



# San Francisco Produce Recycling Program California



*Begun in 1996, the San Francisco Produce Recycling Program is a collaborative effort among many public and private participants—the city and county, produce businesses, a farmer, a hauler, a food bank, and a composter. From June 1996 to August 1997, this program provided 450 tons of edible food to charities, 300 tons of inedible food as animal feed, and 750 tons of food to a composting facility. In that period, food discards came from more than 40 wholesale and retail businesses; the program has since greatly expanded.*

## Program Description

In 1997, the **San Francisco Food Bank** collected more than 60 tons a month of food from 25 wholesalers at the San Francisco Produce Terminal and from other city wholesalers. Food Bank staff collect food in its original packaging, as long as it is at least 50% edible, and transport it in a refrigerated truck to their warehouse where volunteers separate edible food from inedible food.

The Food Bank distributes over 37 tons a month of edible food to member service agencies. A local dairy and heifer farmer collects the remaining inedible produce, which he and other farmers use as **animal feed**.

In August 1996, Sunset Scavenger Company, a local hauler, began picking up some of the inedible produce the Food Bank could not collect from the produce terminal. Sunset Scavengers provided each participating business with a 1- or 2-cubic-yard unlined bin for its spoiled produce. Vendors keep these containers covered to avoid vector and odor problems as well as scavenging and illegal dumping. Sunset Scavengers added 12 wholesalers and one retailer in October 1996. The company began additional pick-

up from seven large supermarkets in April 1997 and from 14 Safeway supermarkets in fall 1997. It plans to expand to several hundred businesses to reach a goal of 8,000 tons per year. In fall 1997, Sunset Scavengers also expanded collection to include waxed corrugated cardboard. It hauls discards to Richmond Sanitary Compost Facility in Richmond, California, where the material is **windrow composted** along with yard trimmings. Finished compost is sold, mostly to professional landscapers.

Before food-related businesses join the program, outreach contractors meet with employees to provide any needed assistance and staff training. The contractor also conducts monitoring and follow-up. For example, at a new supermarket, the contractor meets with the produce section supervisor to devise a plan for the store. As produce workers already separate out wilted lettuce leaves and spoiled fruit into boxes,

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putting vegetative discards in the square container provided by the city is little extra work. Depending on the supermarket's needs, Sunset Scavengers will pick up one, two, three, or more days a week.

## Costs/Benefits

A \$97,000 grant from the City and County of San Francisco provided the San Francisco Food Bank with a refrigerated truck for produce collection and a partial year's salary for a full-time driver. Future grants will help expand collection and make capital improvements. There is no cost to wholesalers for food bank and animal feed services.

San Francisco residents and businesses pay variable trash rates based on frequency of pick-up and weight or volume. These trash fees provide funding for Sunset Scavengers' organics pick-up, and cover the cost of running two trucks (as of 1997), which can accommodate food discards from over 200 businesses.

Benefits of this program are manifold. Food service agencies save money through reduced purchases; they boost the nutritional value of the food they serve. Farmers save money on feed costs. The Richmond Composting Facility produces higher quality compost through this program. Produce businesses save money through lower trash costs as well as through their tax-deductible **donations**

to the Food Bank. The experience of two Produce Terminal vendors—Cooks Company and DeMatti Brothers—illustrates this program's cost-effectiveness to participating vendors. Cooks Company cut its trash bill by approximately 45% within four months of joining the program. In fall 1997, the company received trash pick-up once a week. Previously, trash had been picked up at least twice a week. DeMatti Brothers reduced the size of its trash container by half and reduced the number of trash pick-ups from four a month to two a month, reducing its trash bill by 10-15%.

For the first year, Sunset Scavengers, which also collects trash from the Produce Terminal, did not charge businesses for pick-up of compostables. In fall 1997, it began charging at a rate that is 25% less than what businesses pay for trash pick-up.

Businesses that may have been reluctant to join will have a clear financial incentive. Sunset Scavengers predicts that vendors will reduce their total disposal costs by an average of 10%.

## Tips for Replication

- Place the highest use value on edible food redistribution. When developing your program, work with and support local food donation organizations to incorporate edible food recovery.
- Identify local regional markets for inedible food, including farmers and composters.
- Work with the hauler to develop a collection strategy and financial incentives for participating businesses.
- Put time into working with businesses. Provide monitoring and follow-up. Remind businesses that they reap many benefits from participating, including financial and public relations.

## Program Summary

<b>Sector</b>	Public/private collaborative: city and county government, retailers and wholesalers, a food bank, a farmer, a hauler, and a composting facility.
<b>Start date</b>	1996
<b>Dedicated city employees*</b>	<0.25 plus 0.5 FTE contractor time
<b>Method</b>	Edible food donations; animal feed; off-site windrow composting
<b>Materials collected</b>	Produce trimmings, produce
<b>Part of comprehensive waste reduction program?</b>	No
<b>Total waste generated</b>	NA
<b>Food discards generated</b>	NA

### RESULTS:

<b>Food discards recovered (TPY)</b>	1,500 tons (June 1996-August 1997)
<b>Food discards recovered (%)</b>	50-75% from participating vendors

### COSTS:

Costs and savings for participating vendors are currently unavailable.

\* A dedicated employee is one whose primary responsibility is working with the food discard program. FTE = full-time equivalent NA = not available TPY = tons per year