing Authority**
DOH should issue guidance within the existing Food Code framework, covering topics such as traceability, de-packaging labeling, temperature control, and legal protections under the Good Samaritan Law.
* **Maintain and Publicize Local HRO Lists**
LHJs should create and regularly update public lists of local HROs. Many LHJs already maintain these lists, and promoting the practice statewide may support more participation from HROs. These lists will help donors easily identify appropriate and approved donation partners, enhancing transparency and accessibility.
* **Leverage Existing Food Code Provisions**
The Food Code permits LHJs to conduct no-cost annual reviews and offer technical support to HROs. Making these partnerships public will strengthen community trust and streamline connections between food donors and approved organizations.

#### Policy Alignment

This approach focuses on education and community connections within food donation and recovery. Some examples of how to build connections and expand education for inspectors and food establishments from the[**NRDC through the Engaging Health Departments Guide**](https://www.nrdc.org/resources/engaging-health-departments-overview-guide) (NRDC, 2021).

### 9. Develop a Statewide Collaborative Food Donation and Recovery Map

**Recommendation:** Develop a statewide map to connect food donors, Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs), distributors, transporters, and compost facilities, streamlining food recovery efforts and improving coordination across sectors.

This map will serve as a centralized platform to address gaps in food recovery, enhance resource allocation, and integrate key information on food safety, equity, logistics, and disaster preparedness. It will foster collaboration through public-private partnerships, creating a coordinated system that benefits both the food donation network and communities.

#### Key Actions:

1. **Create a Collaborative Network:** Build on the Food Center’s research to form a network with partners like the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), USDA, EPA, local health jurisdictions (LHJs), HROs, and initiatives such as Eat Local First and the Seattle Good Business Network.
2. **Integrate Existing Tools:** Link the map to existing efforts like Feeding America and Eat Local First to maximize impact and broaden its reach, encouraging adoption by food donors and recovery organizations.
3. **Provide Support and Resources:** Develop technical assistance, standard operating procedures, and outreach materials to support users and ensure consistent participation across partners.
4. **Ensure Long-Term Success:** Implement a sustainable funding and maintenance plan for ongoing updates, tracking features to monitor trends, and ensure the map’s continued effectiveness.

#### Policy Alignment:

* States like New Hampshire, with organic waste bans, have successfully implemented similar maps to connect food banks, creating valuable networks for food surplus generators.

## Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Washington faces a critical intersection of rising hunger, escalating food assistance costs, and ongoing food waste. The Food Donation Workgroup’s recommendations offer a strategic, evidence-based path forward to address these intersecting challenges.

By investing in scalable infrastructure, expanding technical support, enhancing data systems, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration, the state can significantly increase the amount of edible food rescued and redirected to communities in need. These actions not only align with the goals of the Food Waste Reduction Act and the Use Food Well Washington Plan but also serve to advance climate resilience and food equity statewide.

Continued leadership, funding, and engagement will be essential to turning these recommendations into measurable outcomes—and ensuring that good food reaches people, not landfills.

By acting on these recommendations, Washington can lead the nation in edible food rescue and set a lasting example of how public policy, innovation, and partnerships can work together to solve complex challenges and through helping communities use food well.

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##

## Appendices

### Appendix A. Legislative Directive

[Section 701](https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/2301-S2.SL.pdf?q=20240408111253). WORKGROUP TO STUDY FOOD DONATION BY 4 BUSINESSES. (1) The department of ecology's center for sustainable 5 food management created in chapter 70A.207 RCW must convene a work 6 group to address mechanisms to improve the rescue of edible food 7 waste from commercial generators, including food service, retail 8 establishments, and processors that generate excess supply of edible 9 food. The Workgroup must consider:

 (a) Logistics to phase in edible food donation programs, including incentives

 (b) The food recovery network systems necessary to support increased donations of edible food by commercial generators

(c) Assess asset gaps and food infrastructure development needs. The Workgroup must also facilitate the creation of networks and partnerships to address gaps and needs and develop innovative partnerships and models where appropriate; and

(d) Actions taken, costs, and lessons learned by other jurisdictions in the United States that have enacted policies focused on reducing edible commercially generated food waste and from voluntary pilot projects carried out by commercial generators of food waste.

(2) The department of ecology must submit a report to the legislature by September 1, 2025, containing the recommendations of the Workgroup. The Workgroup shall make recommendations using consensus-based decision making. All meetings of the Workgroup must be carried out in a virtual-only format. The report must include recommendations where general consensus has been achieved and note varied opinions where consensus has not been achieved.

(3) The department of ecology must select at least one member to the Workgroup from each of the following:

(a) Cities, including both small and large cities and cities located in urban and rural counties, which may be represented by an association that represents cities in Washington

(b) Counties, including both small and large counties and urban and rural counties, which may be represented by an association that represents county solid waste managers in Washington

(c) An environmental nonprofit organization that specializes in waste and recycling issues

(d) A statewide organization representing hospitality businesses

(e) A retail grocery association

(f) The department of ecology

(g) Two different nonprofit organizations that specialize in food recovery and hunger issues

 (h) Three different hunger relief organizations that represent diverse needs from throughout the state

(i) The department of agriculture

 (j) The office of the superintendent of public instruction

(k) The department of health

l) One large and one small food distribution company

(m) An organization representing food processors

(n) An organization representing food producers

(o) A technology company currently focused on food rescue in Washington; and

(p) Two open seats for appointed members of the Workgroup to nominate for department of ecology appointment if gaps in membership are identified

### Appendix B. Food Donation Workgroup

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2nd Harvest | Eric Williams  | Safeway/Albertsons | Chris Arndt |
| Bellingham Food Bank | Mike Cohen  | Seattle Good Business Network | Erin Adams |
| Benton-Franklin Health District  | Honor Crawford | Snohomish County Health Department  | Emily Rhoden |
| Careit | Alyson Schill  | Snoqualmie Tribe  | Roy Hillis |
| Cascadia Produce | Jeremy Vrablik  | Sustainable Connections | Brandi Hutton |
| Charlie's Produce  | Cherie Barokas | Tacoma-Pierce County Health District | Christina Sherman |
| City of Seattle  | Liz Fikejs | Thurston County Food Bank | Dean Crabapple |
| City of Spokane  | Jill Reeves | Too Good To Go | Chris Spinelli |
| Clark County | Celina Montgomery  | Washington Department of Health | Sammy Berg |
| Colville Confederated Tribes  | Jeanie Kent | Washington Food Coalition | Trish Twomey |
| Copia | Kimberly Smith | Washington Food Industry Association | Katie Beeson  |
| Divert | Holly Yanai | Washington Hospitality Association | Samantha Louderback  |
| Eat Local First | Maressa Vallient  | Washington State Department of Agriculture | Katie Rains  |
| Feeding Washington | Rod Wieber | Washington State Department of Ecology | Alli Kingfisher |
| Food Lifeline | Melinda Saletta | Zero Waste Washington  | Heather Trim |
| Food Northwest | Chris Cary | Safeway/Albertsons | Chris Arndt |
| Free Food For All | Louis Terminello  | Seattle Good Business Network | Erin Adams |
| GoodRoots Northwest | Stacey Crnich | Snohomish County Health Department  | Emily Rhoden |
| King County  | Kelsey Bailey  | Snoqualmie Tribe  | Roy Hillis |
| Kittitas County Public Health Department | Melissa Schumaier | Sustainable Connections | Brandi Hutton |
| Leanpath | Lynn Zhang | Tacoma-Pierce County Health District | Christina Sherman |
| Miracle Food Network  | Doug Robertson | Thurston County Food Bank | Dean Crabapple |
| Northwest Food Alliance | Chef Tom French  | Too Good To Go | Chris Spinelli |
| Northwest Grocery Association | Brandon Houskeeper | Washington Department of Health | Sammy Berg |
| Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  | Jessica Seale  | Washington Food Coalition | Trish Twomey |
| Pierce County  | Karen Hultgren  |  |  |

 |

### Appendix C. Recommendation Worksheet

**DATE:**

**TITLE:**

**ORGANIZATION MAKING RECOMMENDATION:**

**ANALYSIS PREPARED BY:**

* **Summary of Issue**Please provide background on the issue the recommendation works to solve or improve.
* **Summary of Recommendation**Please provide a summary of the proposed recommendation.
* **Barriers and Incentives**Are there rules, legislation, or perceptions that create barriers to solving the issue? Are there incentives that would help the recommendation succeed?
* **Summary of Resources**
Please list and estimate the resources needed to make the recommendation happen. (For example, labor, finances, equipment, etc.)
* **How do we measure and evaluate success?**Please describe any metrics or evaluation criteria that can be used to measure the success of this recommendation.
* **How do we measure and evaluate success?**Please describe any metrics or evaluation criteria that can be used to measure the success of this recommendation.
* **What are the social impacts to this recommendation?**Please estimate the social benefits and value of this recommendation.
* **What are the environmental impacts to this recommendation?**Please estimate the environmental benefits and value of this recommendation.
* **What are the environmental impacts to this recommendation?**Please estimate the environmental benefits and value of this recommendation.
* **Research**Please provide research or literature citations that support this recommendation.
* **Are there consequences to this recommendation?**
Please share any known or assumed positive or negative consequences to this recommendation.
* **Any additional comments?**

### Appendix D. Recommendations without Consensus

The following recommendations were developed by the Workgroup but did not reach full consensus. They are presented in order from closest to consensus to most divergent. Key areas of concern and points of disagreement are noted, along with suggested directions for future research.

#### Explore Voluntary Carbon Credit Generation from Food Donation

RecommendationThis recommendation proposes that the Washington State Department of Ecology evaluate opportunities for voluntary carbon credit generation through food donation, leveraging emerging international, national, and regional carbon markets. The goal is to create financial incentives for businesses to donate edible food while establishing a sustainable revenue stream for Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs).

By recognizing the climate benefits of diverting food from landfills, this approach could simultaneously reduce food waste, support environmental goals, and strengthen food security.

The Workgroup emphasized the importance of ensuring that any credits generated are retained by HROs, as they are the entities directly facilitating the environmental and social impact.

Consensus Status
Full consensus was not reached on this recommendation. While members saw promise in exploring voluntary carbon markets, some expressed caution, noting that the concept is still emerging and untested in the context of food donation. These members recommended further research and observation of similar efforts in other states or jurisdictions before pursuing implementation in Washington.

##### Future Research Opportunities

* Analyze carbon credit models in other sectors to assess applicability to food donation.
* Pilot test food donation offset programs in partnership with interested HROs and donors.
* Evaluate the administrative feasibility, verification requirements, and equity impacts of credit ownership by HROs.
* Monitor evolving carbon market standards and eligibility criteria for food donation offsets.

#### Expand Washington State’s Farm to School Program

RecommendationThis recommendation proposes expanding the [Washington State Department of Agriculture’s (WSDA) Farm to School](https://agr.wa.gov/departments/business-and-marketing-support/farm-to-school-toolkit) program to allow grant funding for the purchase of surplus local food for use in K–12 school cafeterias, childcare centers, and preschools. The program connects students to local agriculture, provides nutritious meals, supports local farmers, and educates youth about sustainable food systems.

Incorporating surplus food into the program could help reduce food waste, strengthen the local economy by creating new markets for unsold produce, and provide an added layer of food security for students across the state.

Consensus Status
Consensus was not reached on this recommendation due to concerns about its alignment with the Workgroup’s core mission—rescuing food at risk of disposal. Some members felt that purchasing “surplus” food does not necessarily equate to food that would otherwise be wasted, and therefore may fall outside the scope of food rescue. Others raised practical concerns about school capacity, such as administrative burden, food safety risk perceptions, and the challenge of integrating surplus or “rescued” food into school meal programs at scale.

Additionally, the lack of stable infrastructure or contracts for surplus food delivery to schools was noted as a barrier. Some members recommended combining this recommendation with others focused more directly on food rescue or donation to improve focus and impact.

##### Future Research Opportunities

* **Clarify Definitions:** Investigate how "surplus food" is defined in this context and whether it overlaps with "wasted" or "rescued" food under state and federal food waste policy.
* **Pilot Programs:** Explore pilot initiatives in Washington or other states that have attempted to integrate surplus or rescued food into school meal programs.
* **Feasibility and Safety:** Conduct studies on the feasibility, food safety protocols, and administrative impacts of sourcing surplus food for schools.
* **Market Impact:** Analyze how grant-funded purchasing of surplus produce might stabilize markets for farmers and reduce food left unharvested due to canceled contracts (e.g., Local Food Purchasing Assistance [LFPA] program case studies).
* **Policy Alignment:** Examine how this concept could align more closely with food waste reduction goals—such as through prioritizing surplus food that is at risk of disposal or integrating food rescue networks with school systems.

#### Develop State-Level Tax Incentives to Increase Donation of Edible Food

Recommendation
This recommendation proposes creating targeted state-level tax incentives to encourage businesses to donate edible food rather than dispose of it. Key elements include:

* **Tax Credits for Donations:** Collaborate with the Washington Department of Revenue to establish tax credits (or deductions) for businesses that donate edible food to hunger relief organizations (HROs), making donation financially preferable to disposal.
* **Cover Donation-Related Costs:** Allow businesses to claim tax credits or deductions for eligible expenses such as storage, transportation, and labor involved in food donation.
* **Incentivize Waste Reduction Investments:** Offer tax incentives to businesses that invest in food donation infrastructure or participate in waste prevention training aligned with state goals.
* **Broaden Eligibility:** Expand program eligibility to include small businesses, senior care facilities, and convenience stores, while ensuring donations meet nutritional guidelines.
* **Streamline Processes:** Simplify the tax incentive application and documentation process to increase participation, particularly among small and mid-sized businesses.

Consensus StatusThe Workgroup did not reach consensus on this recommendation. While many members supported the potential of tax policy to drive donation behavior, concerns were raised in several areas:

* **Systemic Incentives:** Some members expressed concern that tax incentives could unintentionally encourage overproduction by rewarding ongoing food surplus, instead of addressing the root causes of waste.
* **Effectiveness of Tax Benefits:** There was skepticism about the value of state tax credits or deductions, especially since disposal costs already incentivize donations for some businesses. Tax deductions in particular may disproportionately benefit higher-income companies and may not be meaningful to smaller or low-margin businesses.
* **Administrative and Equity Concerns:** Members raised concerns about allowing third-party transportation costs as charitable deductions and emphasized the need to ensure donated food meets nutritional standards. Some felt the proposal would not directly benefit Hunger Relief Organizations or address the cost burdens they bear in handling surplus food.

Future Research OpportunitiesTo strengthen the policy framework and address concerns, the following areas merit further study:

* **Tax Credit Design:** Explore the relative effectiveness and equity implications of tax credits vs. deductions. Credits tend to offer broader benefits across business sizes and income brackets.
* **Impact Evaluation:** Study models from other states (e.g., California’s transportation-specific tax credit) to assess how tax incentives influence food donation volumes and food quality.
* **Mitigating Overproduction:** Investigate safeguards or program designs that prevent incentives from reinforcing surplus generation while still encouraging responsible donation.
* **Infrastructure Incentives:** Consider offering tax credits for in-kind contributions, such as food storage equipment or fleet vehicles, which may have longer-term benefits for donation logistics.
* **Administrative Simplicity:** Assess best practices for minimizing the burden of tax incentive compliance, particularly for small businesses.

#### Support HROs in Managing Inedible Food by Reducing Waste Management Burdens

RecommendationAs food donation increases, Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) often receive food that is inedible, spoiled, or otherwise unsuitable for redistribution. Managing this waste can be financially and logistically challenging. This recommendation proposes a multi-pronged approach to help HROs responsibly manage inedible food through cost reductions, infrastructure improvements, and flexible diversion strategies.

**Proposed Actions:**

* **Explore Subsidies or Reimbursements for Waste Management Costs:** Investigate mechanisms—such as grants or reimbursements—to help HROs offset the costs of increased waste removal, particularly in high-volume donation settings.
* **Develop Flexible Diversion Guidelines:** Provide HROs with best practices and technical support for composting, anaerobic digestion, and animal feed partnerships, allowing them to manage inedible food in ways that suit their capacity and local infrastructure.
* **Clarify Roles in Diversion Partnerships:** Create clear expectations and guidance for HROs engaging in food diversion activities to help prevent confusion or overreach in roles and responsibilities.
* **Improve Upstream Donation Quality:** Pair this recommendation with technical assistance for donors to improve the quality and timing of donations, reducing the volume of inedible food entering the system.

##### Consensus Status

The Workgroup did not reach consensus on this recommendation. While there was agreement that inedible food is an operational reality for HROs and that managing it presents financial burdens, significant concerns were raised regarding the structure, messaging, and potential unintended consequences of certain proposed solutions.

**Key Concerns Included:**

* **Subsidizing Waste Fees:** Several members, including local agencies, expressed concern that subsidizing waste disposal may send the wrong signal—potentially encouraging the donation of inedible food or undermining efforts to improve donation quality.
* **Retailer Cost-Sharing:** Strong objections were raised to the proposal that retail donors help finance disposal costs, especially from industry groups representing small businesses. They viewed this as a disincentive to donate, particularly for retailers already operating on thin margins.
* **Narrative Framing:** The framing of the recommendation—that “much of the donated food is inedible”—was seen as problematic. Some felt this could misrepresent the intent of food rescue programs or harm broader food donation efforts.
* **Local Jurisdiction Limits:** Workgroup members noted that waste collection fees and policies are often set locally through franchise agreements, making statewide action complex or infeasible without further jurisdictional review.

##### Future Research and Considerations

To advance this issue constructively, the Workgroup identified several areas for further exploration:

* **Pilot Projects:** Study local examples where HROs have received support (financial or logistical) for inedible food management to determine replicability and effectiveness.
* **Donation Quality Standards:** Develop clearer guidance and enforcement mechanisms (potentially in partnership with the Department of Health) to improve the quality of food donations, reducing spoilage.
* **Donation Acceptance Policies:** Support HROs in setting and enforcing standards for accepted donations, including the right to refuse unusable food, which could reduce waste at the source.
* **Funding Integration:** Consider incorporating flexible diversion strategies into broader grant or technical assistance programs aimed at strengthening the food recovery infrastructure.
* **Messaging Alignment:** Reframe future proposals to avoid the appearance of incentivizing or normalizing poor-quality donations while still acknowledging the real costs of managing inevitable food waste.

#### Explore a Voluntary State Food Rescue Fund Through a Point-of-Sale “Round Up” Program

RecommendationThis recommendation proposes the creation of a voluntary, event-based "Round Up" program at food retailers, where customers can choose to round up their purchases to the nearest dollar. The collected funds would be administered by the Washington State Department of Agriculture and distributed to registered Hunger Relief Organizations (HROs) to support food rescue, storage, and distribution efforts.

To avoid donor fatigue and minimize interference with existing charitable programs, the initiative would be aligned with key awareness campaigns such as Food Waste Prevention Week, Earth Day, and the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste. This approach aims to generate public engagement and sustainable funding without placing mandatory obligations on retailers or consumers.

##### Consensus Status

Consensus was not reached on this recommendation due to a variety of concerns related to its feasibility, alignment with member priorities, and potential unintended consequences.

**Key Concerns Included:**

* **Limited Revenue Potential:** Multiple workgroup members questioned whether the funds raised through voluntary or mandatory rounding would be meaningful enough to justify the administrative costs involved in managing the program—especially at the state level.
* **Retailer Burden:** Concerns were raised about the additional administrative workload and infrastructure changes this program could require of retailers, particularly small businesses with limited staffing or technology capacity. Several groups emphasized that many retailers already operate charitable round-up programs and should retain the autonomy to do so independently.
* **Public Perception:** Some Workgroup members noted the risk of negative public perception, including confusion about where the money goes and potential backlash from other charitable causes—particularly youth-oriented nonprofits that already rely on these types of campaigns.
* **Equity and Allocation Challenges:** Concerns were raised about how funds would be equitably distributed, especially when purchases made in urban areas might not benefit rural communities, where food access needs may be more acute.
* **Precedent and Policy Creep:** Some workgroup members were concerned that even a voluntary program could evolve into a de facto mandate, adding further regulatory pressure on retailers.

##### Future Research and Considerations

Despite the lack of consensus, several areas were identified for future exploration to determine whether a more targeted or localized version of this concept could be viable:

* **Assess Local Round-Up Models:** Examine successful store-led or nonprofit-led round-up campaigns currently operating in Washington to understand best practices, donation volumes, and administrative costs.
* **Evaluate Administrative Feasibility:** Study the cost of administering such a fund at the state level and whether other models (e.g., regional distribution or private administration) might be more cost-effective.
* **Integrate into Broader Outreach:** Instead of a standalone effort, consider embedding this idea into a broader public awareness and fundraising strategy under an existing initiative such as the Climate Commitment Act or WSDA’s Food Assistance programs.
* **Ensure Local Flexibility:** If revisited in the future, emphasize retailer discretion and autonomy, while offering optional toolkits or templates for those who wish to participate voluntarily.

### Appendix E. Donation Data Best Practices

All questions refer to an annual amount in pounds, if possible, and were identified as data best practices through the Food Center Food Data Hub research.

#### Food Source

* How much was donated from retail?
* How much was donated from farm?
* How much was purchased from retail?
* How much was purchased from farm?
* How much was individually donated (i.e. food drive)

#### Categorization of Donated Food

* Amount donated in pounds:
	+ dry goods
	+ meats
	+ produce
	+ frozen food
	+ dairy
	+ beverages

#### Disposition

* Amount composted
* Amount diverted to animal feed (or others)
* Amount going to landfill
* Percentage rescued
* Percentage prevented
* Percentage recovered

#### Rejected (complete this if food is rejected or refused)

How much of the following were rejected in pounds? What were the reasons for rejection?

* Meat
* Produce
* Dairy

### Appendix F. Letters of Support

#### [Space for letters of support – see the Use Food Well Washington Plan for examples]

1. www.ecology.wa.gov/contact [↑](#footnote-ref-2)