

Pitch-Distilled Team Proposal

Sustainability Issue: Elimination of Food Waste, Accessibility to healthy produce in Food-insecure and Low-Income communities.

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Description of Problem:

Food Waste and Food Insecurity are issues that plague countless urban communities across the United States. Estimates show that almost 40% of a typical landfill consists of food waste; Tallahassee is no exception to this rule. Businesses who might regularly donate food to recovery efforts fail to do so due to a simple lack of knowledge. They are unable to connect with the resources available to them, and so unwittingly exacerbate the problem of food waste.

In addition, a significant area of our urban core has been designated a food desert. This means that people in inner-city Tallahassee do not have access to a grocery store or fresh produce. These communities face above-average obesity rates and higher-than-normal incidence of diabetes and high blood pressure - such common diseases can be ameliorated and even cured with a healthy diet.

Proposed Solution:

Our team proposes a mobile food market. This vehicle would take the form of an eye-catching, produce-covered truck that distributes fresh ingredients directly to low-income communities. Our goal is to simultaneously target food waste by instituting an easy, regular collection service, and target food-insecurity by providing an accessible delivery service. The program will ultimately ameliorate food insecurities in Tallahassee's underserved neighborhoods and make an impact on public health.

Before the invention of large scale grocery stores, it was common to see a produce vendor, historically called a "Huckster" driving through isolated and low-income communities selling fresh produce and other small wares. Our intent is to invoke a similar sentiment with the mobile food market. Modeled after the classic ice-cream truck, this initiative aims to be at once nostalgic and celebratory in its approach to health food distribution. With an eye-catching appearance and catchy jingle, it will make for an enchanting and welcome presence in the community.

Collaboration

This project will focus on building and working alongside Tallahassee's existing food network in an effort to remedy the growing need for food in North Florida and eliminate food waste locally.

Our model for the truck will source healthy food from a variety of local food recovery efforts. Diversifying our resources will not only support the growth of Tallahassee's food recovery system, but will also ensure supply stability. Below is a summary of our prospective partners in developing this program:

The Leon Fruit and Nut Exchange; an urban gleaning organization that works with local farmers and growers who have excess produce available for donation. Currently the *Exchange* delivers to existing pantries, limiting its distribution to those who have access to transport. Our Produce Truck will increase distribution by delivering food directly to those communities that lack access to fresh produce and to those individuals that can not afford to eat healthy.

Local hotels. Often for sanitation and management purposes, hotel mini fridges are turned over, cleaned and restocked on a specific day of each month to ensure guest have fresh food. According the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, *as of August 2017, there were 422,997 hotel and motel rooms in Florida spread over 4,518 properties.* Our vehicle can assist these hotels in removing packaged food that has not reached its expiration date and absorb them back into the local food stream.

Local farmers markets are a prime location for food recovery. It is estimated that 50% of what is available at a Farmers market on any given day does not get sold. We would like to help move this food forward while helping local farmers recover some lost income. A farmer or a grower who donates excess produce may claim a tax deduction through the Florida Department of Agriculture.

We also plan to reach to **Publix SuperMarkets, Whole Foods, Trader Joes** and **Lucky's** grocery markets (all of whom currently have food donation programs) for weekly healthy food contributions. We have learned that food transportation is often the largest obstacle to stores moving their food forward. Having a mobile market that can drive to these stores on a regular basis will have a huge impact on minimizing food waste in Tallahassee.

Educational Programs & Community Engagement:

To ensure that our project is a success we met with people associated with the Tallahassee Food Network and FAMU college of Public Health. We took time to listen and discuss with individuals working in food recovery in marginalized populations to discuss project-scope and impact. Their feedback indicated three main focus areas: Presentation, Education, and Community Engagement.

To address these needs, we propose the following:

Recipes donated by local residents. These recipes would be recorded as community history, accompanied by personal anecdotes from the contributing families. Because we are addressing multi-generational households, we hope to use this as an opportunity to bridge the generational gap and involve isolated elders. Recipes donated for the educational component could eventually manifest in a fully illustrated cookbook.

Giveaway grocery bags made from reusable, environmentally conscious materials. These would be fabricated by local entrepreneurs. Along with ingredients, free educational goodies would be featured in these bags including illustrated recipes, home-gardening walk-throughs, and tips for minimizing food waste in the home.

Cooking Demonstrations. An active educational component is vital to our concept for this mobile food market. By providing visual and tactile learning experiences at sites where the truck is active, we will engage the community and facilitate an overall retention of knowledge. We can invite chefs from local restaurants to participate, as well as chefs from popular food chains to replicate famous dishes with healthier ingredients.

Celebrity participation and investment. We would like to invite players and coaches from the local sports teams to participate in cooking demonstrations, school visits, and other events featuring the mobile market. This could maximize the scope of the program for the community.

Ride-along programs with youth in community. This will engage young entrepreneurs and help us provide them the model/resources to start something like this themselves.

Commemorative Wall or Mural. The Tallahassee Food Network suggested we create some kind of wall or mural, a permanent structure (perhaps the side of the truck itself) depicting the names of community members who contribute recipes to the program.

Hiring local artists from these communities to create the visuals for the program. Young artists can illustrate the recipe cards and cookbook, local musicians can compose the jingle for the truck, etc.

Distribution point for food vouchers. One of our mentors from the Tallahassee Food Network suggested we collaborate with the Florida Department of Agriculture to collaborate with SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Having our markets act as an accessible resource for food stamps could allow it to bring as much value to the community as possible.

An app to track the mobile food market and other fun online programs to promote healthy eating in coalition with the mobile food market. The app can show where the truck is at any given time, and where it is scheduled to go for the rest of the day. We can also get creative with social media and webinars to continue the conversation.

Biofuel/Alternative Fuel Sources. We would like to collaborate with FSU's bio-engineering program on potential ways to make the truck more environmentally sustainable, as well as technologically proactive.

Deliberate community engagement. The truck will participate in block parties, school meal-times, food drives, church events, and other community gatherings. We want it to be a resource for residents to not only access healthy foods, but also to make their events as special as they can be.

Financial Sustainability:

Grants. Grants from the city, sustainability organizations and the local universities would be crucial to our funding of this project. The more backing we obtain for initial purchase of the truck the more additional revenue sources can cover maintenance costs and funding for educational programs.

Investors. At the advice of our mentors and with the help of Domi Station and Sustainable Tallahassee, our team will compile a list of potential investors to approach with the pitch for Huckster's Market. We recognize a need in Tallahassee for this service and are connected with many programs attempting to alleviate the same problems as we are. With the help of private and public investors, the costs for obtaining the truck and establishing its educational program could be supplemented considerably.

Sales. Part of Huckster's business model is its capacity to sell recovered foods at only 10-20% the original cost. The food gleaned from local growers and donated by farmers will sustain a reasonable amount of income to handle gas costs and minor maintenance. It would also aid us in covering costs as needed for materials, printing, etc.

City Backing. The key factor in maintaining financial sustainability will be collaboration with the City of Tallahassee's sustainability, education and recycling programs. We intend to bring this project to the attention of the city and aim for an endowment or ongoing commitment to adopting and expanding the mobile market. These meetings will also give us some insight for how we can best fit the city's regulations in development.

Conclusion

The potential of this project is defined by its collaboration with as many local organizations and community members as possible. By creating a model that is both sustainable and exciting, we believe this program could become a valuable asset to the community. It is our hope that these mobile food markets can act both as an agent to overcome food waste and food insecurity, as well as an opportunity to connect existing sustainability resources.