



Organic Materials Management

Fresno Metro Ministry Food Rescue Case Study

With financial backing from CalRecycle, a group of students and volunteers is rescuing fresh, healthy food for quick delivery to communities in the Fresno area.

Keith Bergthold and his team at the [Fresno Metro Ministry](#) are starting the Food to Share network, which addresses hunger by gathering healthy food that would have otherwise gone to the landfill and instead delivering it to needy communities. The ministry is teaming up with Colony Energy Partners, which is building an anaerobic digester to recycle food waste into clean energy in nearby Tulare County. The joint anaerobic digester and food distribution project was awarded \$2.9 million through CalRecycle's competitive [Organics Grant Program](#).

Fresno County has long been America's top-producing agricultural county; the value of agricultural commodities produced there topped \$7 billion in 2014. Yet, in the midst of this abundance, nearly 30 percent of county residents and 43 percent of their children live in poverty, according to the [California Food Policy Advocates](#). Many people in the area, including 45 percent of the farmworkers, are "food insecure," according to the [California Institute for Rural Studies](#). As defined by the USDA, food insecurity means that "consistent access to adequate food is limited by a lack of money and other resources at times during the year."



[Colony Energy Partners'](#) stand-alone [anaerobic digester](#) will divert thousands of tons of food-processing wastes and other discards that otherwise would be landfilled. From this waste, the company will produce gas for pipeline injection, electricity, and vehicle fuels. What was already a compelling project became even more potent with the addition of Bergthold and the Fresno Metro Ministry. Part of the scoring criteria for CalRecycle's Organics Grant Program is to provide benefits to disadvantaged communities, and in a highly competitive grant solicitation, Bergthold's food rescue proposal pushed Colony Energy Partners to the top. While food that cannot be salvaged will go to the anaerobic digester, the Food to Share Network will divert high-quality food that can be transported before it spoils and deliver it instead to needy communities.

In addition to the obvious good of feeding hungry people, keeping tons of edible food out of the landfill results in additional greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions beyond what can be achieved through anaerobic digestion alone. The energy required to produce fertilizers and pesticides, and to grow, harvest, process, ship, and sell food is embedded in that food. When food is landfilled, that energy is wasted. Making sure that food is eaten puts the energy that went into its production to its highest and best use, and prevents the methane generation that occurs when food is landfilled.

CalRecycle's Organics Grant Program is funded through the [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#) and must be used toward projects that reduce GHG emissions. Keeping food waste out of landfills has been identified by the California Air Resources Board (ARB) as an effective way to reduce methane emissions. Landfills account for 20 percent of California's methane emissions, and methane is at least 25 times more potent as a climate pollutant than carbon dioxide. Methane is one of three GHGs targeted by ARB in its recently released [strategy to reduce short-lived climate pollutants](#).

Fresh fruits and vegetables are difficult to rescue; they are often lost to bruising and spoilage. The irony is that farmworkers are among those who are often food-insecure and do not eat enough of the produce they help to grow and

deliver to our stores. Food to Share will soon connect Fresno Ministry's existing service network with businesses that can provide healthy, fresh food to the food-insecure individuals and disadvantaged communities in the Fresno area that need it the most.

The GGRF grant from CalRecycle will help fund new commercial refrigerators, commercial freezers, ranges and hoods, and a cargo van. It also helped Bergthold hire a new program manager, Song Vang, who has begun coordinating the expansion of the network by establishing relationships with area grocery stores, restaurants, institutions, caterers, and farms, and by coordinating the logistics of getting edible but perishable food to the people who need it. These efforts will capture an additional 65 tons of edible food that would otherwise go to waste each year. In the event that some of this food spoils, it will be diverted to Colony Energy Partners' anaerobic digestion facility in Tulare, where it will be converted into energy.

Keith Bergthold, executive director of the Fresno Metro Ministry, spoke with CalRecycle about his food rescue effort.

1. We understand that Fresno has among the worst food hardship rates in the United States. However, it is also ranked first in the production of almonds, milk, livestock, raisin grapes, and processing tomatoes. Can you speak to this from your perspective?

Fresno is the second most food-insecure city in the United States, with more than 24 percent of our residents unable to put food on the table consistently.

One of the main reasons so many of our residents are food-insecure in rural areas is because they live in poverty. In 2014, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 38 percent of Fresno residents who are food-insecure come from low-income households. Many of them live from paycheck to paycheck, and at times they do not have enough money to purchase nutritious foods. Instead, many food-insecure families tend to eat the cheapest food they can find, largely high in calories and low in nutrition. In Fresno County, more than 63 percent of adults and one-third of children are obese. In addition to the lack of financial means to purchase nutritious foods, a lack of access to the nutritious foods grown in the Central Valley is a huge issue. According to USDA, Fresno County has 12 areas that are classified as food deserts. Food deserts are urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. This is why a project like Food to Share is so critical in the Central Valley: It is combating hunger and increasing access to healthy food in underserved neighborhoods.



2. How has the drought changed hunger in the Fresno area and surrounding Central Valley?

The drought in the Central Valley has caused a rise in unemployment. In 2014, UC Davis found that due to the drought, there would be a loss of 17,100 seasonal and part-time jobs related to agriculture with 5 percent of irrigated crop land going out of production in the Central Valley, Central Coast, and Southern California. With the increase of unemployment, more residents are becoming food-insecure and relying heavily on food programs for their families.

3. You have included this food rescue project in the curriculum at CSU Fresno. How was this accomplished?

The [Fresno State Food Recovery Network](#) (FSFRN), which became the first in the CSU system to join the national Food Recovery Network, is a food rescue project created by Dr. Janine Nkosi, a sociology professor, and a group of bright and passionate students who wanted to address food insecurity in their own community and on the Fresno State campus. Their mission is "to unite students at universities to fight food waste and hunger by recovering surplus perishable food from their campuses and surrounding communities that would otherwise go to waste, and donating it to people in need."

Through meetings with Fresno State's Dining Services and Risk Management, FSFRN was able to recover surplus food from the University Dining Hall on campus, and from the Manchester Farmer's Market. The St. Paul Newman Center became a receiving site for the recovered food. FSFRN also created a hot

meal program to provide dinners every Friday to feed the community and students.

FSFRN started with about 10 dedicated student volunteers in the summer of 2013 and grew by more than 40 students each semester. Not only were sociology students involved—students in dietetics, agricultural business, health and human services, education, and physiology also became part of the team.

To keep the food rescue project sustainable, the sociology faculty advisers incorporated the food recovery project in their service-learning courses and offered semester credits for participation in FSFRN. The Agriculture Department incorporated the project to teach logistics, planning techniques, event coordination, and risk management.

4. Let's talk about daily operations.

At this point in the development of this project, daily operations of Food to Share are to expand the network of food receivers and food donors with the goal of ramping up technology and physical infrastructure systems in order to begin expanded operations in March/April 2016. We are making calls and attending many community meetings to identify and generate potential food receivers and food donors throughout Fresno County. We are inspiring people to think differently about food and how they can be part of the solution to food insecurity and environmental issues, whether as a prospective food receiver organization or as a food donor.

5. Who is donating right now?

Our partner, FSFRN, who inspired the creation of Food to Share, operates the student volunteer food recovery program. Current food donors are Fresno State University Dining Hall, DiCicco's Italian Restaurant, Fresno State University Student Union Food Court, Manchester Farmer's Market, and U.S. Department of Agriculture.

FSFRN has worked with these food donors to set up a weekly pick-up schedule for student volunteers. This has allowed them to be consistent in delivering food to their food receivers. The current food receivers are St. Paul Newman Center, Wesley Methodist Church, Millbrook Presbyterian Church, and Bulldog Pantry.

6. We imagine that restaurants and food processors face obstacles when it comes to donating food.

The current model allows restaurants and any other food donors to donate surplus food at no additional cost. FSFRN uses a delivery system of volunteers who are able to pick up and drop off recovered food at designated times and dates most convenient to the business.

7. What can a restaurant donate? Can it be a few pizzas a week?

If a restaurant has leftover pizzas that had not been touched, they can donate as much or as little as they want. Typically we accept items like prepared and unserved entrees, side dishes, baked goods, and desserts. Some items from a buffet if they have been kept at the right temperature. Unopened containers of food, beverages, condiments, sauces, and spices. Fresh produce, dairy products, fresh chilled or frozen meat.

We do not accept food that will not make it to the recipient organization's refrigeration in less than two hours in the "temperature danger zone" (41-135°F). Other unacceptable items include:

- Home canned, vacuum-packed, or pickled foods.
- Perishable foods past a "use by" date, unless frozen.
- Foods in sharply dented or rusty cans.
- Foods in opened or torn containers exposing the food to potential contamination.
- Unpasteurized milk.
- Foods with an "off" odor.
- Foods prepared, cooked, cooled, or reheated at home (except for baked goods that do not need refrigeration).
- Donations from a donor who has experienced a power outage.
- Foods that have been in a fridge for more than five days.

By following these guidelines, it will allow for safe donations of food.

8. On some occasions you get a large, unexpected donations of fresh produce. How are these handled so they do not go bad?

Usually when there is a large, unexpected donation of fresh produce, it is from a homeowner or farm. We inquire about how much produce they believe would be recovered and from that answer we contact the food receivers who we know can handle most, if not all of it. Many times our food receivers are able to receive the produce and distribute it out before it becomes inedible.

9. We know that in terms of fresh produce, time is a big challenge. Food can spoil so quickly. Do you include some refrigeration as well as fast delivery?

Fast delivery of fresh produce to food receivers is the primary focus since they can use it right away or refrigerate it themselves. When Food to Share begins expanded operations in March/April 2016, we will be able to have physical infrastructure systems in place where we can provide our partners with even more storage space.

10. What is next for the Food to Share network?

In the next couple of months, Food to Share will have a new website for user-friendly communication with the general public, special interaction with registered users of the website, and data software integration for measurement, record-keeping, reporting, and transparency. Food to Share just held a rigorous application process with web developers interested in creating a comprehensive website to increase access and availability of rescued nutritious food that otherwise would be wasted. This will go to disadvantaged communities and to increase food-related waste diversions from landfills. Our initial process entailed sending a Request for Qualifications to the top web developers in California, followed by an invitation-only interview with those who showed the highest competence in accomplishing our goals. After the interviews, Request for Proposals were sent with a three-week turnaround for all submissions. Fresno Metro Ministry will review all proposals and make the award announcement soon. We are planning to have the website fully operational with a launch date for January 2016. Our plan is to ramp up technology and physical infrastructure systems, and food donor and receiver partnership networking, and expand operations in March/April 2016.

[Fresno Metro Ministry](#) is a 45-year-old 501(c)3 community benefit organization, founded in 1970 by churches moving out of downtown Fresno to address the social, economic, health, safety, and related issues experienced by children and families that remained in our neglected and disinvested neighborhoods. Fresno Metro has evolved to become a multifaith and multicultural organization dedicated to achieving a mission-vision of “Learning, connecting, and engaging to achieve healthy people and healthy places in Fresno and across the San Joaquin Valley.”

Food to Share is a community food project and partnership that provides unique opportunities to address food insecurity and environmental solutions. This project, inspired by the Fresno State Food Recovery Network model, will increase access and availability of nutritious food to underserved communities in Fresno County and make significant contributions to regional air quality through greenhouse gas reductions in partnership with Colony Energy Partners, LLC.

References

1. According to research from The [Food Research Action Center](#), the City of Fresno is the second-most food-insecure city in the United States. Fresno is ranked second, Bakersfield is fourth, and Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario is tenth.
2. [Colony Energy Partners](#), LLC in Tulare is a recipient of the GGRF grants. They will operate an anaerobic digestion facility that will divert more than 110,000 tons of waste annually from California's landfills and produce biomethane. The biomethane will be fed directly into the natural gas grid via a SoCalGas transmission line adjacent to the property. Biomethane will also be supplied as a diesel alternative to San Joaquin Valley's on-road truck market through a public access bio-CNG fueling station on the property.
3. [Fresno County Farm Bureau](#)
4. [Fresno drought forum is an opportunity for agriculture](#). California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)
5. [California Agricultural Statistics Review 2012-13](#) (PDF, 3.0 MB). CDFA

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