

Re-Setting the Table: Food Rescue Update & Next Steps

December 16, 2021

Watch [virtual meeting](#) to learn more.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

DONATIONS DURING GROCERY RESCUE ASSESSMENT (see [Summary Report](#))

Q: Do you have more detailed information about the types of donated food in each category?

A: There are seven assigned categories for recovered food including:

- Dairy (yogurt, cheese, milk, etc)
- Bakery (breads, pastries)
- Dry goods (canned foods, dry pasta, beans, etc.)
- Meat (includes fresh/frozen proteins including seafood)
- Prepared (includes ready to eat / premade sandwiches, fresh entrees, salads, etc.)
- Frozen (may include frozen protein items, premade entrees oven ready)
- Produce (any fresh vegetable or fruit)

Q: Was the increase in variety of product donated due to enabling more accurate recording of donated food, or did the bins impact the type of products being donated?

A: Both. When we introduced uniform bins to the stores in this assessment, we found that store staff took more care to sort donations by category, which allowed for easier and more accurate recording of donations. We also found that utilizing bins resulted in a greater variety and quantity of food overall, perhaps due to increased staff awareness brought about by using designated donation bins.

Q: Has there been more exploration around unattended drop-off/pickup of food donations?

A: Yes, we are moving forward on a robust recording and data collection strategy as well as exploring innovations on pickup and distribution strategies.

DONATION COLLECTION BINS

Q: Are there plans to explore the use of standardized reusable bins for prepared foods?

A: Yes, prepared foods do require additional measures for safe donation and our team continues to explore solutions for prepared food donations.

Q: Regarding standardized reusable bins, what are the regulations on food safety? We understand that there are liabilities for the retailer if they are not clean.

A: Unlike disposable containers such as cardboard boxes or paper bags, reusable bins can be washed and sanitized in commercial grade washers with cleaning solutions that comply with food safety standards. If cleaned and sanitized properly, reusable bins offer a solution that ensures donations are transported safely. As noted in our presentation, we are exploring third-party vendor solution for bin collection and proper washing.

Additionally, we observed improvements to the donation sorting process, reduced handling of donations, and greater capacity to monitor food safety. Any recommendations for a standardized reusable bin will align with state-wide food donation policies.

Q: How much do the bins cost? Who could provide the labor and the investment for the bins?

A: Part of our work in 2022 will involve researching bins and working with manufacturers to understand the financial costs and benefits of introducing reusable donation bins. Also, as noted, third part vendor selection is already underway for reusables in multiple venues in Seattle.

Q: What was the shrink rate on bins used during the pilot (due to damage or pilferage)?

A: The field testing was limited to test bin usage and efficacy. We recognize these potential issues and are exploring solutions, stay tuned!

Q: How did you work with the grocers to carve out space for the dedicated bins vs. using banana boxes?

A: The bins used in this pilot are designed to stack while in use and nest while empty, so unused bins do not require much storage space. As we explore different bin options, our team plans to work with partners to ensure bins will fit well in vehicles for transport.

Q: Would donors/agencies have a sufficient stock of bins to enable continuous flow of donations?

A: We are exploring a solution involving a third-party organization to collect, wash, sanitize, and return bins to donors. This third-party would monitor inventory levels to ensure that stores have the bins required and donations would not be interrupted.

Q: How would a third-party be funded to wash and return bins?

A: The food recovery landscape in Seattle is vast and complex and includes a multitude of 'hidden costs' such as the cost of staffing and transportation, missed pickups, inconsistent or unreliable product, and disposal, to name a few. We don't have a solution for funding yet, but

we will be considering how much food recovery costs could be offset by adopting this solution. In 2022, we will conduct a business analysis to develop a cost/benefit calculator to better understand the financial impact of reusable bins.

TRAINING

Q: What sort of staff training is provided to stores, and does it include visual cues like posters? What about the tracking or labeling of donatable items?

A: Food donation training for retail employees is needed now more than ever: since early 2020, many retailers have experienced high staff turnover. Our work in 2021 showed the need for more frequent and engaging staff training. We will continue to work with retailers to look at options for developing effective training modules.

Q: Is there interest in standardized food rescue training for food workers?

A: Yes, our team is working with retailers to identify optimal structure and content for standardized food rescue training.

COLD STORAGE

Q: Is there currently sufficient cold/freezer storage capacity in Western WA for food recovery efforts?

A: No

REUSE SEATTLE

Q: How does the Reuse Seattle program for beverage cups work behind the scenes, and has it been launched yet?

A: Reuse Seattle is a public-private partnership among the City of Seattle, the city's major sports and entertainment venues, institutions, small and medium-sized restaurants, and businesses, PR3 (Partnership to Reuse, Refill, Replace Single-Use Plastics), and a growing list of new partners to create practical solutions and standardized systems to help Seattle's businesses and residents move from single-use to reuse. Reuse Seattle is currently focused on replacing single-use plastic beverage cups with reusable cups. The project is rapidly evolving, and systems are being built to facilitate distribution, collection, and sanitation of the cups. Expect to see news from this developing project in 2022. Visit <https://www.reuseseattle.org/> to learn more.

Q: Do you have a resource or list of start-ups/groups that operate bin cleaning services across the US/Canada?

A: We are currently compiling a list and have already contacted several directly.

COMMUNICATIONS

Q: Can you speak more to the communications i.e.: communications horizontally between food rescue organizations and horizontally between retailers to collectively strengthen the system?

A: Establishing strong lines of communication with folks managing donations at both stores and agencies is crucial for an efficient and effective donation stream. We have found a strong interest and need for a platform where stakeholders can access up-to-date information and communicate with one another transparently.

Q: Any updates on creating a communications hub for HROs?

A: Just as various donors have differing types of product available for donation, HROs serve diverse communities with differing dietary and cultural needs. A communications hub would allow HROs to communicate needs and share donations more easily with one another. We plan to explore these communications solutions in 2022.