

Wasted Food Solutions: Spotlights from Providence



Why Wasted Food Matters

Food makes up [35% of all waste landfilled](#) in Rhode Island. Some is food scraps (think carrot tops, bones, and peels) that could instead be converted to carbon-rich compost to restore soil health, or energy through anaerobic digestion. It also includes edible food that could be consumed by people—helping to tackle food insecurity, which impacts 12% of RI's population.

Wasted food prevention, donation, and recycling are priorities in RI, and integral to improving public health and achieving climate action goals. Since 2016, in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI DEM), other government agencies, non-profits, and sponsors like the U.S. EPA, the Center for EcoTechnology (CET) has helped commercial businesses and institutions implement strategies to reduce wasted food.

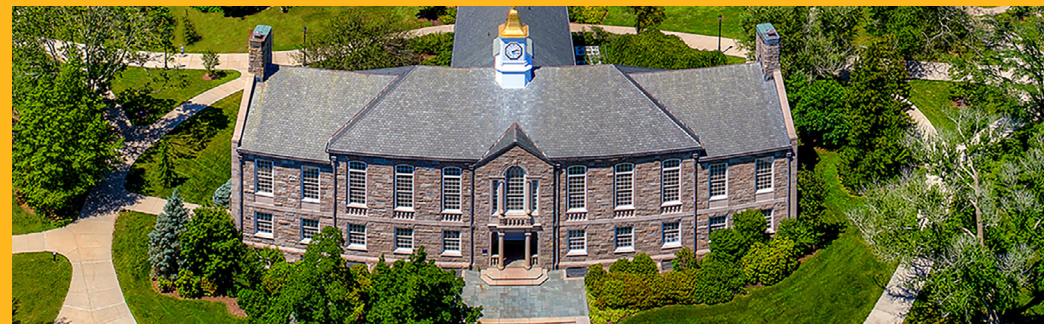
University of Rhode Island

With approximately 17,000 students and 3,800 faculty and staff, meal planning across the University of Rhode Island's (URI) two dining halls, four cafés, and retail dining outlet, means surplus food is inevitable. But thanks to the initiative of URI's Dining Services team and technical assistance from CET, the campus is putting that surplus to its highest value use.

One goal was to reduce excess food from the dining halls' self-service stations, since once served, the food can neither be repurposed nor donated. The solution: installation of cameras on the lines and monitors in the kitchens. Now chefs watch consumption in real-time, allowing them to better gauge when to prepare more, and when to refill the food trays. By reducing food preparation and increasing their ability to repurpose surplus, URI is preventing 10 tons of wasted food per year.

For surplus food, Dining Services forged a new partnership with the food rescue organization, Elisha Project, which picks up excess food twice a week, amounting to 33,000 meals per year. URI also expanded their back-of-house composting program, serviced by The Compost Plant, to include collection of food scraps from students' trays, which has increased diversion by 15 tons per year.

Altogether, URI's combination of strategies across the food recovery hierarchy are preventing 45 tons of wasted food from being disposed, and offsetting nearly **100 tons of CO₂ every year**.



Greater Boston Food Bank, Elisha Project, and Riverside Church

When they got the call from Stop & Shop, Greater Boston Food Bank did what food rescue organizations do when offered nutritious food—they said they'd accept. But 17 pallets of short coded corn?! There was no way they could pick up, store, or distribute that quantity before it spoiled.

That's when they called CET for assistance finding other organizations that could come to the rescue. CET staff made some phone calls and within hours logistics were in order: Elisha Project in Rumford would pick up 13 pallets of corn, and Riverside Church in Riverside would collect the remaining 4 pallets from Stop & Shop's warehouse, just across the state line in Freetown, MA.

"The fresh corn helped feed our community with fresh produce... this category of food is often skipped by low-income families because of its high cost. We distributed all four pallets in two days. Since the initial pickup of corn, we have been back to Stop & Shop three times for different items. Your call created an opportunity for us to grow a relationship with Stop & Shop, who could be a major supplier." -Peter Letendre of Riverside Church

This swift coordination of all parties prevented nearly 10 tons of disposal, and put food on 17,000 plates.

Get Started

Start with prevention: Check out CET's [Source Reduction Guidance](#) to learn how your business can start reducing surplus food.

Donate surplus edible food: Become part of the [Rhode to End Hunger](#) and work with the food rescue organization, MEANS Database, to donate unserved, edible food to organizations who can use it.

Stay informed: CET's [Wasted Food Solutions website](#) includes details on the RI Food Waste Recycling Law and state-specific information on [liability protections](#), [tax incentives](#), and [protocols](#) for donating rescued food, prepared by Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic.

Earn recognition for your efforts: RI DEM's [Green Certification Programs](#) assist businesses with becoming more sustainable.

Feeling moved to act? Contact [CET's Wasted Food Solutions hotline](#) to access free virtual or on-site technical assistance.

wastedfood.cetonline.org

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The information in this document has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement 00A00527 to Center for EcoTechnology. It has been subjected to the Agency's publications review process and has been approved for publication as an EPA document. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute endorsement or recommendation of use.