

# City of Carlsbad Food Recovery Analysis

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A report developed by San Diego Food System Alliance  
for the City of Carlsbad: Sustainable Materials  
Management Division



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# Introduction

## Definitions

### **Food Recovery Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations that pick up food from food donors (e.g. grocery stores) and bring the food back to their organizations to distribute it directly to the community. Examples include food pantries, residential shelters, and soup kitchens.

### **Food Banks**

Large organizations that have a relationship with the California Association of Food Banks. Food banks receive large quantities of food from federal and state programs (e.g. the Farm to Families Program), aggregate donations in large warehouses, facilitate food recovery with partner organizations through “fresh rescue” programs, and provide other food access and hunger-relief support to organizations and community members. Usually, facilitating food recovery is one of many food assistance programs that food banks provide. The two food banks in San Diego County are the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego.

### **Food Donors**

Food businesses across the supply chain, including farms, grocery stores, and institutions that have excess food available for donation.

## SB 1383 & Food Recovery

Signed into law in 2016, [SB 1383](#) establishes statewide targets to reduce organic waste disposal by 50% by 2020 and 75% by 2025, and to increase edible food recovery by 20% by 2025. The regulation seeks to address the intersection of three key issues that have historically been independent: climate change, solid waste, and food insecurity. Not only is SB 1383 the first legislation of its kind in the United States to establish quantifiable targets for food waste reduction and edible food recovery, it also includes unique provisions for regulation enforcement and penalties for non-compliance.

In order to achieve this statewide food recovery target, SB 1383 regulations require jurisdictions to implement an edible food recovery program for specific food businesses, known as Commercial Edible Food Generators. These generators are categorized into two groups: Tier One and Tier Two. Tier One generators include supermarkets, grocery stores, food service providers, food service



distributors, and wholesale vendors. Tier Two generators include restaurants, hotels, health facilities, large venues, state agencies, and local education agencies that meet specific size and capacity thresholds. This classification system is important in the development of edible food recovery programs, as businesses in each Tier have different types and quantities of food available for recovery. Additionally, enforcement of the regulation is also dependent on a business' Tier: Tier One commercial edible food generators must comply with edible food recovery requirements by January 1, 2022, and Tier Two generators must comply by January 1, 2024.

The edible food recovery program requirements include educating generators about food recovery options, increasing access to food recovery organizations and services, evaluating edible food recovery capacity, increasing edible food recovery capacity, monitoring generators, and reporting edible food recovery to California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). These edible food recovery program requirements place new responsibilities on jurisdictions who have a limited historic role in the food recovery space and limited staff capacity.

Education is a critical component for the establishment of a successful edible food recovery program. While some identified Tier One and Tier Two generators within a jurisdiction may already be involved in donating their excess edible food, many businesses will be unfamiliar with food donation and recovery processes. Food recovery is often a complex system that involves transportation and delivery logistics, food safety requirements and guidelines, and ongoing coordination between food donors and recipients. Additionally, food recovery often crosses jurisdictional boundaries, adding additional challenges for coordination.



**SB 1383 seeks to address the intersection of three key issues that have historically been independent: climate change, solid waste, and food insecurity.**

# Data Analysis: Carlsbad Food Recovery Landscape

## Methodology

The San Diego Food System Alliance analyzed food donor and recipient data provided by San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego in order to understand the existing food recovery landscape in the City of Carlsbad. Another dataset used in this analysis was the Tier One and Two generator list and corresponding edible food disposal estimates provided by the city's Sustainable Materials Management division.

## Food Donors

The most recent food donation data, from calendar year 2020, revealed that 28 Carlsbad businesses donated food, totaling 626,460 pounds of food donations.

Grocery stores and supermarkets made up 90% of all food donations. Other smaller food donor contributors included wholesalers, Starbucks, and food service providers.



**28**

Carlsbad businesses  
donated food in  
2020



**626,460 lbs**

of food were  
donated by  
Carlsbad  
businesses in 2020

## Food Recovery Organizations

There were 18 recipient food recovery organizations identified that picked up the food donations from the Carlsbad food donors. Most of these food recovery organizations are located in surrounding cities. In fact, only one food recovery organization was identified within the Carlsbad city boundaries. However, there were several other hunger-relief programs identified within the City that do not currently have food recovery programs. 15 of these organizations, called "food distribution organizations" were identified.



### Food Recovery Organizations

Rescue, transport, and distribute food.

**18** Food recovery organizations identified serving Carlsbad. Only 1 is located within Carlsbad.

Example: Brother Benno Foundation



### Food Distribution / Hunger Relief Organizations

Distribute food to community members.

**15** Food distribution sites identified within Carlsbad.

Example: Carlsbad Community Center

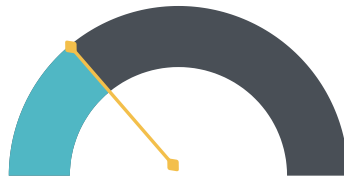
## Tier One & Tier Two Analysis

The City's Sustainable Materials Management division provided the San Diego Food System Alliance with a list of Tier One and Tier Two generators within the City. This list was compared against the food donor list, in order to identify what percentage of Tier One and Tier Two generators already have donation programs in place.

### Tier One Generators in Carlsbad

supermarkets, grocery stores, food service providers,  
food service distributors, wholesale vendors

**20 out of 72**  
Tier One  
generators are  
already donating



### Tier Two Generators in Carlsbad

restaurants, hotels, health facilities, large venues,  
state agencies, local education agencies

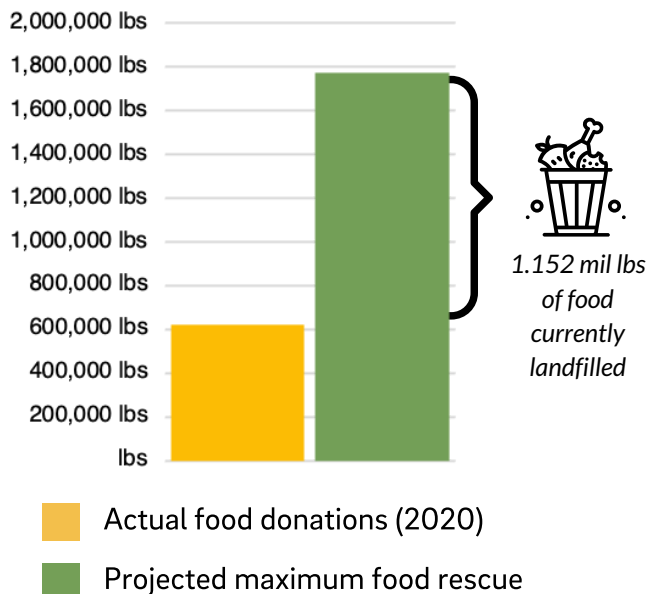
**2 out of 101\***  
Tier Two  
generators are  
already  
donating



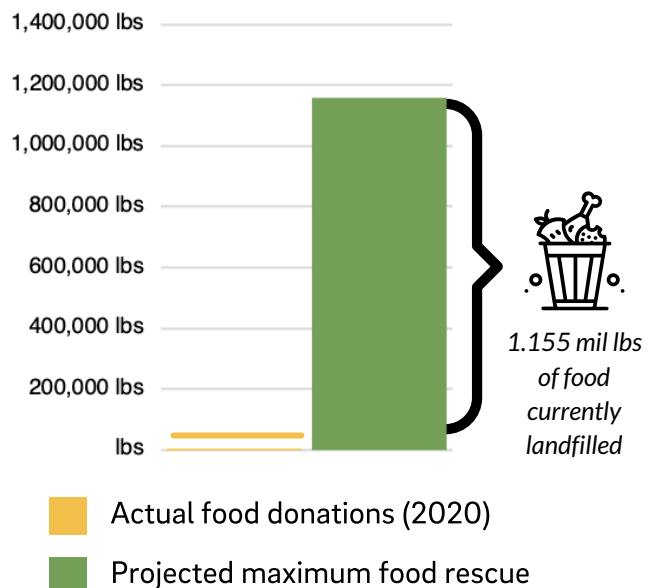
\*101 is considered an aggregate number and not a number of businesses

The San Diego Food System Alliance also compared actual food donation data to projected food donation data for the Tier One and Tier Two generators. This analysis revealed that approximately 2.3 million pounds of currently uncaptured food are potentially available for rescue from Tier One and Two generators.

### Tier One Actual Food Donations vs. Projected Maximum Food Rescue Scenario



### Tier Two Actual Food Donations vs. Projected Maximum Food Rescue Scenario



# Community Voices: Focus Group Findings

## Methodology

The San Diego Food System Alliance organized a series of focus groups for the City to better understand food recovery operations and capacity. The goal of the focus groups was to convene food recovery organizations for a 1-hour virtual focus group, provide educational information on SB1383 food recovery elements, and facilitate discussions on food recovery, with a focus on identifying food recovery barriers and areas of opportunity.

The target audience for the Food Recovery Focus Group were food recovery organizations that were located in the City of Carlsbad, as well as organizations operating in the City (i.e. an organization located in Oceanside that is rescuing food from a Carlsbad business). Based on previous analysis completed by the San Diego Food System Alliance, 18 food recovery organizations met these criteria and received direct email invitations to the focus groups. Follow-up phone calls were made as well.

The Food Recovery Focus Group was held on Tuesday, August 24th, 2021 with the following organizations in attendance:

- Mary Nielson, The Foundry
- Yanira Frias, Community Resource Center
- Ben Meyer, Brother Bennos
- Pastor Ruth Walkes, R.A.W. Ruth Anointed World Ministries
- Kate Garrett, Feeding San Diego
- Kerri Kolarik, Feeding San Diego
- Patty O'Connor, Feeding San Diego
- Kayla Thomson, San Diego Food Bank
- Amanda Carson, San Diego Food Bank

Following this session, subsequent focus groups were held with each food bank individually to better understand the food bank's role in facilitating food recovery in Carlsbad, as well as assess for high-level food recovery capacity needs at the food bank level. These Food Bank Focus Groups are detailed below, and have their own summary of findings in this report ("Food Bank Perspectives"):

- Wednesday, September 1st, 2021. San Diego Food Bank Focus Group
- Thursday, September 2nd, 2021. Feeding San Diego Focus Group

A complete list of questions from each focus group are included in the Appendix.

## Focus Group Findings Overview

The focus group discussions and key findings are categorized within three over-arching themes: food recovery organization capacity, food donor relationships, and food bank perspectives. Within these themes, perspectives that were shared across all focus group attendees are called out and explored in further detail in the following pages of this report.

### Food Recovery Organization Capacity



The logistics and planning involved in food recovery are resource intensive.



Expanding food recovery will require investment in additional resources for existing organizations and new organizations.

### Food Donor Relationships



Donation dumping is an unaddressed burden for food recovery organizations.



Food donors' fear of liability limits food donations.



Open communication is the foundation of successful relationships.

### Food Bank Perspectives



The food donor onboarding process is similar between Feeding San Diego and San Diego Food Bank, and relies mainly on food donors reaching out to the food banks.



Increased food recovery capacity is necessary in the City of Carlsbad.



## Food Recovery Organization Capacity

»» **The logistics and planning involved in food recovery are resource intensive.**

The scale of food recovery differed between focus group attendees, primarily based on the size of their organizations and the availability of food recovery infrastructure. Those with large, refrigerated trucks are rescuing upward of 4,000 pounds of food per day across 20 - 30 donors, while smaller operations utilizing a part-time driver are only able to complete 1 pick-up per day. While some organizations had access to regular, paid drivers to facilitate their food rescue, others relied on part-time volunteers for all operational needs. Food rescue was reported to be planned around scheduled food distribution days, to ensure that rescued food is distributed quickly to the community.

Once food is rescued and hauled back to the food recovery organization, there are significant time and resource needs in order to sort through the food. Organizations must weigh and record the donation, before sorting through the food to separate any unusable product, refrigerate or freeze any perishables, and store dry goods. This process typically takes between 2 - 4 hours, depending on the logistics involved.

Food safety was also a strong consideration for organizations' capacity to rescue food.

“

"We can only pick-up within a 30 minute window so that we can get it back to room temperature correctly."

”

»» **Expanding food recovery will require investment in additional resources for existing organizations and new organizations.**

Many food recovery organizations expressed an interest and desire in expanding their food recovery capacity, but faced barriers with having the necessary resources to rescue more food. Storage space was referenced as a common need, as some food recovery organizations felt that they had to turn down accepting food due to insufficient storage space. Some organizations also cited not having enough drivers, staff, or volunteers to rescue the food, as well as sort the food once it is hauled back. One food recovery organization emphasized the need for volunteers that are physically able to lift, load, and unload heavy boxes of food from their vehicles.

The following food recovery resources were identified as high needs for many of the focus group attendees:

- Refrigerated trucks
- Walk-in refrigerators and freezers
- Storage space and better locations for distribution
- Volunteers and paid staff
- Drivers
- Funding

With respect to the anticipated influx of food donation as a result of SB 1383 implementation, organizations highlighted the need for establishing new food recovery organizations to adequately manage the anticipated food recovery needs of new Tier 1 and Tier 2 generators. They expressed concern that food recovery organizations may become overwhelmed without more volunteers and resources to accept these new donations.

## Food Donor Relationships

### »» Donation dumping is an unaddressed burden for food recovery organizations.

The most significant food recovery challenge mentioned among focus group attendees was the issue of donation dumping. Almost all focus group attendees shared that they regularly receive food that is either poor quality and requires significant time and labor to sort through, or it was moldy, rotten, and completely unusable, forcing food recovery agencies to throw it away.

“We end up with a lot of rotten produce, stuff we can't hand out at all...pretty much everyday. There's times where we've gotten a couple pallets of bananas that are just really rotten, or giant pallets of strawberries that are all completely molded over and there's nothing we can do about it.”

Furthermore, donation dumping puts the burden of disposing this unusable food on the food recovery organizations. For one organization, even with the support of a food scrap recycling program from their city, their food scrap bins can fill up after just 2 days.

“We don't have the volunteers to sort when we get so much bad product, and we also don't have the capacity to put it in our garbage bins because we lease from where we're at...and it's overwhelming, and it's just really a hardship on us.”

There were also concerns shared about communicating with food donors regarding the issue of donation dumping. Food recovery organizations view food donations received as a gift, and fear that making a complaint about the quality of food being donated will damage their relationship with the donor and cause the donor to stop donating any food.

“We don't want to complain about it because they do give us good stuff. For us, we look at it as a form of service work to help them for what they're doing. But sometimes it becomes very overwhelming... a couple times a week, we're ending up with way more than we feel like we should be getting, but we're just so grateful for everything we do get that we're then turning around to the community, so it's kind of a tough spot to be in”.

## »» Food donors' fear of liability limits food donations.

Additionally, focus group participants suggested that food donors may not understand the full scope of products that are safe and welcomed for donation. Food bank partners do encourage donors to provide food across different departments. However, they also acknowledge that the fear of liability, particularly around perishable items like meat or dairy, is a significant barrier to having more diverse food donated.

“We were picking up from a store donating only bread to us, they didn't know they could donate frozen meat, frozen meals - again from fear of liability.”

Additionally, some food donors have corporate protocols for mislabeled or outdated products that require them to send the product back to the manufacturer, even if there is a desire to donate. Overall, focus group participants stressed the importance of providing education to donors about food recovery best practices, as well as the liability protections that are in place.

## »» Open communication is the foundation of successful relationships.

“We have great relationships with our stores!”

“Overall, the relationships are great! I promise you, I love them all. What I do like, I can say, with one organization, is the constant communication. I know for sure at least 1 or 2 times a week, we're going to have some type of contact about what's going on, or what to do...that really helps.”

Almost all focus group participants described their relationship with food donors overall as positive, and communication was referenced as a key indicator for successful relationships. Food recovery organizations established regular communications with the food donors, providing updates on holidays, closures, or changes in scheduling (e.g. running late for a pick-up).

Focus group participants suggested that involving donors more closely with the details and impacts of the food recovery process can help get staff members more engaged. One focus group participant mentioned that they usually interface with the same staff member every time they pick up food, which has helped create a smooth food donation process.

Conversely, challenges with communication were mentioned as a strain on donor relationships. In one example, a food recovery organization had no direct line to call a particular donor, and had to physically visit the store in order to speak to staff.

## Food Bank Perspectives



**The food donor onboarding process is similar between Feeding San Diego and San Diego Food Bank, and relies mainly on food donors reaching out to the food banks.**

Overall, both the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego had similar processes and protocols for acquiring and onboarding new food donors into their networks. Both food banks indicated that the majority of food donors within their networks reached out to the food banks directly to set-up their food donation programs. While some outreach is done on the part of the food banks, the most successful relationships have emerged from donors reaching out directly to the food banks: one food bank indicated that out of 50 outreach attempts made to potential new food donors, they may get 2 conversations of interest and 1 donor fully onboarded.

Some reasons that lead food donors to reach out to the food banks directly include directives coming from corporate offices to establish a formal food donation program, or simply from noticing the amount of waste being produced at their business.

The process for onboarding new food donors for each food banks is outlined below:

- Initial donor assessment: location, size of facility, frequency of donation, estimated quantity of donations/week, types of product donated (e.g. bakery, meat, deli, produce, etc.), what is currently being wasted.
- Training: conducted in person, on site, or virtually. Training materials provided (e.g. date labels, food storage), food donor handbooks, education about liability protections, brand protections, and food bank operations. Food safety protocols emphasized.
- Contracts: formal contracts are held with individual donors (SDFB) or at the corporate level (FSD). Contracts include donation guidelines, liability protections, and best practices for food rescue.
- Schedule Food Rescue: Coordinate first rescue. Determine whether food bank or fresh rescue partner agency rescue is the best fit for future recovery. Efforts made to connect food donors to agencies to keep food distribution local.



**Increased food recovery capacity is necessary in the City of Carlsbad.**

The North County Coastal region of San Diego (which includes the City of Carlsbad) was identified by both food banks as posing logistical food recovery challenges due to the imbalance between the number of commercial edible food generators and available food recovery organizations that can rescue from them. Increased capacity in Carlsbad was highlighted as a need, and funding was identified as a key resource that will be critical to increase and improve the capacity of partnered food recovery organizations.

San Diego Food Bank currently operates a Super Pantry program, which provides select agencies with discretionary lump sum funding that can be used for any food recovery operational needs (e.g. funding, trucks, etc.). Feeding San Diego has plans to include pass through grant funding in their budget, with an open grant program for partner agencies in the upcoming quarter.

The food banks identified cold storage and transportation as some of the largest barriers to increased capacity, and specifically highlighted a challenge with equipment maintenance. Some agencies that received cold storage or vehicles from the food banks were unable to afford the ongoing operational and maintenance costs for the equipment, and as a result had to return the equipment. Ensuring sufficient staff, volunteer, and space capacity is critical before granting equipment to agencies.





# Conclusion & Recommendations

The focus group findings outlined in this report elevate multiple opportunities for the City of Carlsbad to support local food recovery. The City of Carlsbad could be well positioned to offer increased organic waste recycling services to food recovery organizations, to assist with the disposal of unusable food. Furthermore, feedback from both food recovery organizations and the food banks suggests that multiple touch-point educational outreach to commercial edible food generators will be necessary to ensure generator compliance with SB 1383, as well as mitigate the issue of donation dumping. Finally, the City of Carlsbad can also facilitate the conversion of traditional feeding agencies into food recovery organizations, to help meet increased food donation needs.

These high-level recommendations underscore the need for increased engagement between jurisdictions and food recovery stakeholders for successful SB 1383 implementation. Beyond the inspection and reporting requirements outlined in the legislation, the City of Carlsbad will need to take a more active role in working with the two regional food banks, and supporting local food recovery organizations servicing Carlsbad commercial edible food generators.

While focus groups are an important starting point for understanding the food recovery landscape within the city, additional engagements and partnerships are needed to identify more specific engagement strategies. We recommend defining a model for jurisdictional engagement with food recovery stakeholders as an important next step to best support food recovery organizations and expand capacity for SB 1383.

## Recommendations for the City of Carlsbad:

- Offer increased organic waste recycling services to food recovery organizations.
- Ensure multiple touch-point educational outreach to commercial edible food generators to ensure generator compliance with SB1383, as well as mitigate the issue of donation dumping.
- Facilitate the conversion of traditional feeding agencies into food recovery organizations, to help meet increased food donation needs.
- Take a more active role in working with the two regional food banks, and supporting local food recovery organizations servicing Carlsbad commercial edible food generators.
- Define a model for jurisdictional engagement with food recovery stakeholders.

# Appendix

## Food Recovery Focus Group Questions

Describe a typical day of food rescue. What people, tools, or resources are helping your organization rescue food?

What are the things that are making it difficult for your organization to rescue food?

Are there barriers for businesses to start food donation programs? (e.g. fear of liability, cost, etc.)

What are some of your greatest needs for rescuing food?

How would you describe your relationship with food donors (e.g. grocery stores)?

Do you feel that businesses are supportive of the work your organizations do? Can you talk about ways that businesses can be more supportive?

What role do you think the City of Carlsbad could play in supporting your food recovery work?

If you could wave a magic wand, what would your ideal food recovery system look like?

# Appendix

## Food Bank Focus Group Questions

Describe how your organization helps to facilitate food rescue. What is the process for onboarding a new food donor? How long does it take to fully onboard a new donor (i.e. how much time between when they express interest to when they actually start donating)? What about the process for onboarding a new food recovery organization? How are donors approaching you, how many per month onboarded?

Are there contracts/written agreements that are signed during on-boarding? If so, what information do they include? Who is the contract between (donor & food bank, or donor & agency)?

After onboarding, what does the continued involvement of the food bank look like in the relationship between the donor & partner agency? Is there reporting?

Donation dumping was identified as a top issue during the focus group. What is the food bank's experience with donation dumping? Do you have any policies or practices in place to help mitigate for donation dumping that's experienced by partner agencies?

Do you think the City could help to play a role in regulating donation dumping?

Some of the greatest needs for rescuing more food identified during the focus group were: storage space, refrigerated trucks, and funding for drivers/volunteers. Is this consistent with what you hear?

This question is about expanding capacity for Tier One generators. (Tier One generators= supermarkets, grocery stores, food service providers, food service distributors, wholesale vendors). There are 72 Tier One generators identified in Carlsbad, and 20 of those have donation relationships. What role do you think the City of Carlsbad could play in expanding food recovery options for the remaining 52 Tier One generators? What specific actions could the City take? (Another way of asking this question: what would you do if you were in the City's shoes?)

Does the food bank have any plans to expand capacity in Carlsbad?

With additional funding, could the food bank play a role in expanding capacity in Carlsbad (e.g. inspections and onboarding for new Tier One generators, partnership matching services, and technical assistance)?

During the focus group, organizations mentioned that with the influx of food donations due to SB 1383, there will need to be more organizations able to rescue food. What are your thoughts on this?

# Appendix

## Food Bank Focus Group Questions (cont.)

This question is about expanding capacity for Tier Two generators. (Tier Two generators= restaurants, hotels, health facilities, large venues, state agencies, and local education agencies). There are 101 Tier Two generators identified in Carlsbad, and only 2 are currently donating. What role do you think the City of Carlsbad could play in expanding food recovery options for Tier Two generators? What specific actions could the City take?

How does supporting Tier Two generators look different from Tier One?