



食物捐赠 与余量食物



Green Food Bank: Building an Accessible Surplus Food Sharing Network in Your Community

Company/Organization

Green Food Bank

Authors of this report

Zhang Chi and Zhu Feng, School of Environment, Tsinghua University

Advisor

Liu Jianguo, School of Environment, Tsinghua University

Source

Second Prize Winning Entry, 2023 Good Food - University Student Case Analysis Report Competition

Abstract

Green Food Bank envisions “building a food bank network in China” and is committed to the mission of “zero food waste, community sustainable development, and food for all”. It breaks the imbalance between food waste and food insufficiency, and promotes the proper handling of surplus food through activities such as sharing surplus food from supermarkets, foodsaving and foodsharing, and distributing “nutritional food boxes” . In 2021 alone, Green Food Bank has collected a total of 409 tons of donated food that was worth 15.51 million RMB, reducing the carbon emission by 7807.72 tons. This achievement showed a win-win scenario of economic, social, and environmental benefits based on food waste reduction.

Keywords

surplus food, food redistribution, sharing network, win-win of multiple parties

The authors of this report express gratitude to Wang Wenhua, Vice Secretary-General of China Chain Store & Franchise Association (CCFA); Li Bing, Chairman of Shanghai Green Oasis Public Service Development Center; and Bi Wenjuan from Director of Sustainability, Corporate Affairs Department, Walmart China, for contributing to this case analysis report

Case Introduction

Background

Ways to reduce food waste has long been a topic drawing global attention. It is closely related to global sustainable development and is a key route for each country to ensure food security and environmental benefits. Statistics show that currently, global food loss and waste contribute to 8-10% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Meanwhile, in 2021, population suffered from hunger around the world reached 828 million, with an increase of 46 million compared to the previous year. In 2020, the social and economic crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic further aggravated hunger and food security problems.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 issued by United Nations suggests that around 30% of food around the globe is lost or wasted, which can happen at the frontend (food production, harvesting, storage, processing, transportation, etc.) and/or the backend (retail, restaurants, households, etc.). Meanwhile, the Food Waste Index Report 2021 published by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) shows that in 2019, 931 million tons of food waste was generated, among which 61% came from households, 26% from food service and the remaining 13% from retail. Food waste is not only related to food security and resource waste, but also brings tremendous pressure to addressing climate change. In 2013, the Food and Agriculture Organization published a report named Food Wastage Footprint: Impacts on Natural Resources, which showed that the 1/3 global food loss and waste resulted in around 4.4 billion tons of GHG emissions. From the perspective of food value chains, 37% of carbon footprint of food waste occurs at the

consumption phase, despite the fact that consumption only accounts for 22 percent of total food waste. At the downstream of the food value chain, the consumption phase has accumulative effects on the environment that cannot be neglected. The UNSDG Target 12.3 clearly states that, by 2030, the per capita food waste of global retail and consumption sectors should be halved, whilst food losses along production and supply chains should be reduced.

Taking a comprehensive look at the food supply chain, it is not difficult to discover that some food is still edible but not made good use of. Such food is going to be the focus of our endeavor – surplus food. Surplus food refers to food that is not sold for certain reasons but is still edible and free of food security concerns. This includes, but not limited to those that are still within expiration date but fail to meet retail standards for appearance or packaging reasons, pre-packaged food or agricultural products that have to be delisted due to product shelf-life restrictions^[1]. In major developed markets around the world, surplus food has been redistributed to the target population through “food banks”, yet this mode has not been widely implemented in China. In April 2021, the *Anti-food Waste Law of the People's Republic of China* was officially enacted. It encouraged social forces to participate in food donation, which brought about new developmental opportunities for surplus food donation. On one hand, surplus food donation can optimize the allocation of food resources, solve the problem of excessive social resources, and meet the short-term food demands of the population in need. On the other hand, as a fundamental aspect of governmental public

service, kitchen waste processing requires massive municipal investment. Donating surplus food instead of discarding it not only benefits the community, but also plays a pivotal role in reducing resource depletion and carbon emissions caused by food waste^[2].

Green Food Bank is the first food bank and the only authorized member of The Global Food Banking Network (GFN) in China Mainland. Since 2014, Green Food Bank has been exploring local operations of food bank projects in Shanghai.

Case story

Sharing surplus food from supermarkets

Retailers, as a crucial link in the food supply chain, hold a pivotal position that bridges the upstream and downstream segments. They have unique roles in impacting the occurrence or prevention of food waste in other stages of the supply chain (for instance preliminary manufacturing, distribution, and terminal consumption). However, due to issues such as supply-demand imbalance and managerial loss, retailers frequently retain a large amount of surplus yet high-quality and edible food. This excess often ends up in the terminal disposition system, leading to the unnecessary waste of huge quantities of food. Green Food Bank deeply understands this key source of food waste and collaborates with supermarkets to explore customized food donation practices. Among these projects, the most representative example is the pilot campaign of surplus food donation initiated in Shanghai in July 2021, in partnership with Walmart. They cooperated in running the “Food Bank Around Me” project and co-founded the first “National Surplus Food Donation Network” in the retail industry, aiming to explore a standardized, convenient, and replicable mode of retailer surplus food donation.

Green Food Bank fully recognizes the key demands of benefactors and beneficiaries. Through three campaigns focusing on sharing surplus food from supermarkets, foodsaving and foodsharing, and nutritional food boxes, Green Food Bank breaks the imbalance between food waste and food insufficiency, enabling the circulation of viable food, and ultimately benefiting multiple parties. The following section will narrate a specific story about handling surplus food kindly and aiding others through the benevolent sharing of such provisions.

To engage collaborating distribution agencies quickly and reliably into the project, the Green Food Bank has developed guidelines suitable for project implementation in different regions. These guidelines encompass a complete set of workflow and methods for food collection, categorization, distribution, reception, and quality control, alongside volunteer training manuals, etc. With the support of Walmart China, the Green Food Bank developed mini programs and backend management systems, to achieve digital operation and ensure food security is traceable during the entire process^[1].



Figure 1. Green Food Bank surplus food donation program and backend management system (Source: Good Food Bank)

By the end of October 2022, this project has covered 81 department stores and 17 Sam's Clubs across 8 cities in China (membership-based stores under Walmart). Green Food Bank has also established 44 authorized distribution points across 8 cities and recruited and trained 189 authorized distribution volunteers^[2]. From July 2021 to September 2022, surplus food being donated had a total value of 3.78 million RMB, benefiting over 150,000 people.

Foodsaving and foodsharing

Kitchen waste poses irreversible negative impacts on environment and climate change, so Green Food Bank launched the "Foodsaving and foodsharing" campaign. This initiative focused on gathering food that cannot be sold normally from manufacturers, retailers, warehouses, and companies due to non-safety reasons. These items include fresh vegetables, and food for clearance, etc. After ensuring that these food are within their expiration dates, undamaged, and not spoiled, they are then distributed to families in need.

In 2021, the "Foodsaving and foodsharing" campaign distributed a total of 968,422 food items, with a total weight of 285.07 tons and value of over 13.23 million RMB. These food items are shared among low-income families, schools for the children of migrant workers, nursing homes, social organizations, and charity shops, etc. In the meantime, Green Food Bank has also facilitated connection with local charitable enterprises in Guangdong, Beijing, Wuhan, Chengdu, Jiangsu, Shanxi, etc. with appropriate non-profit organizations to resolve the food surplus problems, further validating the scalability of this mode of

operation.

Nutritional food boxes

In the process of promoting surplus food donation, it is often discovered that beneficiaries struggle to afford a living due to grandparent led- childcare, severe illnesses, disability, unemployment, etc. To address this issue, Green Food Bank visited families to collect information, and regularly supplied families in need with charity food bags after verification. These packages usually include daily essentials, like rice, oil, noodles, grains, supplemented with donated items such as milk powder and honey, to alleviate their survival crisis.



Figure 2. Distribution site of nutritional food boxes
(Source: Green Food Bank)

This initiative continued to advance in 2021, with regular monthly home deliveries of food packages to sustain the basic needs of 228 fixed-assistance households in Shanghai. Additionally, in regions such as Nanchang, Huangmei, Suqian, Xianyang, and Shenzhen, Oasis has provided cumulative assistance to 2,288 households, distributing a total of 4,700 food packages.

Addressing the Good Food Pledge



Waste Reduction:

Surplus food donation bridges food waste and food insufficiency, directing originally discarded food to more suitable places. It directly curtails food waste by its redistribution.



Food Education:

Surplus food donation presents diverse concepts regarding food waste reduction to the public during donation activities, building a more wholesome and sustainable social trend.

Results and Impacts

By 2021, Green Food Bank has saved a total of 1298.1 tons of surplus food by collection and redistribution, with a total cost of 70 million RMB. It aided a total of 3.34 million people and reduced around 24.8 thousand tons of carbon emissions. Just within 2021, it saved 409 tons of surplus food that together was worth 15.51 million RMB, aided 1258327 individuals, and curtailed the carbon emission by 7807.72 tons. From 2014 to 2021, the annual amount of saved food increased from 30 tons to 409 tons. This reflected that Green Food Bank was rapidly developing in saving surplus food, accompanied by a rapid increase in corresponding economic, environmental, and social benefits.

In 2021, Green Food Bank coordinated and organized 552 volunteering activities, attracting 9191 people participations. Its multimedia publicity surpassed over 100,000 engagements, with media reports reaching as many as over 250 thousand viewings. Green Food Bank has been awarded global top 12 in “Alibaba Global Charity Partners” and one of “Ten Charity Projects with the Highest Potential in Shanghai”, etc.

Future prospect

Currently, influenced by traditional notions, food for clearance remains relatively unacceptable to people. On the other hand, being concerned about the risks to food safety and enterprise social images in food donations, there has not been self-motivated and widespread participation in donation projects from the retailers. As a result, third-party organizations, exemplified by Green Food Bank, can make full use of its rich experience and comprehensive management system to serve as the key force to overcome barriers against implementing food donation. In addition, to further expand the market size of surplus food donation in the future, support from policies and the market environment is also required, together with the widespread engagement of diverse parties involved in the donation network. Considering the uncertainties around donation sources and item types, the present donation food bags have not been able to fulfill personalized delivery demands and ideal nutrition compositions. There could be further consideration of including AI and big data technologies to achieve dynamic monitoring of data and optimization of response strategies throughout the entire donation process, to achieve more efficient and reasonable supply-demand liaison.

Discussion

The Green Food Bank has led the construction of a surplus food donation network, targeting the critical needs of food suppliers and customers. It breaks the imbalance between food waste and food insufficiency; proposes a new paradigm of reducing food waste from the origin. This lays the foundation for the establishment of a comprehensive household waste processing system, with a pyramidal structure of “Prevention→Recycling→Recovery→Terminal processing”, in China.

The case study will focus on the following three key questions to analyze the main factors leading to the success of Green Food Bank. It aims to extract actionable guidelines that can be used for reference in a wider context. This helps to further engage different aspects of social resources and forces to participate in reducing food waste and promote a comprehensive low-carbon transformation of industries.

- Why is surplus food donation favored over other disposal methods?
- How does Green Food Bank ensure the effective implementation of surplus food donation?
- What are the benefits of surplus food donation, and what are the roles of multiple parties?

Case Analysis

Why is surplus food donation favored over other disposal methods?

Compared with traditional measures of terminal disposition, transferring edible food that might potentially be wasted to terminals of higher productivity, such as redistribution, animal feed, or biomaterial or biochemical processing, can yield significant social, economic, and environmental benefits. Among various strategies, food redistribution is given a higher priority, with surplus food donation being a representative method of this strategy.



Figure 3. Hierarchical Framework for Mitigating Food Waste (Source: The Waste and Resources Action Programme, WRAP)

Surplus food donation redistributes food, which would otherwise be destined for terminal disposition, to people in need. On one hand, this approach effectively reduces the initial demand for food production, thus eliminating resource and energy consumption and greenhouse gas emission during manufacturing. On the other hand, this

avoids the environmental impacts of traditional food disposition techniques, ultimately achieving “bilateral” environmental benefits.

Currently, the USA, EU, and other developed countries all have launched food donation campaigns exemplified by “food banks”. Corresponding research and papers have been conducted to evaluate the environmental and economic benefits of these activities.

Here, this report has conducted literature review to summarize some representative research findings for the benefit of our readers. Federico Sulis and colleagues conducted a life-cycle assessment (LCA) of the CEAGESP food donation center in São Paulo, Brazil. They found that food donation is more environmentally friendly than direct landfill or incineration for power generation. Compared to landfill, food donation lowers greenhouse gas emission by 140-fold, fossil fuel consumption by 80-fold, and human toxicity by 100-fold^[3]. Moreover, Paola Federica Albizzati et al. discovered from studying the food donation practice of 20 French retailers that, surplus food from retailers should be considered for food donation. Per ton of donated food results in 3 tons of reduction in CO₂ emission, while generating 40-400 euros of economic revenue^[4]. Niina Sundin et al. studied a Swedish non-profit organization The Waste and Resources Action Programme, WRAP (UCM) and discovered that food donation can be viewed as a transformation system, in which the economic value of food from retailers is transferred and transformed from food bag center to environmental, economic, and social benefits^[5]. Aside from all these, surplus food donation will also facilitate enterprises to take targeted actions,

set sustainable development goals, and increase waste reduction opportunities in their operation systems and entire supply chains, to help them establish images as sustainable businesses.

How did Green Food Bank ensure the effective implementation of surplus food donation?

Currently, safety concerns and risks for enterprise social images are critical limiting factors for companies to engage in food donation, and more importantly, for further expansion of the market size of surplus food donation. Based on practical experience, Green Food Bank proposes the “Triple Food Inspection System”, offering a practical solution to this challenge.

The system recommends three food safety inspections across the process of donation, including self-assessment during enterprise food collection (by donating companies), during food collection of third-party charity organizations (referring to Green Food Bank here) from donating companies, and during food distribution (by distributing agents or volunteers). The aim is to report damaged items among surplus food that have not undergone safety checks, which are then transferred to terminal disposition. Through triple spot checks, the responsibilities for food safety are clearly attributed, leading to timely and accurate avoidance of food safety risks.

Referring to published data from Walmart China, the research team further clarifies the donation standard of food categories involved: to ensure the timely distribution of “surplus food”, for fruits, vegetables, and fresh food not suitable for long-term storage, Green Food Bank requires secondary distribution agents to complete rolling out the same day as collection; for pre-packaged food that has not passed the expiration date, distribution should be within 1 month of collection in theory;

Near-expiry pre-packaged food products that need to be distributed within 2-3 days of receipt should be consumed by beneficiaries before the expiration date. To further elevate donation efficiency and accuracy of quality checks, the project team developed a WeChat mini program, which is centrally managed and operated by Green Food Bank, to track the delivery and timing of donated food items. Compared to traditional donation strategies, digitized and smart operation methods enable precise specialization and supervision of the entire process of donation, effectively increasing donation efficiency and ensuring attribution of responsibilities for food security, while reducing the communication costs among different parties.

Beyond the strict food safety monitoring procedures, human factors are critical to the success of surplus food donation. According to official statistics, donation activities involved around 9191 volunteers. They participated in distributing nutritional food boxes, visiting beneficiaries, and conducting surveys on food satisfaction. These volunteers are deeply integrated into each phase of the donation process to engage, observe, provide feedback, and advertise. Through their actions, volunteers play a vital role in spreading the spark of sustainable dietary habits and broadly disseminating emerging concepts like surplus food and food banks.

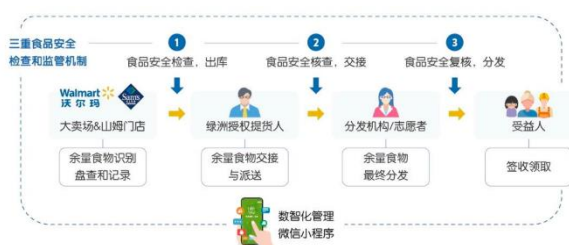


Figure 4. Schematic showing the triple food security spot check system (Source: Walmart China)

What are the benefits of surplus food donation, and what are the roles of multiple parties?

The food donation embraced by Green Food Bank transcends the traditional boundaries between “consumption” and “waste”. It transforms from the traditional mode “resource acquisition-consumption-disposition” of food to “resource reuse and recovery”, and engages suppliers and customers to advance towards a “circular economy”.

Given the context, what impact does this donation model actually have? In this segment of the case study, using the “Surplus Food Donation” project jointly carried out by Green Food Bank and Walmart, a comprehensive benefit evaluation is conducted based on published data from the two enterprises. The results are presented below:

Economic benefits

From July 2021 to September 2022, Green Food Bank processed and allocated “surplus food” from Walmart, valued at 3.78 million RMB in total. This initiative not only conserved economic resources in the food production phase but also circumvented the costs associated with the transportation and disposal of these food items as waste.

Environmental benefits

Environmental benefits were calculated using two methods provided by Walmart. The first one was based on food price^[6], resulting in 441 tons carbon emission reduction. The other one was based on food weight^[7], indicating carbon emission was reduced by around 570 tons. These calculations demonstrate there has been a prominent reduction in carbon emission. In addition to carbon emission, water used for producing and

processing these food items, is equal to 2.5 million cubic meters of surface and ground water^[8].

Surplus food donation can effectively conserve water resources, minimize the spoilage and deterioration of food waste, and reduce the likelihood of attracting insects and spreading contagious diseases, thereby protecting the outlook and hygiene of the cities.

Social benefits

Since the initiation of the project, it has benefited over 150,000 individuals. This project promoted collaboration among communities, social organizations, and enterprises, combined the power of multiple parties to construct a new ecosystem of social resource integration. This, in turn, had enhanced grassroots community governance capabilities and fostered a harmonious philanthropic atmosphere within the community. Simultaneously, it had resolved the food demands of the beneficiaries, ensured comprehensive nutritional needs were met, and encouraged neighboring residents to continue the spirit of sharing sha.

To sum up, surplus food donation effectively broke the imbalance between food waste and food shortage, ultimately achieving economic, social, and environmental benefits.

However, the implementation of surplus food donation has its particularity and complexity. While ensuring food safety, how to realize optimization of management cost, precision of supply-demand liaison, and maximization of food circulation efficiency, are the major challenges faced when scaling up the market of surplus food donation. In the Practice Guide for Retail Enterprises on Conducting Surplus Food Donation, which was co-authored by members of our case study team, the research team summarizes the

successful practice of Green Food Bank as the following paradigm (Figure 5):

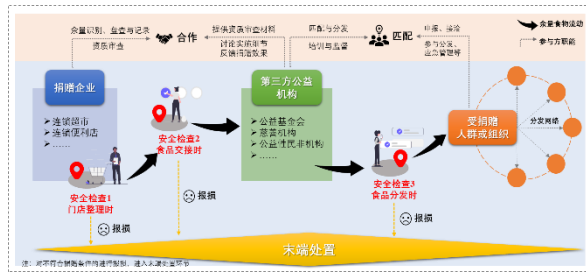


Figure 5. Schematic showing the surplus food donation paradigm for reference (Source: China Chain-Store & Franchise Association)

This model pertains to a specific approach in which donating enterprises, subsequent to identifying surplus food within their operational scope that is suitable for donation, engage third-party charitable organizations. These organizations are responsible for the regular distribution of surplus food to matching recipient organizations. Throughout the process, third-party charity organizations, such as Green Food Bank, can rely on flexible networks to organize workers or recruit volunteers for food distribution, or further collaborate with secondary organizations to complete food distribution.

This paradigm can be further refined as a mega-cycle of surplus food donation, involving “donating enterprises → third-party charity organizations (including subordinate or entrusted secondary distributing agents) → the reception party”. In the course of the donation, each party assumes different roles:

Donating enterprises

Mainly responsible for identifying food items suitable for donation, confirming their quantities and categories, and ensuring proper storage and cataloging. In the meantime, they collaborate with third-party charity organizations to determine the

delivery and distribution procedures of the donated foods, with a focus on monitoring the destination of the donations. Each donating enterprise can consider including surplus food donation into their own operation framework based on comprehensive factors, such as their business scales, product types, market impact, whether they belong to franchise businesses, etc.

Third-party charity organizations

Mainly responsible for examining the suitability of the donation recipients. The decisions should be made after thorough consideration of the alignment between the target audience and the preferences of the donating companies. In cases where donating enterprises have specific preferences, third-party charity organizations can assist in the identification and evaluation of the reception party. Meanwhile, third-party charities should also be responsible for the training, management, and supervision of secondary distribution agents, volunteers, or workers. Ultimately, they should provide feedback on the results of the donation to the corresponding enterprises.

Secondary distribution agents

Mainly be responsible for distributing, documentation, providing feedback, etc. on donated food.

Dimensional analysis: levers of change employed in the case

Food production and supply	Conservation	Surplus food donation promotes the notion of thriftiness, making good use of food rather than casually discarding them, to reduce carbon emissions.
	Livelihoods	Surplus food donation meets the beneficiaries' food and nutrition demands and also encourages neighboring residents to continue the spirit of sharing kindness. There are four groups of beneficiaries targeted by surplus food donation: Group One, families with underage minors facing difficulties due to unanticipated accidents; Group Two, people under subsistence allowance, mandatory insurance, and the disabled population covered by the governmental security system; Group Three, other disadvantaged populations in need; Group Four, people who adopt the concepts of food banks and who are willing to accept surplus food to reduce waste.
Food environment	Policies and Regulations	In terms of food supply-demand liaison, the national government encourages "the Civil Affairs Bureaus, Administrations of Market Regulation, etc., in local municipal governments above the county level to establish liaison systems regarding donation demands and to guide food manufacturers and retailers to donate food to agencies or individuals involved in social, charity, or relief organizations". Meanwhile, the national government also "encourages social forces to participate in food donation activities. Internet and information service providers can construct platforms to facilitate food donation etc."
	Food Safety	Surplus food donation involves one security inspection in each of the three processes of donation, transportation, and distribution, which effectively enhances food safety.
	Accessibility	Surplus food donation adopts digital tools to improve management efficiency, connecting with distribution agents and volunteers through WeChat mini programs. The volunteers have been specifically trained to develop relatively high food safety awareness and distribution efficiency.
	Social norms	By organizing volunteering activities, Green Food Bank enhanced its social impact. This has enabled more people to

		know about surplus food donation and become self-motivated to participate in this practice, creating a beneficial social trend.
Food demand	Information and education	Through volunteering activities, media advertisement, food distribution, etc., Green Food Bank promoted the notions of wholesome and sustainable consumption, calling for more people to accept surplus food.
	Product experience	Green Food Bank took into consideration the demands for healthy diets, aiming to provide more suitable, nutritious, and personalized food bags.

Addressing the pillars of sustainable development

PEOPLE Nourishing everyone for health and wellbeing	Surplus food donation benefits the disadvantaged population and ensures their food and nutrition needs, facilitating a benevolent social atmosphere.
PLANET Producing in harmony with nature	Surplus food waste is avoided by effective redistribution and reuse, contributing positively to reducing pollution and carbon emissions and environmental protection.
PROSPERITY Inclusive, transformative and equitable recovery for the 2030 Agenda	Surplus food donation reduces food waste, which is beneficial for reducing operation costs for companies, indirectly promoting the improvement of business management efficiency. Green Food Bank has assisted 334 food manufacturers to save 1887 tons of surplus food, with a total value of 75.92 million RMB.



The rigor and standardized management of food safety is a highlight of the ‘surplus food donation’ project. From internal employee management to the liaison with each external collaborators and recipients, it is possible to identify the key notes across the entire operational workflow, which is supplemented by clear liaison procedures and scientific risk assessment process. The cooperative effort of Green Food Bank and Walmart provided precious knowledge for enterprises in the industry, which is going to have positive impacts on engaging different parties into surplus food donation.^[2]

Wang Wenhua

Vice Secretary-General, China Chain-Store & Franchise Association; Director General, China Sustainable Consumption Roundtable

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Afterword

September 2025

The year 2024 marks the tenth full year that Green Food Bank has been dedicated to the cause of zero food waste and sustainable community development. Over the past decade, Green Food Bank has rescued a total of 8,159.15 tons of food, with a total value exceeding 214 million yuan, benefiting over 9.25 million people and reducing carbon emissions by more than 15,000 tons. In the journey to combat food waste and hidden hunger, every act of goodwill is transforming into tangible change. Additionally, Green Food Bank has successfully incubated seven partner organizations across multiple cities, further expanding the warm network of surplus food sharing.

Looking ahead, Green Food Bank plans to introduce innovative technologies, deepen interactions and connections with communities, and expand collaboration models with businesses and organizations, continuing its efforts to build a healthier and more equitable world.