

*We Don't Waste and Their Innovative Food Recovery for the Hungry; Growth Complications with Non-Profits***Summary of the Case**

On a national and international scale, an astonishing amount of edible food is wasted every day. In America alone, it is estimated twenty-seven percent of the food available for consumption is wasted. In 2009, Mr. Arlan Preblud observed the frustrations of caterers, as they were looking for a way to give their excess food to those in need. He examined the challenges relative to the recovery and redistribution of overproduced but useable prepared food in the Denver area. Mr. Preblud had personally observed excess food production and wasted food at several catered events, and he contemplated how to bring together those people that are overproducing food, and connecting them with those groups and assistance agencies that help those at or below the poverty level. Along with the acknowledgement of this dilemma, he also became aware of an opportunity. Mr. Preblud examined the obvious obstacles and determined that there must be an innovative way to solve this challenge.

The concept of food reclamation from restaurants, caterers, and other food production outlets was visionary and a bit daunting at the same time. However, Mr. Preblud only needed one food service provider to help him begin. He felt that after the first restaurant got in line to donate their soup from yesterday or their day-old artisan bread, then a second provider, then a third restaurant, and over time, Mr. Preblud would have a number of providers of restaurant quality food.

At the same time, Mr. Preblud needed to seek out those agencies that provide actual meals to the indigent, and who may appreciate the donation of high quality meals. Certain agencies have unique nutritional and caloric needs. In the early 2000's, the concept of reclaiming quality food product from viable resources throughout the region to feed the hungry was not a new idea. Similar initiatives had been attempted in years prior, but none were sustainable. (Thang, H. 2009)

Built into the requirements for the success of the We Don't Waste mission were several layers of responsibilities. How much food could they collect? How many agencies and people are food insecure needing this service? How much working capital will it take to keep this enterprise solvent? How can We Don't Waste interact with the various chefs and management teams with minimal involvement in order to identify and pick up eligible food product? It was clear to Arlan that past processes of other organizations needed to be evaluated, analyzed, and reality-based solutions needed to be created to make this community-based program a sustainable success.

**Target Audience**

This case study is intended for any Hospitality or Nutrition-based class that may study aspects of Strategic Management and food sustainability initiatives, although it has excellent applications in Human Services disciplines. While the intention of this instructors guide is targeting all levels of study, instructors of undergraduate students could easily adapt this case study for use in their classrooms. The concepts developed by We Don't Waste reviewed here, while simple, create a very effective method for an efficient distribution network analysis.

**Teaching Objectives and Suggested Strategies**

Presented in this case study are examples of overproduced food, food waste, food reclamation, food sanitation, and community nutrition. Exponential growth is examined, and the impact on the local community is measured. Distribution logistics weigh heavily on operations as does the need to build cash reserves through fundraising.

***Food Recovery and Food Redistribution***

Is there a need for food reclamation in your own community? Can you identify who are the overproducers of food in your community? Can you also identify those who are in need?

***Managing Growth***

The dilemma of exponential growth and increased expenses is critical in understanding how a nonprofit operates. Developing strategies for growth in the nonprofit sector is an excellent opportunity to discuss management issues. These can include exploring new potential revenue streams, developing an annual vehicle maintenance plan, and creating partnerships with similar organizations where potential expenses can be shared.

Should We Don't Waste lower their expectations on achieving such high numbers in food distribution? Would it be wiser to set a goal of only distributing 1 million servings per year instead of 3+ million servings, and lower their labor and vehicle maintenance expenses? Or should We Don't Waste assume exponential growth will continue, and should they develop a matrix of what future growth would look like? A discussion of distribution systems can lead to exploring recruiting volunteers, purchasing vehicles, maintenance costs and volume of food that one truck can handle. An examination of similar systems around the country or the world will reveal multiple types of distribution networks for foods. Other than using a fleet of trucks, what are other ways foods are distributed? What are the hard costs associated with distribution? Will they ever have enough trucks and people to pick up more food donations?

## Cash Flow Concerns

A dilemma that occurs with all non-profit organizations is cash flow. We Don't Waste works on an extremely small budget, and a major repair to one of 2 trucks can cripple the annual budget. What conclusions can be drawn when food donations increase, but cash donations do not? What are other ways to fundraise, outside of the existing fundraising event called Fill a Plate For Hunger?

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, the student should be able to:

- Analyze the relationship of expenses and fundraising donations in a nonprofit environment.
- Evaluate exponential growth, and strategize how to handle growth. Should growth be allowed to continue unfettered, or can you justify when too much growth can be negative towards an operation.
- Demonstrate an understanding of nonprofit food redistribution systems in their city.
- Determine the ease or difficulty in starting a small nonprofit organization, and identify major components to be sustainable.

## Lesson Plan

### Timing

It is recommended that this case study be reviewed and discussed over at least two class sessions. Prior to the session, students should read this case study along with additional readings on those organizations that distribute food to those people at or below the poverty level. Students can be assigned to analyze other metropolitan areas in the United States or beyond. Topics for research and discussion can include:

- What other cities have food recovery networks?
- What different types of distribution means are available?
- What types of foods do other networks distribute?
- Are there any foods that are refused by the food recovery team?

### Types of Assignments

This case is an ideal vehicle for students to work in teams. This case study lends itself to additional research in areas of nonprofit sustainability, the dilemma for food waste juxtaposed against food insecurity, and the feasibility of handling a time and temperature sensitive product in all seasons. Specific assignments and objective can include:

- Do research through the USDA website, identifying the government's interpretation of food insecurity and food waste.
- How many people in your own geographical area are food insecure? Where would you go to determine data like this?
- How do other food recovery operations manage food temperature and sanitation quality issues throughout 4 seasons per year?
- Examine nonprofits in other sectors and investigate how they

raise funds for operations.

## Outcomes of Assignments

Since this case study can be used in multiple scenarios, some outcome competencies could include:

- Students will realize the staggering amount of foods produced in the USA, and the huge issue of food security. The US Federal Government involvement in food growing, distribution and assistance programs are all topics for research and discussion. <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=food-security> Additional research of operations concerned with food growing, distribution and assistance programs outside of the federal government will reveal a vast network of food providers in the nonprofit sector.
- Assessment of food insecurity in your own geographical area could begin with a local food bank. They are the organizations with ties to the USDA that ultimately are charged with distribution of federally funded SNAP foods. (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program)
- Determining governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in food distribution to those at or below the poverty level should lead to an active discussion of distribution methods. One organization, Denver Food Rescue, picks up discarded food from supermarkets and distributes by small trailers attached to bicycles. <http://www.denverfoodrescue.org>
- Other organizations use a fleet of cars and personal vehicles. How do these organizations handle fresh produce, dairy and proteins on a 90-degree day?
- Fundraising in any nonprofit sector is always needed, come in many forms, and is needed to create sustainability in any organization. A cleverly led discussion can examine multiple types of nonprofit organizations, and what different types of fundraising vehicles exist.

*Additional outcomes of the listed assignments can also include the following:*

- Identify and illustrate ways to reduce waste, feed the hungry, shrink environmental footprint, enhance sustainability, save money, access valuable tax incentives, improve sanitation, build corporate conscience, and elevate perception of food sector businesses.
- Analyze the challenges in providing food for the hungry by collecting excess food from venues, caterers, restaurants, and other food purveyors to in turn distribute this excess food to Denver's under-served populations.
- Examine the current processes used by We Don't Waste to evaluate the operational effectiveness of the collection of eatable food products and the re-distribution of this product to the hungry for consumption.

- Explore current state and/or federal legal issues and boundaries (i.e. Good Samaritan Laws), which foster or thwart the movement of excess food product resources from food purveyors to the hungry.
- Recommend innovative and logical answers to the challenges the We Don't Waste non-profit organization faces in addressing the operational and social aspects of sustaining the ability to feed the hungry.

### **Key Points for Discussion**

Based on the assignments listed, the instructor can lead discussions and debates in several areas. There are several issues worthy of discussion when considering the current and future situation of We Don't Waste:

- Organizational structure; review We Don't Waste's growth from the beginning, and their future and potential growth. Is it similar to other nonprofit entities?
- Exponential donations of over-produced food; Lead a discussion of figures 1, 2 and 3, representing the exponential growth of this nonprofit for 6 years. Do other food-related nonprofits have similar or stagnated growth?
- Distribution obstacles; How is it determined which agency gets what food items? A discussion regarding types of foods donated, and foods needed by specialized agencies dealing with food insecure individuals should reveal agencies dealing with people dealing with a variety of illnesses and immunity-related issues. How do the poor get good nutrition?
- Infrastructure issues; who are the agencies We Don't Waste serves? (website research)
  - What agencies in your city would be on a list like that?
  - Who are the food donors? (website research)
  - What providers in your city would be on a list like that?
- Community Nutrition. How do the poor access nutritious foods? A discussion of the types of foods that a Food Bank distributes is warranted. What types of proteins are distributed by your local food bank? Fruits? Vegetables? Fresh dairy? Baked goods? Have the class either do research or create a service learning class at a local food bank to learn what is and what is not distributed.

Dealing with exponential growth; is controlling growth an issue for We Don't Waste? With We Don't Waste's donations of food increasing yearly, what effect would that have on their annual operating budget? Their staff? Their vehicles?

- Should fiscal restraint be used to limit expenses and growth, or should growth and fundraising continue to rise? Create a discussion on We Don't Waste's escalating payroll budget.
- Community nutrition and sanitation; what key points need to be considered when handling product sanitation from storage,

then pick up and through to delivery?

### **Instruction**

This case study can be taught in a variety of ways. For example, time permitting, three separate class periods could be utilized to address the above discussion questions and topics. A class trip to a food bank would be advantageous. Alternatively, one class period could address all three questions and topics, and each topic could be divided among groups. Regardless, each area of discussion requires at least 60 minutes to explore, discuss, and synthesize results. This class plan is designed to be taught with the minimal requirement of 60 minutes, however, instructors can expand these sections according to time available, as stated previously. Instructors can divide the class into 3 groups, each taking a topic, or can lead a class discussion as a whole.

### **Assessment**

Students working through this case study can be assessed several ways. One is, before the end of the session, the instructor should require the students to write a brief summary about their own opinions and perspectives on the three main topics. Another form of assessment would be to challenge the student to create a rubric containing food donations, vehicle and labor expenses and determine, can unbridled growth be contained? Additionally, students should be asked whether their own opinions and perspectives have changed as a result of the larger group discussion. Students can be given an assignment to write a report on one of the main topic areas, which defends their respective views on the case study. Students must include three to five references other than those provided by the instructor.

### **References**

- Giuseppe, A., Mario, E., & Cinzia, M. (2014). Economic benefits from food recovery at the retail stage: an application to Italian food chains. *Waste Management*, 34(7), 1306-1316.
- Remley, D. T., Kaiser, M. L., & Osso, T. (2013). A Case Study of Promoting Nutrition and Long-Term Food Security Through Choice Pantry Development. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 8(3), 324-336.
- Roux-Smith, D. (2014). *Food Banks, Food Drives, and Food Insecurity: The Social Construction of Hunger* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Schneider, F. (2013). The evolution of food donation with respect to waste prevention. *Waste Management*, 33(3), 755-763.
- Sert, S., Garrone, P., & Melacini, M. (2014). Keeping Food Alive: Surplus Food Management. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 3(4), 339-346.
- Thang, H. (2009). Food reclamation as an approach to hunger and waste: a conceptual analysis of the charitable food sector in Toronto, Ontario. *Esurio: Journal of Hunger and Poverty*, 1(1).
- We Don't Waste website, [www.wedontwaste.org](http://www.wedontwaste.org)