

# **FOOD RESCUE PROGRAM WILL RESCUE FOOD BANKS FROM INADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLIES: RESTAURANTS' PRACTICES AND ISSUES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated current food rescue practices in restaurants and identified issues for improving or initiating food rescue programs. A survey was mailed out to 275 restaurants in Sacramento County with a return envelope. The response rate was 16% for usable questionnaires after the two follow-up efforts were made. 36 of 45 respondents did not donate any edible perishable products or non-perishable products to food banks. The majority (75%) of them discarded all leftovers and 33% instructed their employees to refrigerate and serve the next day. Reasons most frequently identified for not participating in food donation programs were insufficient quantity of food to donate (73%) and concern about food safety (47%). Results of this study indicate a need to develop food rescue campaigns and promotion programs targeted at restaurants.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the rich agricultural production and sound economy in the United States, hunger is one of our most complex health problems [1]. Based on 2003 California Health Interview Surveys, out of a total of 2.9 million low-income California adults reporting food insecurity, approximately, 88,000 adults resided in Sacramento County in 2003. Among low-income households, approximately 22,000 food-insecure adults in this county experienced episodes of hunger, out of a total of 900,000 California adults reporting hunger [2]. Both food insecurity and hunger are not only a moral issue, but also affect the long-term health and well-being of vulnerable groups such as children and older adults [1] [3]. Food rescue is one creative way to help reduce hunger in America. To date, no studies have been found in the literature regarding specific food rescue practices and related issues in restaurants and school districts located in larger communities where more agencies and organizations that feed the hungry are located. This study investigated current food rescue practices in restaurants and identified issues for improving or initiating food rescue programs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study population was all restaurants located in the Sacramento County, California. Sacramento County includes Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, and Sacramento. The Environmental Management Department (EMD), Sacramento County was contacted and asked to provide lists of restaurants in which food inspection was conducted within a year. A convenient sample of 275 restaurants (every 10<sup>th</sup> restaurant in the list) was selected from lists of restaurants obtained from the EMD. A questionnaire was modified from the similar study [4] that determined food recovery practices by the public school foodservice operations. In addition, a series of questions addressing factors that discouraged implementation of food rescue and information related to food rescue that were requested by non-participating restaurants were included. Demographic information of the restaurant was also

obtained. A survey was mailed out to 275 restaurants in Sacramento County with a return envelope, The response rate was 16% for usable questionnaires after the two follow-up efforts were made.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Food Rescue Practices of Restaurant Participating in Food Donation**

Among 45 respondents, four restaurants donated both perishable and non-perishable foods. Another five restaurant donated only perishable, prepared foods. The weekly amount of food donated varied from 5 to 200 pounds of perishable food items. Foods were most often donated to community soup kitchens and homeless shelter. The majority (88%) initiated food recovery programs to reduce the amount of edible food discarded. Transportation (38%) and packaging (25%) were the primary costs associated with the programs. The management staff or employee (68%) and staff from recipient organizations (50%) were frequently responsible for delivering foods to the recipient organizations. The managers indicated that reducing edible food discarded (50%) and providing food for the hungry in the community (42%) were the most important benefits for participating in food rescue. Challenges faced in implementing food rescue included concern about food safety of the donated foods (57%) and limited knowledge about food rescue programs (52%). Obtaining owner or corporation's support was not identified as a challenge by the programs surveyed that had initiated food recovery.

### **Restaurants Not Participating in Food Rescue**

36 of 45 respondents did not donate any edible perishable products or non-perishable products to food banks. Current practices and barriers to participate in food rescue programs are in Table 1. The majority (75%) of them discarded all leftovers and 33% instructed their employees to refrigerate and serve the next day. Reasons most frequently identified for not participating in food donation programs were insufficient quantity of food to donate (73%) and concern about food safety (47%). The managers without food rescue were most interested in examples of how other restaurant practiced food rescue program (53%). They also wanted to know about food safety requirements for collecting and packaging of food products (43%) and the availability of food banks and other locations to donate food (32%).

### **The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act and Tax Act**

The respondents rated their knowledge of the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act as low, regardless of their participation. None of the manager reported being very knowledgeable about the Act. The majority answered they had never heard of the Food Donation Act (78%) and the Tax Act (85%).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Results of this study indicate a need to develop food rescue campaigns and promotion programs targeted at restaurants. Even though most restaurant managers are effective in forecasting production requirements and have implemented strategies to reduce waste and costs, leftovers often still occur. Food rescue provides several benefits to donors and their communities. Restaurants can save money by donating leftover, outdated or slightly damaged (but still edible) food to local food banks. It will enhance restaurants' public image [5]. There are tax savings for farmers, food manufacturers, retailers, foodservice operators, and others that donate food. While individual restaurant may have a small quantity to donate, each donation can make a significant contribution toward reducing hunger in communities when combined with other donations. Food rescue reduces waste going to landfills and

decreases the costs and environmental impact of solid waste disposal. The results of this study can be used for developing tools that will assist restaurants in implementing food rescue program.

**Table 1. Factors discouraged non-participating restaurants from implementing food rescue<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	N	%
<b>What to do with leftover foods<sup>b</sup></b>		
Discard all leftovers	27	75
Refrigerate and serve next day	12	33
Freeze food and use a later time	2	7
<b>Reasons preventing non-participating restaurant from implementing food rescue<sup>b</sup></b>		
Not enough edible food to donate	26	73
Concern about food safety (temperature control)	16	47
Lack of knowledge about options available	10	27
Lack of information about the regulations	7	20
Difficulty in obtaining owner or corporation's approval	2	7
Labor availability (sorting, wrapping, etc.)	0	0
Need for special equipment and materials	0	0
Fear that you will be perceived as an ineffective manager	0	0
Other	0	0
<b>Information sources to evaluating the feasibility of implementing a food recovery program<sup>b</sup></b>		
Examples of how other program implement food recovery program	19	53
Food safety requirements	10	27
Availability of food banks and other locations to donate food	8	22
Cost of implementing a program	7	20
State and USDA regulations regarding food donations	2	7
Other	0	0

<sup>a</sup> Non-participating restaurants were those schools that donated neither perishable nor non-perishable foods (N=36)

<sup>b</sup> Respondents were allowed to select more than one choice; therefore, the sum of the percentages is over 100%.

## REFERENCES

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