

HOW TO REDUCE FOOD LOSS: FROM THE GROWERS' PERSPECTIVE

A SALVATION FARMS REPORT - DECEMBER 2018

Twenty-four growers from around Vermont were interviewed in January 2017 as part of Salvation Farms' research. The goal was to better understand growers' perspectives and insights into how best to reduce food loss on Vermont farms.

We found that Vermont vegetable, berry, and fruit growers are very interested in **finding new markets for their surplus produce**. Some growers already access these markets, such as selling their surplus to restaurants, schools, and other institutions that are willing and able to minimally process and cook the produce. Others sell select surplus produce to value-added processors, such as beer-makers, cider-makers, jam-makers, and juicers. Overall, there is interest in expanding these markets to be able to sell more of a product and/or other products. Vermont growers are also willing to sell their surplus produce at lower prices to these to-be-developed markets, although are wary of inadvertently impacting their 'firsts' prices in the market.

A number of growers point to the tension between growing good, local products and consumer-buyer desire for cosmetically perfect produce. While a number don't believe the public perception can change, others are interested in **public education campaigns to increase local consumption of seconds, in addition to local produce overall**.

Vermont growers also discuss in detail the current landscape of donations in the state. Many emphasize the often unaccounted for costs associated with donating produce, and highlight key recommendations to strengthen the donation system, such as **more assistance in picking up and transporting produce to donation recipients**. The federal enhanced tax deduction for food donations, enacted in 2015, has not been received by growers as a sufficient incentive to donate more produce.

Gleaning operations throughout the state – where volunteers visit farms to pick unharvested produce and/or transport harvested surplus produce – are taken advantage of by a number of growers interviewed. Both growers who have and haven't worked with gleaners identified a series of ways in which this volunteer assistance could be improved, thereby capturing more produce and facilitating more donations. This includes **increasing gleaners ability to mobilize in very short time windows to reflect their own harvesting schedule and/or commit to visiting the farm at regular intervals**.



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A number of growers noted that certain **growing techniques**, including the common practice of planting more than is needed in order to ensure that orders can be filled, are key areas where food loss can be reduced. However, further research is needed to understand which of these practices are common, and if/how much they contribute to food loss.

Based on the common themes that emerged from the interviews, we recommend the following **seven actions to respond to food loss in Vermont**:



Increase marketing of seconds to restaurants, public institutions, and value-added processors



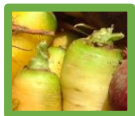
Launch a public campaign around Vermont to educate consumers on the various ways wholesome produce can look, how to eat seconds, and the benefits of local produce



Facilitate open discussion and support research tracking surplus prices and the effect of introducing more of these products into the market on growers' bottom lines



Invest in supply chain infrastructure to support market development and expansion



Increase transportation assistance to help in pickup and transfer of donated produce from farms and invest in storage at donation receiving sites



Encourage gleaners organizations and farms to coordinate well ahead of harvesting season on a mobilization response strategy: either one in which gleaners mobilize in a short time window, or one in which gleaners visit farms on a regular basis



Conduct future research to identify which planting, growing, and harvesting practices are difficult to maintain and that lead to substantive food loss

We are enthusiastic about capturing and operationalizing the ideas raised by these Vermont growers. Their particular knowledge of Vermont's landscape, environment, and systems makes their perspectives and insights the needed base from which we can take action.

To access the full report, please visit www.salvationfarms.org



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