

Community Ideas Factory

Perceptions of Rescued Food

From Halton Food Agencies



Sheridan | Applied Research
and Innovation



Creative
Behavioural
Insights

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 1

About 2

Core Project Team 3

Project Partners 4

The Challenge 5

The Approach 6

The Results 7-10

Key Takeaways 11

Where Can We Go From Here 12

References 13

About

This study and report are projects of the “Community Ideas Factory” at Sheridan College.

The Community Ideas Factory (CIF) is a unique, community-college-private sector partnership that seeks to foster innovation in the Social Economy by connecting the talent, facilities, networks, resources and capabilities of the College with the needs and the efforts of the non-profit community in and around the Halton Region. Since its inception in 2016, the CIF has engaged more than 50 non-profits agencies, numerous private sector actors, and hundreds of social program stakeholders and Sheridan students in applied research projects on topics ranging from: affordable housing, food security, employment equity, wrap-around programming, education savings, and charitable giving behaviours in a time of Covid. Outcomes of our work at the CIF include: conception and design of new agency programs, policy reports, new data to drive decision-making, agency website upgrades, academic-community conference papers, and numerous academic publications.

For those on the front- lines of social justice work, the CIF is a valuable resource and ally in terms of its ability to mobilize new technologies, equipment, resources and other capabilities in support of beneficial social change efforts. For the college, affording students the opportunity to work directly on applied research projects for social change provides invaluable experiential learning opportunities that allow them to hone their technical skills while simultaneously developing the softer aptitudes and social awareness that characterize global citizens.

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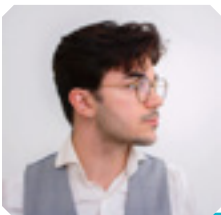
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Project Partners



Food For Life

Rescuing Food. Impacting Lives. Since its inception in 1995, Food for Life has rescued over 30 million pounds of food by collecting surplus perishable food (fruit and vegetables, dairy, meat and prepared foods) from both retail and wholesale food suppliers and grocery stores. They are the largest food rescue organization in Halton and Hamilton.



Halton Environmental Network (HEN)

Propels climate education, resources and environmental sustainability in Halton, by educating and building awareness in our community. Halton Environmental Network (HEN) strives to make the community of Halton a region with educated citizens, engaged stakeholders, and best practice policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and environmental sustainability.

The Challenge

Rescued food (RF) is edible food that too often goes to waste because it is in excess and/or is not ideal for resale. Based on the latest data from Statistics Canada’s Canadian Income Survey, 5.8 million Canadians, including 1.4 million children, in the ten provinces lived in food-insecure households in 2021. A whopping 58 percent of all food produced in Canada — 35.5 million tonnes — is lost or wasted, according to a new report, and about a third of that wasted food could be “rescued” and sent to communities in need across the country. The total financial value of this potentially rescuable lost and wasted food is a staggering \$49.46 billion. The abundance of waste is indicative of a food system that is productive enough to ensure no Canadian goes hungry. However, in practice that is not the case. Naturally, charitable attempts to reduce food waste and improve access to nutrition have been undertaken. One example has been the uptake and distribution of Rescued Food.

Rescued food is an essential pillar in a food system. Using Rescued Food reduces waste, it is nutritious, economical and environmentally positive, is affordable and can be integrated into our current food system. There are multiple ways to utilize Rescued Food. Some possible uses of Rescued Food are human consumption, animal feed and if inevitable adding food waste to existing composts to return nutrients to the earth.

To our knowledge, no attempt to collect and study the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of RF that the leaders of organizations in Halton region hold. In order to mobilize the distribution and increase the consumption of Rescued Food, it is important to understand the perceptions, intentions, motivations and willingness of Organization when it comes to using Rescued Food to support their clients



The Approach

In an effort to best understand the local climate around Rescued Food, The Community Ideas Factory: Behavioural Insights Unit (CIF_BIU) designed an online survey for organizations in the Halton Region. The 10-minute confidential survey successfully reached the leaders of 37 different organizations, with 24 participants completing the survey fully.

In determining the ideal criteria for organizations invited to participate in the survey, it was essential that said organizations have the appropriate facilities to collect and distribute Rescued Food. Whether characterized by the organization's ability to store dry, chilled, and/or frozen goods, any of these characteristics make them significant voices in the discussion of Rescued Food. However, physical space is not the only considered attribute of these organizations. It is just as critical, if not more so, that these organizations display appropriate values in their work with Rescued Food. Not only have these organizations already demonstrated their ability to positively impact the community, but their involvement in Rescued Food exhibits a goal to continue benefiting their community. Ultimately, the organizations involved in the survey are active contributors, ambassadors, and supporters of a Rescued Food-friendly future.

Using the results of this survey, the CIF_BIU sought to understand two key facets of Rescued Food: the general perceptions that Organization leaders have of RFs, and the physical problems that Organizations face as collectors and distributors of RFs. Ultimately, the research conducted by the CIF-BIU is intended to have lasting positive effects, as Food Security Organizations gain insightful results and work to harness opportunities and reduce challenges with Rescued Food greatest problems.



The Results

Is the Amount of Rescued Food the Issue?

A majority of the organizations agreed that the amount of Rescued Food is not the issue. **No organization wanted less Rescued Food**- only 25% said they had “enough”, and 75% of organizations wanted more.

Most organizations are enthusiastic and want More Rescued food, but what’s stopping them? There is no issue in the food itself, and many organizations agree that Rescued Food has a positive impact in meeting the needs of the people.

The Barriers to Distributing Rescued Food

Most organizations cite “logistics” as the barrier preventing them from offering and providing Rescued Food. However, what does “logistics” mean in this situation?

When talking of the logistics in the barriers between distributing Rescued Food- lack of people and storage are major issues. Organizations are challenged when there are not enough people volunteering and helping with distributing the Rescued Food- which causes a block in the pipeline because if there is no one distributing the food then there is no way to really get the Rescued Food to those who need it. The same goes with having enough people to look over and process the food to make sure it is fit for consumption.

Another logistic issue is the lack of storage- which means both space and equipment. When storing perishable Rescued Food, onsite refrigeration (fridge/freezers) are required.

Fridges and large freezers take up a lot of space- and there is the job to keep them well maintained and clean to not let the food go bad or rotten- so a lot of care and space is needed for this equipment. Fridges and Freezers also cost money to buy and keep since there is always the end of month energy bill.

Other than the issue of volunteers and storage, there wasn’t any other consistent cited reasonings as to what the barriers were to distribute Rescued Food- which is good or bad depending on if these are truly the only two issues for organizations.

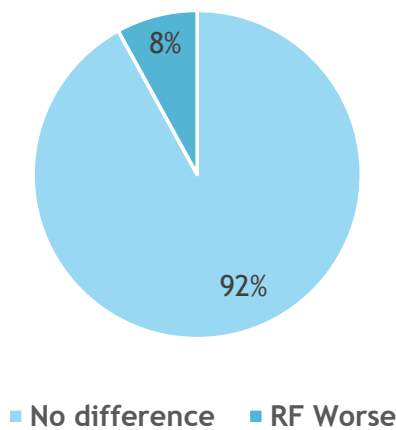


The Results

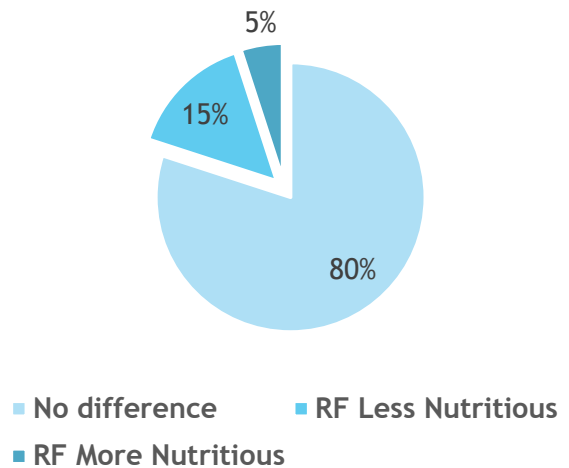
Comparing Rescued Food to “Normal” Food

In our study, we asked about perceptions of the differences between Rescued Food and the food normally provided by the Organizations and based it off of the four topics: Taste, Nutrition, Freshness and Visual appeal.

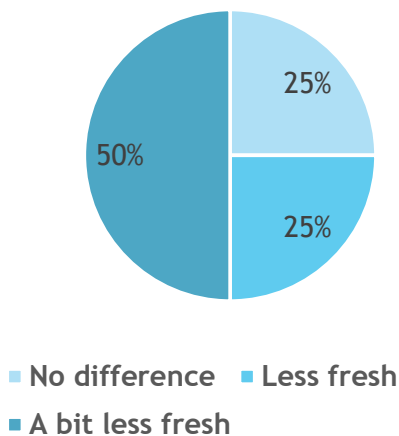
Taste



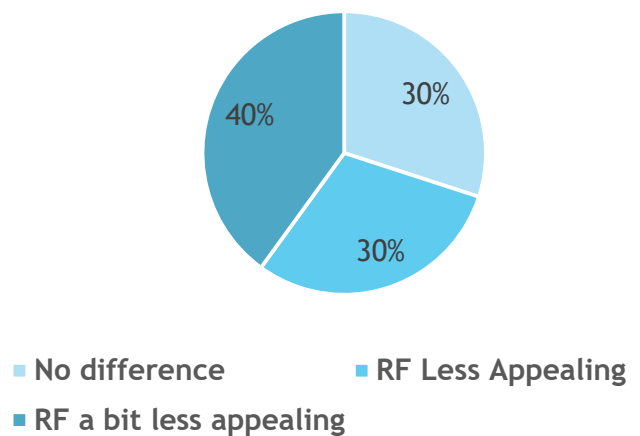
Nutrition



Freshness



Visual Appeal



For the most part, it was noted that there was no difference significant in the taste of the food, or perceived nutrient quality. Rescued food was perceived as just a bit less fresh, and visual appeal was nearly split 3 ways- but Rescued food was perceived as looking just a little bit less appealing.

The Results

Perceptions of Rescued Food to Serve Org. Goals

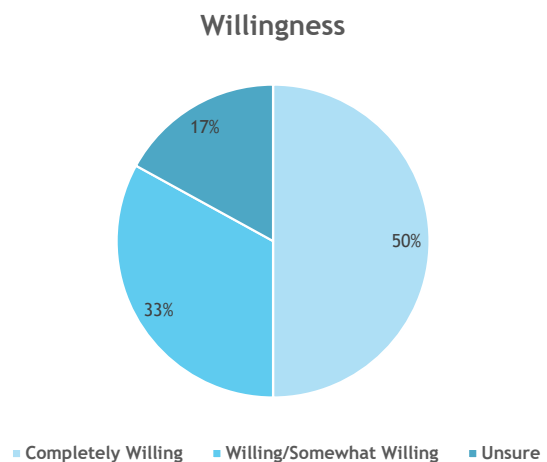
As a part of the study, we assessed whether serving Rescued Food would be helpful in serving general goals that the organizations may have. The questions asked were based on the topics of: Feeding target population, Reducing food waste, Creating and maintaining sustainable food systems and maintaining consumers dignity.

It was noted that there was a widespread agreement from the organizations in regards to the use and distribution of Rescued Food. Out of the twenty four organizations surveyed, twenty two organizations agreed that they would use Rescue Food to Feed target populations (92%). Twenty four organizations agreed that regular use of Rescued Food would aid in reducing food wastage (96%). Fourteen organizations strongly agreed that they would use Rescued Food to feed target populations and it would reduce food waste. Majority of the Organizations agreed that using and distributing Rescued Food will be crucial in creating and maintaining a sustainable food system (98%).

Although some organizations did not agree that the use of Rescued Food would serve their goals in maintaining consumers dignity, twenty organizations agreed that serving Rescued Food would still maintain consumers dignity and not affect it in any way.

Rescued Food and Skin in the Game

The members of the Organizations who participated in the study were asked about their views of Rescued Food and how willing they would be with the concept of using Rescued Food to feed their families. Half of the members said that they were completely willing to feed their families Rescued Food, one-third of the members were willing and somewhat willing with the idea of feeding their families Rescued Food, and one-sixth of the members (17%) were unsure if they were willing to feed their families Rescued Food. While there were varied responses about their willingness for using Rescued Food for personal use, no one was completely against it. This shows us that with more information and knowledge about Rescue Food, people's opinions could be swayed to increase uptake of RF.



The Results

The Perception of Rescued Food as a Name

Organizations reported polarizing results on Canadians' impression of Rescued Food. More specifically, Organizations revealed the contrasting implications of "Rescued Food" as a name and how this may affect the uptake and distribution of Rescued Food.

Beginning broadly, **Organizations agree that the former half of "Rescued Food" suggests positive and negative moral qualities.** The reasoning for this impression may be a mindset in which one may feel altruistic for rescuing food yet demeaned for consuming it. Organizations' responses corroborate this idea, as the majority believe that the "rescued" label sounds less appetizing. The negative connotations of this name are further scrutinized, as one-third of Organizations do not fully agree that the term "Rescued Food" effectively communicates the nature of the product.

Despite the disagreement regarding "Rescued Food" as a name, two-thirds of Organizations still believe that the name effectively communicates the nature of the product. Ultimately, the majority of Organizations agree that consuming Rescued Food is morally correct.

If the name of Rescued Food is at all negatively affecting its ability to gain more traction and success, the consequences are deemed minor and not a significant priority.

Redefining Rescued Food

Rescued Food is generally understood to be a product sourced from restaurants, grocery stores, or farms that is still appropriate to consume yet would otherwise go to waste.

While this is not an incorrect perception of Rescued Food, it is a limited perspective of the potential for Rescued Food. When asked about additional sources for Rescued Food, Organizations showed enthusiasm for Community Gardens (96% enthused) and Local Backyards (77%).

Expanding the potential sources for Rescued Food not only creates the opportunity for a higher yield but it redefines Rescued Food beyond a product that should otherwise go to waste if not consumed. This enthusiasm raises the question as to whether it is required to amend the definition of Rescued Food, or simply amend the limited perception of it.



Key Takeaways

Rescued Food Organizations' Greatest Obstacle is Logistics

- Organizations outline a clear need for greater quantities of volunteers and additional storage spaces for Rescued Food.

The Rescued Food Label

- While organizations believe that Rescued Food is ultimately an effective and appropriate name, the label appears to suggest an unappetizing product.

Stigma

- Fortunately, any stigma surrounding Rescued Food is not harsh enough to create significant negative consequences.
- However, there does appear to be some hesitancy regarding the actual act of consuming Rescued Food.

Organizations believe in the value of Rescued Food

- An overwhelming majority are confident in Rescued Food's ability to feed target populations, reduce food waste, and create sustainable food systems.

Redefining Rescued Food

- Expanding the sources of Rescued Food demonstrates promise for the success, sustainability and accessibility of Rescued Food.
- This includes sourcing Rescued Foods from Community Gardens and Local Backyards.

Where Can Food Security Agencies Go From Here?

Food For Life holds a unique niche among Canadian food relief charities in that they focus on redistributing fresh, nutritious food. Their clients tell them that they are often not able to afford fresh food and that having access to this healthy food allows them to focus on obtaining other life essentials as they work towards no longer relying on the services provided by Food For Life and like organizations. It's imperative that Organizations make use of the resources and services provided by Food For Life. Now more than ever, individuals and organizations need to mobilize and work towards ensuring that consumers have access to nutritious food.

Through the identification of the issues at hand and Organizations perceptions of RF, it is understood that the Organizations would like to use more RF but they do not have the resources required to store the food and do not have access to more information about the services provided. Understanding the Organization's perceptions and willingness to use Rescued Food was the important first step. It provides insights on the reasons why the Organizations have not been optimizing or embracing the use of Rescued Food and what might motivate them to start using it more. Next steps would be, constructing creative and informative campaigns aimed towards Organizations and consumers to apprise them about the benefits of using Rescued Food, building strategies and compiling resources for Organizations to start using Rescued Food more often and recording the perception of the consumers about the Rescued Food. It is important to learn from the results and findings of this report and these insights into actionable changes.



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